

The Ultimate Mandala

The Ultimate Practice

A simple answer:

Question: What is Buddhism?

Answer: Buddhism is the practice of applying the ultimate truth to our daily life.

The Ultimate truth is that we are the sole creators of life, all life eternal.

To awaken to this truth requires the training of one's mind to shed the veils of misperception within our minds. The "essential" training (practice) is accomplished by chanting the name, sound, and essence of the Buddha Law, Namumyohorengekyo. In this practice, the focusing aid of the ultimate mandala or Gohonzon will demonstrably increase results. This practice connects immediately with the innate Buddha-nature and wisdom.

The "abbreviated" practice is the thorough study of the second and sixteenth chapters of the Lotus Sutra, and to recite them (Gongyo).

The "comprehensive" practice is the thorough study of the entire twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

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This book is meant primarily to expound the philosophy and systems of attainment outlined by Sifu Sylvain Chamberland - Nyudo for the purpose of documentation, research, study, teaching, and promotion of those systems and philosophy.

Furthermore, all proceeds from the sale of this book will be used entirely for building a Monastery compound for the continuing research, study, and practice of the Threefold Lotus Kwoon and Quantum Life Buddhist practice and transmission of the Buddhas' teachings and systems as outlined by Sifu Sylvain.

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Perfect Teaching

Why now? If truly "ultimate", why has this mandala not been around for thousands of years? The simple answer is that it has been with us since time immemorial. It is also true that it has not been until now that the time and capacities of people has been sufficient to grasp the ultimate truth in this way.

When one studies the volumes of teachings of the Buddha, one finds the repeated exhortation of the Buddha to discard his previous teachings, and to now adopt a new teaching more suited to the people's capacity. He also spoke about the future, stating that after the first five-hundred year period after his death, the people's capacity will demand new wisdom, and the third five-hundred year period would require new sages to transmit the teachings in a way suited to that time and the capacity of people in that time. That time period in the 6th century, we experienced the amazing scholarship and brilliant codification of all the Buddha's teachings as well as the discard of many teachings shown to be erroneous, by the great scholar and teacher Chi'i or T'ien-T'ai. Chi'i demonstrated, by simple use of the teachings themselves, the Buddha's teaching order and the four stages of teachings he used to get people's capacity to raise to his teachings. The Buddha had only one goal in all his teachings, and yet he had to teach in a variety of ways in order that people could attain that goal within their capacity to understand. The early teachings of the Buddha focused on purification of one's life on this earth. People believed it would take

many successive lifetimes to do this purification. The Buddha taught that people should understand that everything they experienced on this earth is illusion and that their attachment to these illusions was the cause of all suffering. And so people believed that salvation lie in the after life or some other "pure" land. This was the time of precepts and rules and endless rituals.

Later, when the people were able to better comprehend the forces at work in their lives the Buddha discarded the earlier teachings and taught in accord with the people's new capacity to understand the workings of their minds. People still believed this would require many life times as taught by the Buddha. Later, the Buddha taught the one's entire existence and future existence was completely a matter of the mind. From this stage of the Buddha's teachings come all the various meditative sects of Buddhism including the most notable, practiced widely in China and now worldwide, Chan Buddhism or as it is sometimes better known by its Japanese name, Zen Buddhism. Chi'i would be instrumental in demonstrating that this was not the final and culminating teaching of the Buddha. That in fact, this was a very difficult way to attain enlightenment and would benefit only a few individuals.

The goal of the Buddha from the very start was to make enlightenment available and easy for every person, no matter what state of life, caste, class or education. So, a specialized practice benefiting only the few after arduous years of practice could not possibly achieve the ultimate goal of Buddhism. In his late teachings, the final eight years of his life, the Buddha taught the teachings named the "The Teaching of the Magnificent Lotus Flower", known commonly as the "Lotus Sutra".

In this teaching the Buddha explicitly tells all students to completely discard all previous teachings as he declared that he, The Buddha, had not yet revealed the ultimate truth. In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha teaches that we are indeed all Buddhas! And that we have always been so! That one's true nature is the Buddha-nature and that all one need do is to awaken that truth! This life is in reality a part of our journey of the discovery that we are Buddha and need not be mired in the attachments of this mundane existence. The beauty and awe of this existence is an essential part of this realization, and therefore to be human is a great gift of fortune. For it is in this life only that we can make "causes" to cleanse our misconceptions and it is in this life only that we can "perceive" the magnificent nature of life.

Chi'i was so meticulous in his reading, understanding, and application of the teachings of the Buddha that he understood the title of the Sutra itself contained all the wisdom and method necessary to attain the ultimate goal of enlightenment for all sentient beings. Yet, Chi'i advocated a program of meditation on these truths. It was not yet the time for advent of the simplest form of practice as taught by the Buddha. The peoples' capacity at that time still necessitated great rituals of practice and long arduous meditative techniques. Some would reach enlightenment to be sure, but most not in their present forms on this earth.

Not until 13th century Japan, in the beginning of the "Latter day" of the Law, the fifth five hundred year period after the passing of the Buddha, did a priest named Nichiren create a mandala of the five essential characters of the Lotus Sutra teachings. Of course,

medieval Japan, with its Samurai Shogunate state was a place and time where the people's capacity was controlled vehemently by tradition, lineage, and ritual. For Nichiren's time and the capacity of the people in his time, this ultimate mandala must contain not only the singular, simple, and elegant path to awakening as taught by Buddha, but must also present the entire argument and lineage for its existence to leave no question as to its authenticity.

There is some debate amongst scholars in regard to the CE (Common Era) calendar and the lifespan of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha, Gautama, Shakyamuni, or Tathâgata, all names for the same historical figure, Buddha. According to Nichiren's writings, Nichiren dates his own life to be about 2200 years after the Buddha's passing, placing the Buddha's death at about 950-1000 BCE. The time of his birth and death are uncertain, and most early 20th century historians date his lifetime from about 563 BCE to 483 BCE. More recently, however, at a specialist symposium on this question, the majority of those scholars who presented definite opinions gave dates within 20 years either side of 400 BCE for the Buddha's death, with others supporting earlier or later dates. If these estimates are more accurate, then the fifth five-hundred year period is NOW! And the predictions by the Buddha of the advent of the Buddhas' perfect universal Law is due NOW!

To this day various forms of the Nichiren mandala are enshrined in homes and temples all over the world and revered as the ultimate mandala for the attainment of enlightenment. And this is where my journey begins.

Let me continue by stating that I am just a man. I claim no special privilege or powers in what I am about to say. I have been studying and practicing the Buddha's teaching in some forms all of my life. I took my vows at a Nichiren Shoshu temple in 1988. As I studied Buddhism and all Buddhist teachings I could locate, I found that there were 125 extant Gohonzon, or mandala verified to be created by the hand of Nichiren.

As I studied them, two things became very apparent. The first was not much of a surprise, since a great many of the writings of Nichiren claim the "essential" practice of the Buddha's teachings is the chanting of the O'Daimoku, the title of the sutra, the five characters of Myo, Ho, Ren, Ge, and Kyo. So when I saw a wide array of Gohonzon with little more than the characters for Na and MU (complete dedication or devotion to...) followed by Myohorengekyo, I thought it well within the teachings of the Buddha. The final Gohonzons attributed to Nichiren, and by Nichiren's own description in his writings, contain in name, the main personalities of the allegorical stories of the Lotus Sutra used to teach the ultimate law.

Now, because of Nichiren's time, and the capacity of the people in his time, I understand, as he was want to create a "universal" mandala, that he would include such reverence for the lineage and the surrounding justifications for the ultimate law in his mandala, all while keeping the "main" characters of the Daimoku, Namumyohorengekyo much larger and at the center of the mandala. The One vehicle described by the Buddha is none other than the five characters of the O'Daimoku, Myohorengekyo. However, the remaining characters surrounding the Daimoku are there by convention of

the time, by traditional observance, and follow the “Formal” presentation of the time. There is no part of the Buddhas’ teaching that includes any of these other allegorical personages as essential or even necessary for the attainment of enlightenment. Still, in Nichiren’s time, the additional information on his mandala would not have created any conflict or misunderstanding, but rather supported his findings and justified the validity of his transmission of the Buddhas’ Law.

My second observation though, was much more troubling. The Gohonzon (mandala) given me by the Nichiren Shoshu temple at my ceremony was not the same as any of these Nichiren Gohonzon! In fact, there was much more calligraphy that had nothing to do with the Lotus Sutra on my Gohonzon and thousands of other Gohonzons handed out by "Nichiren Buddhist" sects. These mandala contained birth dates of contemporary priests and special inaugural dates of temple buildings, signatures, and so forth! Certainly some respect can be appropriate for those who come before you and whose efforts might be given some credit for these teachings being maintained in order that we might discover and embrace them, perhaps in special ceremonies etc... But, it is a far cry from respect to include that respect as a devotional element requisite to our enlightenment in the ultimate mandala! The Mandala represents the Buddhas’ Perfect Teaching, not the classroom! The Buddha himself taught that the teaching of the one vehicle, the Law contained within the Lotus Sutra, is the teaching of all Buddhas and the way for all to attain enlightenment. The Buddha never taught that all should revere and worship his mortal presence in order that one reaches enlightenment, or the allegorical examples as part and parcel of our

enlightenment. Had he done so, the ultimate teaching would be to chant his name, and focus on his visage in statue or picture. Now you see why all those movies and temples where you find people doing exactly that kind of ritual are NOT practicing correctly. The practice of praying to images of people, or chanting their names cannot even be considered Buddhism today. At one time, long ago, when the people's capacity was low, it may have been the most arduous and necessary thing for people to repeat some Buddha's name, like Amida (Amitaba) in order that they simply train their minds toward the teachings. But this is certainly not the capacity of the people today, and it was not acceptable in Nichiren's time either, as you will find in the excerpts included later from Nichiren's own writings.

In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha makes explicit that it is this teaching (Lotus Sutra), the one vehicle, the true law, which leads all to enlightenment, not him. He too attained enlightenment using this same Law, just as all other Buddhas before and after him. His purpose, his advent as the Buddha, was simply to lead people to this knowledge.

Like many others in the late twentieth century, before and after me, I now found myself practicing independently. I sought out scholars and their research. There is in fact, a large community of independent practitioners of the Buddha's teachings using versions of the Nichiren Gohonzon. And now, after twenty years of daily practice, I am more convinced than ever that the ultimate mandala must be cleansed of its past confusions.

I cite the following Gosho of Nichiren; for myself and all those who practice in earnest, with a studious mind for the truth. The entire Gosho is relevant here, but I **bolded** the section that I believe is crucial to understanding why it is important to leave institutions, organizations, or individuals that do not follow the Buddhas' teachings strictly!

The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood

The “Expedient Means” chapter in volume one of the Lotus Sutra states, “The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable.” A commentary says that the riverbed of reality is described as “infinitely profound” because it is boundless, and that the water of wisdom is described as “immeasurable” because it is hard to fathom.

Is not the meaning of the sutra and the commentary that the way to Buddhahood lies within the two elements of reality and wisdom? Reality means the true nature of all phenomena, and wisdom means the illuminating and manifesting of this true nature. Thus when the riverbed of reality is infinitely broad and deep, the water of wisdom will flow ceaselessly. When this reality and wisdom are fused, one attains Buddhahood in one’s present form.

The sutras expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra cannot lead to Buddhahood because they are provisional and expedient teachings that separate reality and wisdom. The Lotus Sutra, however, unites the two as a single entity. The sutra says

that the Buddhas open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, show it, cause them to awaken to it, and induce them to enter its path. By realizing this Buddha wisdom, one attains Buddhahood.

This inner enlightenment of the Buddha is far beyond the understanding of voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas. This is why the “Expedient Means” chapter goes on to say, “Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it.” What then are these two elements of reality and wisdom? They are simply the five characters of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Shakyamuni Buddha called forth the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and entrusted to them these five characters that constitute the essence of the sutra. This is the teaching that was transferred to the bodhisattvas who had been the disciples of the Buddha since the remote past.

The Lotus Sutra states that Bodhisattva Superior Practices and the others will appear in the first five hundred years of the Latter Day of the Law to propagate the five characters, the embodiment of the two elements of reality and wisdom. The sutra makes this perfectly clear. Who could possibly dispute it? I, Nichiren, am neither Bodhisattva Superior Practices nor his envoy, but I precede them, spreading the five characters to prepare the way. Bodhisattva Superior Practices received the water of the wisdom of the Mystic Law from the Thus Come One Shakyamuni and causes it to flow into the wasteland of the people’s lives in the evil world of the latter age. This is the function of wisdom. Shakyamuni Buddha transferred this teaching to

Bodhisattva Superior Practices, and now Nichiren propagates it in Japan. With regard to the transfer of teachings, it is divided into two categories: general and specific. If you confuse the general with the specific even in the slightest,³ you will never be able to attain Buddhahood and will wander in suffering through endless transmigrations of births and deaths.

For example, the voice-hearers in Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime received the seeds of Buddhahood from Shakyamuni in the distant past when he was the sixteenth son of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence. Therefore, they could not attain enlightenment by following Amida, Medicine Master, or any other Buddha. To illustrate, if a family member brings home water from the ocean, the entire family can use it. But were they to refuse even a single drop of that water and instead go looking for water from some other ocean, it would be terribly misguided and foolish. In the same way, to forget the original teacher who had brought one the water of wisdom from the great ocean of the Lotus Sutra and instead follow another would surely cause one to sink into the endless sufferings of birth and death.

One should abandon even one's teacher if he or she is misguided, though there will be cases where this is not necessary. One should decide according to the principles both of the world and of Buddhism. Priests in the Latter Day of the Law are ignorant of the principles of Buddhism and are conceited, so they despise the correct teacher and fawn on patrons. True

priests are those who are honest and who desire little and yet know satisfaction. Volume one of The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra states: “Those who have yet to attain the truth should humble themselves before the highest principle, which is comparable to heaven, and feel abashed before all the sages. Then they will be monks with a sense of shame. When they manifest insight and wisdom, then they will be true monks.”

The Nirvana Sutra states: “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.” You should etch deeply in your mind the two words “see” and “disregard” in the phrase “sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him.” Both teacher and followers will surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering if they see enemies of the Lotus Sutra but disregard them and fail to reproach them. The Great Teacher Nan-yüeh says that they “will fall into hell along with those evil persons.” To hope to attain **Buddhahood** without speaking out against slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water. No matter how sincerely one believes in the Lotus Sutra, if one is guilty of failing to rebuke slander of the Law, one will surely fall into hell, just as a single crab leg will ruin a thousand pots of lacquer. This is the meaning of the passage in the sutra, “Because the poison

has penetrated deeply and their minds no longer function as before.”

The sutra states, “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers,” and “If one stays close to the teachers of the Law, one will speedily gain the bodhisattva way. By following and learning from these teachers one will see Buddhas as numerous as Ganges sands.” A commentary says, “Originally one followed this Buddha and for the first time conceived the desire to seek the way. And by following this Buddha again, one will reach the stage where there is no retrogression.” Another commentary says, “In the beginning one followed this Buddha or bodhisattva and formed a bond with him, and so it will be through this Buddha or bodhisattva that one will attain one’s goal.” Above all, be sure to follow your original teacher so that you are able to attain Buddhahood. Shakyamuni Buddha is the original teacher for all people, and moreover, he is endowed with the virtues of sovereign and parent. Because I have expounded this teaching, I have been exiled and almost killed. As the saying goes, “Good advice grates on the ear.” But still I am not discouraged. The Lotus Sutra is like the seed, the Buddha like the sower, and the people like the field. If you deviate from these principles, not even I can save you in your next life.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

*The third day of the eighth month in the second year
of Kenji (1276), cyclical sign hinoe-ne*

To Soya

The Ultimate Mandala

We are now living in a time when our capacities have evolved by huge margins over the times of Mediaeval Japan. In fact, I believe that there has never been a time in history when humans have been so consumed by their solitary identity. The idea of lineage hardly harkens back to ones parents, let alone formal tradition.

This is why I believe we find ourselves, all across the world, in crisis. Will we blindly follow the marketed, egotistical version of our identity, sold to us by the products we use each day, the cars we drive, the "developments" we live in, the clothes, styles, and technologies we use? Or do we take that same uncorked energy, conviction, and all our perceptive powers to come to our true identity, our true self, our most wise, liberated and immaculate identity of our inherent, Buddha-nature?

All we need do is what the Buddha taught all along. I advocate nothing new here. This is not my revision of the past, nor is it my interpretation. The remainder of this book will be all quotations from the Buddha's teachings, Nichiren and T'ien-T'ai. All will be a starting point for you to make up your own mind. The ultimate mandala, the Gohonzon, must simply contain the Buddha Law, the "Law of all Buddha's". This and only this is the true and correct practice as taught by the Buddha some 2500 to 3000 years ago. We are now in the latter day of the Law. That LAW is NAMUMYOHORENGEKYO.

Buddhism is the practice of applying the ultimate truth to our daily life. The Ultimate truth is that we are the sole creators of life eternal. To awaken to this truth requires the training of one's mind to shed the veils of misperception in our minds. This training is accomplished by chanting the name, sound, and essence of the Buddha Law, Namumyohorengkyo. In this practice, the focusing aid of the ultimate mandala or Gohonzon will demonstrably increase results.

This is the ultimate mandala:



The Ultimate Practice

From the Lotus Sutra, quotations of the Buddha, chapter 2

Skillful Means

There is but one vehicle, Sâriputra, and that the Buddha-vehicle.

For, Sâriputra, it is for a sole object, a sole aim, verily a lofty object, a lofty aim that the Buddha, the Tathâgata, appears in the world. And what is that sole object, that sole aim, that lofty object, that lofty aim of the Buddha, the Tathâgata, appearing in the world? To show all creatures the sight of Tathâgata-knowledge does the Buddha, the Tathâgata, appear in the world; to open the eyes of all creatures for the sight of Tathâgata-knowledge does the Buddha, the Tathâgata, appear in the world.

This, O Sâriputra, is the sole object, the sole aim, the sole purpose of his appearance in the world. Such then, Sâriputra, is the sole object, the sole aim, the lofty object, the lofty aim of the Tathâgata. And it is achieved by the Tathâgata. For, Sâriputra, I do show all creatures the sight of Tathâgata-knowledge; I do open the eyes of all creatures for the sight of Tathâgata-knowledge, Sâriputra; I do firmly establish the teaching of Tathâgata-knowledge, Sâriputra; I do lead the teaching of Tathâgata-knowledge on the right path, Sâriputra. By means of one sole vehicle, to wit, the Buddha-

*vehicle, Sâriputra, do I teach all creatures the law;
there is no second vehicle, nor a third.*

It seems to me that little if any commentary is needed on these quotes. These are the Buddhas words, translated though they might be by very learned scholars, we can find the same statements in other translations by other scholars with varying cultural vernaculars, but the essential repetition of the “One vehicle” and the mission of the Buddha is quite clear...

From The Writings of Nichiren

The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra

“NAMU-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO.

Question: Is it possible, without understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sutra, but merely by chanting the five or seven characters of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo once a day, once a month, or simply once a year, once a decade, or once in a lifetime, to avoid being drawn into trivial or serious acts of evil, to escape falling into the four evil paths, and instead to eventually reach the stage of non-regression?

Answer: Yes, it is.

Question: You may talk about fire, but unless you put your hand in a flame, you will never burn yourself. You may say “water, water!” but unless you actually drink it, you will never satisfy your thirst. Then how, just by chanting the daimoku of

Namu-myoho-renge-kyo without understanding what it means, can you escape from the evil paths of existence?

Answer: They say that, if you play a koto strung with a lion's sinews, then all the other kinds of strings will snap. And if you so much as hear the words "pickled plum," your mouth will begin to water. Even in everyday life there are such wonders, so how much greater are the wonders of the Lotus Sutra!

We are told that parrots, simply by twittering the four noble truths of the Hinayana teachings were able to be reborn in heaven, and that men, simply by respecting the three treasures, were able to escape being swallowed by a huge fish. How much more effective, then, is the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, which is the very heart of all the eighty thousand sacred teachings of Buddhism and the eye of all the Buddhas! How can you doubt that by chanting it you can escape from the four evil paths? The Lotus Sutra, wherein the Buddha honestly discarded expedient means, says that one can "gain entrance through a strong mind alone."³ And the Nirvana Sutra, which the Buddha preached in the grove of sal trees on the last day of his life, states, "Although there are innumerable practices that lead to enlightenment, if one teaches a strong mind, then that includes all those practices."

And also from the same Gosho ...

Question: What passages of proof can be cited to show that one should chant only the daimoku?

Answer: The eighth volume of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law states that one who accepts and upholds the mere name of the Lotus Sutra will enjoy immeasurable good fortune. The Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law says that, if one hears this sutra and proclaims and embraces its title, one will enjoy merit beyond measure. And the Supplemented Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law says that one who accepts and upholds the name of the Lotus Sutra will enjoy immeasurable good fortune. These statements indicate that the good fortune one receives from simply chanting the daimoku is beyond measure.

To accept, uphold, read, recite, take delight in, and protect all the eight volumes and twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra is called the comprehensive practice. To accept, uphold, and protect the “Expedient Means” chapter and the “Life Span” chapter is called the abbreviated practice. And simply to chant one four-phrase verse or the daimoku, and to protect those who do so, is called the essential practice. Hence, among these three kinds of practice, comprehensive, abbreviated, and essential, the daimoku is defined as the essential practice.

From the Gosho (Nichiren Teachings)

On The Treasure Tower

In your letter you ask, "What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth?" The teaching on the treasure tower is of great importance. In the eighth volume of his Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai explains the appearance of the treasure tower. He states that it has two distinct functions: to lend credence to the preceding chapters and to pave the way for the revelation to come. Thus the treasure tower appeared in order to verify the theoretical teaching and to introduce the essential teaching. To put it another way, the closed tower symbolizes the theoretical teaching, and the open tower, the essential teaching. The open tower reveals the two elements of reality and wisdom.¹ This is extremely complex, however, so I will not go into further detail now.

In essence, the appearance of the treasure tower indicates that on hearing the Lotus Sutra the three groups of voice-hearers perceived for the first time the treasure tower within their own lives. Now Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters are also doing this. In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo, are themselves the treasure tower, and, likewise, are

themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures. No treasure tower exists other than Myoho-rence-kyo. The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Namu-myoho-rence-kyo.

On Offering Prayers to the Mandala of the Mystic Law

I HAVE offered prayers to the Gohonzon of Myoho-rence-kyo. Though this mandala has but five or seven characters, it is the teacher of all Buddhas throughout the three existences and the seal that guarantees the enlightenment of all women. It will be a lamp in the darkness of the road to the next world and a fine horse to carry you over the mountains of death. It is like the sun and moon in the heavens or Mount Sumeru on earth. It is a ship to ferry people over the sea of the sufferings of birth and death. It is the teacher who leads all people to Buddhahood and enlightenment. This great mandala has never yet been propagated anywhere in Jambudvīpa in the more than 2,220 years since the Buddha's passing.

[The prescription of] medicine differs according to the illness. A slight ailment can be treated with ordinary medicine, but for grave illnesses, an elixir should be used. During the more than 2,220 years since the Buddha's passing, the people's illnesses of earthly desires and negative karma were not serious, and a succession of wise men appeared in

order to act as physicians and dispense medicine appropriately as these illnesses required. These men came from the Dharma Analysis Treasury School, the Establishment of Truth School, the Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, and Three Treatises schools, as well as the True Word, Flower Garland, Tendai, Pure Land, and Zen schools. Each of these schools prescribed its own medicine. For example, the Flower Garland school set forth the principle of the six forms and the ten mysteries, the Three Treatises school advocated the middle path of the eight negations, the Dharma Characteristics school stressed the perception that all phenomena derive from consciousness only, the Precepts school upheld the two hundred and fifty precepts, the Pure Land school invoked the name of Amida Buddha, the Zen school expounded the “perceiving one’s true nature and attaining Buddhahood,” the True Word school propounded the meditation on the five elements, and the Tendai school taught the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

Now, however, we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and the medicines of these various schools no longer cure the people’s illnesses. Moreover, all the Japanese have become icchantikas and people of grave slander. Their offense is even worse than that of killing one’s father or mother, fomenting a rebellion, or causing a Buddha to bleed. Japan is filled with individuals whose respective offenses exceed even those of one who were to gouge out the eyes of all the human beings of a major world system, or raze all temples and pagodas in the worlds of the ten directions. Consequently, the heavenly deities glare down furiously upon our

nation day after day while the earthly deities tremble in continual rage. Nevertheless, all the people of our day believe themselves to be without fault, and none doubt that they will be reborn in the pure land or attain Buddhahood.

The blind cannot see or know the shining sun, and someone who is sound asleep will not feel even an earthquake that is reverberating like a great drum. So too it is with all the people of Japan [who do not realize their own offenses]. The offenses committed by the men are heavier than those committed by the women. In like manner, the nuns' offenses are heavier than the laymen's and the priests' more serious than the nuns'. Among the priests, the offenses of those who observe the precepts are worse than those of priests who violate them, and those of learned priests are graver still.⁴ Such priests are like those with white leprosy among lepers and, among those with white leprosy, the most malignant.

Then, what great physician or what efficacious medicine can cure the illnesses of all people in the Latter Day of the Law? They cannot be cured by the mudras and mantras of the Thus Come One Mahavairochana, the forty-eight vows of the Thus Come One Amida, or the twelve great vows of the Thus Come One Medicine Master, not even his pledge to "heal all ills." Not only do such medicines fail to cure these illnesses; they aggravate them all the more.

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, brought together the Thus Come One Many Treasures and

all the emanation Buddhas of the ten directions, and left one elixir— the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo— for the people of the Latter Day of the Law. He refused to entrust it to any of the bodhisattvas such as Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merits, Vajrasattva, Universal Worthy, Manjushri, Medicine King, and Perceiver of the World's Sounds, let alone to Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, [or any other person of the two vehicles]. Rather, there were four great bodhisattvas, including Superior Practices, who had been disciples of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni since [he first attained Buddhahood] numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. Not even for a moment had they ever forgotten the Buddha. Shakyamuni summoned these great bodhisattvas and transferred Myohorenge-kyo to them.

A woman who takes this efficacious medicine will be surrounded and protected by these four great bodhisattvas at all times. When she rises to her feet, so too will the bodhisattvas, and when she walks along the road, they will also do the same. She and they will be as inseparable as a body and its shadow, as fish and water, as a voice and its echo, or as the moon and its light. Should these four great bodhisattvas desert the woman who chants Namu-myohorenge-kyo, they would incur the wrath of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the emanation Buddhas of the ten directions.

You may be certain that their offense would be greater than even that of Devadatta, their falsehood more terrible than Kokalika's. How reassuring, how encouraging!

Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nichiren

On Upholding Conviction and Certitude of Mind in the Gohonzon.

Here it is obvious that Nichiren kept very little distinction between “Lay” believers or those that would leave secular life for a monastery. This was more the accepted “tradition” of the time. But Nichiren shows many examples, many more explicit than this one of the Buddhas’ teaching that there is no difference in practice or benefit for a monk or an “ordinary” person. Of course the main thrust of this Goshō is the importance and function of the Mandala.

I HAVE received the various articles that you so kindly sent. I am entrusting you with a Gohonzon for the protection of your young child. This Gohonzon is the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all the scriptures. It is like the sun and the moon in the heavens, a great ruler on earth, the heart in a human being, the wish-granting jewel among treasures, and the pillar of a house.

When we have this mandala with us, it is a rule that all the Buddhas and gods will gather round and watch over us, protecting us like a shadow day and night, just as warriors guard their ruler, as

parents love their children, as fish rely on water, as trees and grasses crave rain, and as birds depend on trees. You must trust in it with all your heart.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

*The twenty-fifth day of the eighth month
Reply to the lay nun Myoshin*

From the Gosho

The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon

... Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life's functions. To be endowed with the Ten Worlds means that all ten, without a single exception, exist in one world. Because of this it is called a mandala. Mandala is a Sanskrit word that is translated as "perfectly endowed" or "a cluster of blessings." This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for a strong mind. This is what the sutra means when it states that one can "gain entrance through a strong mind alone."

Since Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters believe solely in the Lotus Sutra, honestly discarding expedient means and not accepting even a single verse of the other sutras, exactly as the Lotus teaches, they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon. How reassuring! Make every possible effort for the sake of your next life. What is most important is that, by chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo alone, you can attain Buddhahood. It will no doubt depend on the strength and conviction of your mind. To have a strong mind is the basis of Buddhism. Thus the fourth volume of Great Concentration and Insight states, "Buddhism is like an ocean that one can only enter with a strong mind." The fourth volume of The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight" explains this: "With regard to the phrase 'Buddhism is like an ocean that one can only enter with a strong mind,' even Confucius taught that a strong mind is first and foremost. How much more so is this true of the profound doctrines of Buddhism! Without a strong mind, how could one possibly enter? That is why the Flower Garland Sutra defines a strong mind as the basis of the way and the mother of blessings." The first volume of Great Concentration and Insight says, "How does one hear, believe in, and practice the perfect teaching to attain perfect enlightenment?" The first volume of On "Great Concentration and Insight" says, "To 'believe in the perfect teaching' means to awaken a strong mind through doctrine and to make a strong mind the basis of practice."

Arguably the most important of all the teachings of Nichiren for the purposes of this book, included here with reference to the Perfect teachings of the Buddha, is this next Goshō. Because this writing contains a question and answer format that broadly includes all the basic initial question of the new student to these ultimate teachings of the Buddhas', Lotus Sutra, and clarification on various sects, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, and the time and capacity style of the Buddhas' evolving teachings, I have decided to include the complete letter. It isn't really that long, but does contain an amazing amount of answers and clarity. It is also a tremendous eye opener on the true nature of practice and further demonstrates the clarity and singularity of the Daimoku as the core of the ultimate practice.

How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra

Question: Of the eight schools, the nine schools, or the ten schools, which is the true school founded by Shakyamuni Buddha??

Answer: The Lotus School is the school founded by Shakyamuni. We know this because of the statement that, of all the sutras "I [Shakyamuni] have preached, now preach, and will preach," the Lotus Sutra is foremost. Shakyamuni Buddha himself spoke these words. Therefore, [the school based on] the Lotus Sutra is known as the Buddha-founded school and is also called the Lotus school. It is also known as the Tendai School.

For this reason, the Great Teacher Dengyo states in his commentary, "The Lotus School, which T'ien-T'ai elucidated, represents the school founded by Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One." In none of the sutras other than the Lotus does one find a passage concerning [the relative superiority of] all the sutras that "I have preached, now preach, and will preach." Here, the sutras that the Buddha has preached refer to the various sutras expounded by the Buddha in the more than forty years before he preached the Lotus Sutra. Those he now preaches refer to the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra. Those he will preach refer to the Nirvana Sutra.

The Buddha thus firmly decreed that, transcending these three categories of sutras, the Lotus Sutra alone constitutes the school that assures the attainment of Buddhahood. The various other schools were founded by bodhisattvas or teachers in the period after the Buddha had entered nirvana. Should we now turn our backs upon the Buddha's decree and follow the schools established by the bodhisattvas and teachers? Or should we ignore the words of the bodhisattvas and teachers and follow the school established by the Buddha? Or should we entrust ourselves to either course as the feeling strikes us, and uphold whatever sutra or doctrine suits our inclination?? The Buddha knew long ago that we would have doubts of this kind, and therefore he clearly designated the sutra to be embraced by those who are truly aspiring to the way in this defiled and evil age of the Latter Day of the Law.

A sutra says: "Rely on the Law and not upon persons. Rely on the meaning of the teaching and not on the words. Rely on wisdom and not on discriminative thinking. Rely on sutras that are complete and final and not on those that are not complete and final." The meaning of this passage is that one should not rely upon the words of the through the Lotus Sutra bodhisattvas and teachers, but should heed what was established by the Buddha. It further means that one should not rely upon the teachings of the True Word, Zen, and Nembutsu schools, which are based upon the sutras of the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom periods, but should uphold the sutras that are complete and final. And by relying upon "sutras that are complete and final," it means upholding the Lotus Sutra.

Question: Observing Japan at the present time, we see that the obstacles presented by the five impurities are very grave, that quarrels and disputes occur incessantly, and that people's minds are consumed with anger and their thoughts filled with jealousy. In such a country and at such a time as this, what sutra ought to be propagated?

Answer: This is a country in which the Lotus Sutra should be propagated. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra itself says, "I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end."

The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice states that there is a small country situated to the northeast where the Mahayana teachings of the

Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law should be spread. And the Reverend Annen states, "This refers to our country of Japan." From the point of view of India, Japan is indeed situated to the northeast.

Moreover, the Supervisor of Priests Eshin states in his Essentials of the One Vehicle Teaching, "Throughout Japan, all people share the same capacity to attain Buddhahood through the perfect teaching. Whether at court or in the countryside, whether far or near, all alike turn to the single vehicle; and whether priests or lay believers, whether eminent or humble, all can hope to attain Buddhahood."

The meaning of this passage is that the people of Japan, whether they live in Kyoto, Kamakura, Tsukushi, Chinzei, or Michinoku, whether they live nearby or far away, are endowed with the capacity to attain Buddhahood solely through the one vehicle teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and that Japan is therefore a country where high and low, eminent and humble, those who observe the precepts and those who break them, men and women alike, can all attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. Just as there are no ordinary stones in the K'un-lun Mountains and no poisons on the mountain island of P'eng-lai, so Japan is purely and wholly a country of the Lotus Sutra.

And yet we find people who, while declaring with their mouths that the Lotus is inherently a wonderful sutra and that no one could therefore refuse to take a strong mind in it, nevertheless spend night and day, morning and evening, reciting

the name of Amida Buddha. They are like people who sing the praises of a particular medicine and yet morning and evening dose themselves on poison.

Or there are those who declare that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are essentially one. They are like persons who claim that ordinary stones are the same as gems, senior monks identical to junior monks, and poison equivalent to medicine.

In addition, there are many who hate, envy, resent, slander, despise, and look down on the Lotus Sutra. The sutra says, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe." It also says, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" These predictions of the sutra have come about without the slightest deviation.

Therefore, the Great Teacher Dengyo writes in his commentary: "Speaking of the age, [the propagation of the true teaching will begin] in the age when the Middle Day of the Law ends and the Latter Day opens. Regarding the land, it will begin in a land to the east of T'ang and to the west of Katsu. As for the people, it will spread among people stained by the five impurities who live in a time of conflict. The sutra says, 'Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?' There is good reason for this statement." From these passages of the sutra and commentaries, one should know the following: In

Japan, in one mountain monastery after another, in temple after temple, at court and in the countryside, in both near and distant regions, though scriptural teachings other than the Lotus Sutra, such as those of the True Word, Zen, Precepts, and Nembutsu schools, are being propagated, these are not teachings that suit the country, or that conform to the Buddha's true intention, nor can they free us from the sufferings of birth and death.

Question: The Flower Garland School propounds the doctrine of the five teachings and declares all the other sutras to be inferior, and the Flower Garland Sutra, superior. The True Word School puts forth the doctrine of the ten stages of the mind, declaring that all the other sutras, being exoteric teachings, are inferior, while the True Word School, because it represents the esoteric teachings, is superior. The Zen school rejects all the sutras as belonging to the realm of written teachings and asserts "a separate transmission outside the sutras, independent of words or writing." Because enlightenment, they say, is gained merely by sitting and facing the wall, the Zen school alone is superior. The Pure Land School sets forth two kinds of practices, correct and sundry. The Lotus Sutra and the various other sutras are rejected as belonging to the category of sundry practices, and hence one is urged to "discard, close, ignore, and abandon" them. The three Pure Land sutras, on the other hand, they claim, are adapted to the people's capacity and are wonderful sutras belonging to the realm of correct practices. Thus each school in its conceit maintains its own biased attachment. But which one

represents the true intention of Shakyamuni Buddha?

Answer: Each school declares its own sutra to be superior, all other sutras being dismissed as inferior, and on this basis labels itself the correct school. But their arguments are based merely upon the words of the teachers and not upon the Buddha's teaching. Only the Lotus Sutra was proclaimed superior by the Buddha himself when he expounded the simile of the five flavors, likening them to the teachings of the five periods. He also declared that of all the various sutras that he "has preached, now preaches, and will preach," in terms of the path of attaining Buddhahood, none could rival the Lotus Sutra. These statements are in truth the Buddha's own golden words.

Therefore, when people declare that their own sutra surpasses the Lotus Sutra, or that their own school is superior to the Lotus school, they are like persons of inferior rank calling someone of high rank a commoner, or retainers whose families have for generations been in the service of a certain lord turning against him and declaring him to be their servant. How can they escape grave retribution?

On the other hand, the assertion that the various other sutras rank below the Lotus Sutra is not based upon the words of the teachers, but is plainly stated in the text of the sutra itself. In this respect, it is like a ruler asserting that he is superior to his subjects, or a samurai calling a commoner a person of low rank. What penalty could this possibly bring? This sutra, the Lotus, represents the true intention

of the Buddha and the prime concern of T'ien-T'ai and Miao-lo.

Question: The teachings of the Buddha's lifetime were all intended to benefit the people. And because people differ from one another in their innate nature, he expounded the various teachings. Nevertheless, his basic intention in all cases was simply to enable everyone to attain the Buddha way. Therefore, [people reason that] the sutra that is pertinent to oneself may be quite irrelevant to others, while the sutra that is pertinent to them will be irrelevant to oneself. Thus, for example, for persons who can attain the way through the Nembutsu teachings of the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, the Meditation and related sutras will be of greatest benefit while the Lotus Sutra will be of no help. Conversely, for those who can reach Buddhahood and achieve the way through the Lotus Sutra, the other sutras will be irrelevant while the Lotus Sutra will be of greatest benefit. When the Buddha said, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth"; when he said, "Though they [the Buddhas] point out various different paths, in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha vehicle"; or when he said, "Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way," he was addressing persons with the capacity to attain the way through the Lotus Sutra. Everyone in the world agrees that this argument is reasonable. How should we understand this? If this view is correct, then there is really no difference between the Mahayana and the Hinayana, and no dissimilarity between the provisional and true teachings. Thus I find myself in great doubt as to which sutra the

Buddha defined as representing his true intention, and which in fact he proclaimed to be the teaching for attaining Buddhahood.

Answer: From the very beginning, the Buddha's intention in appearing in the world was to preach the wonderful Law. But because the people differed so greatly in their capacity and were not ripe to receive it, the Buddha first pondered for a period of three weeks, then spent the following forty years and more preparing and readying the people, and then finally preached this wonderful Law. The Buddha said: "If I merely praised the Buddha vehicle, then the living beings, sunk in their suffering, would be incapable of believing in this Law. And because they rejected the Law and failed to believe in it, they would fall into the three evil paths." He also said, "The World- Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth."

The meaning of these passages is that the Buddha from the very beginning intended to preach this doctrine of the Buddha vehicle. But he knew that the people, having no inclination to hear the Buddha's Law, would not put their a strong mind in it, but on the contrary would undoubtedly slander it. Therefore, in order to develop the people's capacities to the same level, he first spent a period of forty or more years preaching the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, and then at the very last preached the Lotus Sutra. At that time, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and the others of the twelve thousand voice-hearers; Manjushri, Maitreya, and the others of the eighty thousand

bodhisattvas; the ten thousands of millions of wheel-turning kings; as well as Brahma, Shakra, and the countless other heavenly beings, who had all been present during the Buddha's more than forty years of preaching, each exclaimed with regard to the teachings they had heard before, "We would never gain the immeasurable insight of the Thus Come One." But when they heard him preach the Lotus Sutra, they rejoiced, exclaiming, "This cluster of unsurpassed jewels has come to us unsought." Therefore, they said, "Since times past often we have heard the World Honored One's preaching, but we have never heard this kind of profound, wonderful, and superior Law." They also said, "The Buddha preaches a rarely encountered Law, one never heard from times past."

The intent of these passages is to praise the Lotus Sutra by saying that, though those present at the assembly had heard the Buddha preach a considerable number of times during the preceding forty years and more, they had never heard anything like the Law of the Lotus Sutra, and that the Buddha had never before preached a doctrine such as this.

The doctrines heard by the assembly in the preceding forty-two years cannot in any way be compared with those of this sutra they were now hearing. Therefore, it is a grave error to assert that this sutra was preached for the sake of persons who can attain the way through the Lotus Sutra, but that it is useless for persons who can gain the way through the sutras preached earlier. In the case of the sutras preached during the previous forty-two

years, since they were provided as expedient means for individuals each with a particular capacity or relationship, one can perhaps speak of them as being relevant to some persons but not to others. But in the case of the Lotus Sutra, the different capacities that had enabled individuals to benefit from hearing one or another of the earlier sutras were all drawn together and readied so that they became identical and pure; the sutra was preached to such people. Therefore, there can be no question of it being relevant to some persons and irrelevant to others.

How lamentable that the distinctions between Mahayana and Hinayana, or between provisional and true teachings, should become confused in this manner, so that the purpose of the Buddha's advent has been lost, and people go about declaring that the Lotus Sutra is useless for persons with the capacity to attain the way through the earlier sutras. One should guard against and fear such errors! In past times there was a man known as the Great Teacher Tokuitsu who taught just this sort of doctrine to others and fully believed it in his own mind, reading the Lotus Sutra in the light of such an interpretation. But the Great Teacher Dengyo attacked him, saying that though he praises the Lotus Sutra he destroys its heart. After that, the Great Teacher Tokuitsu's tongue split into eight pieces and he died.

Question: In a commentary by T'ien-T'ai, it is stated that the bodhisattvas had already gained entrance [to enlightenment] through the various sutras. From this it must follow that the Lotus Sutra was

preached merely for the sake of persons of the two vehicles and not for bodhisattvas, since the bodhisattvas had already gained enlightenment by the earlier sutras. If so, then one should understand that the words of the Buddha, "I have not yet revealed the truth," "Honestly discarding expedient means," and all the pronouncements found in the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, must have been spoken entirely for persons of the two vehicles and are not relevant to even a single bodhisattva. Is this correct?

Answer: The doctrine that the Lotus Sutra was preached solely for persons of the two vehicles and not for bodhisattvas was expounded in China before the time of T'ien-T'ai by the ten leading scholars representing the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north. But T'ien-T'ai refuted this doctrine and put an end to it, so that it is no longer propagated today. If you say that there are no bodhisattvas who profit from the Lotus Sutra, then how do you account for the passage that says, "When the bodhisattvas hear this Law, they will be released from all entanglements of doubt"? In view of this, can you possibly say that bodhisattvas derive no benefit from the sutra?

Or perhaps you will argue that the Lotus Sutra can benefit the bodhisattvas of dull faculties, as it does persons of the two vehicles, but that the bodhisattvas of keen faculties have already received sufficient benefit from the earlier sutras. If so, then how do you account for the passage in the sutra that says, "Those of keen capacity, of dull capacity— I cause the Dharma rain to rain on all

equally,” or the passage that says, “All bodhisattvas who attain supreme perfect enlightenment in all cases do so through this sutra”. The meaning of these passages is that, regardless of whether their faculties are keen or dull, whether they abide by the precepts or break them, whether they are of exalted birth or humble, all bodhisattvas, all ordinary people, and all persons of the two vehicles shall become Buddhas and achieve the way through the Lotus Sutra.

If you say that those bodhisattvas who have received benefit from the Lotus Sutra are all persons of dull faculties, are you then prepared to say that Universal Worthy, Manjushri, Maitreya, Medicine King, and all the others of the eighty thousand bodhisattvas are of dull faculties? And if you maintain that the bodhisattvas of keen faculties had already attained the way through the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, then just who are those bodhisattvas?

Moreover, this enlightenment attained by bodhisattvas through the earlier sutras— is it the same as the enlightenment described in the Lotus Sutra? If so, then it is in fact the enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra and not the result of the earlier sutras. And if it is enlightenment other than that of the Lotus Sutra, then in which of the sutras that the Buddha “has preached, now preaches, and will preach” is it contained? In any event, if it is not the enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra, then it can only be a partial enlightenment and not true enlightenment.

Therefore, the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states, "Therefore the way living beings gained was not uniform but differed in different cases." It also says, "[As for those living beings who are unable to hear this sutra . . .] they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment." In these passages the Buddha is saying that the people attained different degrees of enlightenment through the sutras expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra, but in the end they did not attain the way of supreme enlightenment of the Lotus Sutra itself.

Question: Some 2,230 years have now passed since Shakyamuni Buddha passed away. Among all the sutras, which sutra is fitted for an age like this and will spread and benefit all living beings?

The Great Collection Sutra speaks of five successive five-hundred-year periods, of which our present age corresponds to the fifth period. This fifth of the five-hundred-year periods is described as an age of conflict when the pure Law will become obscured and lost. The Buddha here is saying that at that time people's hearts will be contentious and wicked, and they will be overwhelmed with greed and anger; because of this, strife and warfare alone flourish, and, among the various Buddhist doctrines, those that had earlier spread widely such as the pure Law of the True Word, Zen, and Nembutsu schools and of the observers of the precepts will become obscured and lost.

On examining the first, second, third, and fourth of the five-hundred-year periods, we see that, although the Great Collection Sutra belongs to the

teachings in which the truth had not yet been revealed concerning the way of attaining Buddhahood, the state of affairs in the world did not differ in the slightest from the Buddha's predictions. Considered in this light, his golden words that our present time will be an age of conflict when the pure Law will become obscured and lost could not possibly be false.

Yet, if that is so, are we then to assume that, now in the Latter Day of the Law, none of the Buddhist doctrines are of any efficacy, or that none of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas can benefit the people? Are we then to do nothing and pay no homage to any Buddha or bodhisattva? Are we to practice no teaching whatsoever, to be left with no one at all to turn to? How are we to prepare our minds for the existences that are to come?

Answer: Now, the Latter Day of the Law, is the time when only the seven characters of Namu-myohorenge-kyo — which is the heart of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni Buddha, who achieved enlightenment in the remote past, Bodhisattva Superior Practices, Bodhisattva Boundless Practices, and others must spread— will spread throughout this country; and there will be advantage and benefit for all people, and the blessings of Bodhisattva Superior Practices will flourish. This will happen because it is clearly stated in the sutra. Those who are firm in their aspiration for the way and sincere in their resolve should inquire about this matter in detail.

The people of the Pure Land School claim, “In the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law, all the other sutras will perish. Only this one teaching of Amida will remain.” They also say, “This Latter Day of the Law we now face is an evil age stained by the five impurities. Only this doctrine of the Pure Land offers a road by which one can gain admittance.” Though they falsely attribute these statements to the Great Collection Sutra, no such passages appear in that sutra. Moreover, there is no reason why they should. It is logically apparent that while he was in the world the Buddha would have had no reason for declaring that, in the present, the Latter Day of the Law, an evil age stained by the five impurities, only the Pure Land teachings would offer a path to [rebirth in the Pure Land].

Their basic sutra states, “In the age to come, the scriptural path will perish . . . I [Shakyamuni] leave this one sutra, which shall endure a hundred years.” But nowhere does it state that those hundred years fall within the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. Moreover, if we examine the Universal and Impartial Enlightenment Sutra and the Larger Amida Sutra, it appears that the hundred-year period referred to represents the hundred years that follow the first millennium after the Buddha’s passing. But people all regard Shan-Tao’s mistaken interpretation as quite reasonable, though in fact they are all biased in their thinking.

Perceptive people should consider the matter in the light of everyday reason. In a time of severe drought, is it the great ocean that dries up first, or is it the little streams? The Buddha himself explained

this, likening the Lotus Sutra to the great ocean, and the Meditation Sutra, Amida Sutra, and similar texts to little streams. Therefore, the pure Law of the little streams that are the Nembutsu and similar teachings will surely disappear first, as a sutra passage states. When the Great Collection Sutra says that, in the fifth five- hundred-year period, the pure Law will become obscured and lost, and when the Two-Volume Sutra says, “the scriptural path will perish . . .” they are simply stating the same thing. Therefore, we are to understand that, from the very beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, the scriptural path that includes the Two-Volume Sutra and sutras of that type will perish. “The scriptural path will perish” means that the sutras will lose their power to benefit living beings. It does not mean that the actual scrolls of the sutras will cease to exist. At present, more than two hundred years have passed since the time began when the scriptural path is to perish. In this period, the Lotus Sutra alone can benefit people and lead them to enlightenment.

This being the case, it becomes obvious that one ought to embrace this sutra and chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. In the “Medicine King” chapter, the Buddha states, “In the last five- hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off.” The Great Teacher T’ien-T’ai comments on this by saying, “In the last five-hundred-year period, the mystic way will spread and benefit humankind far into the future.” And the Great Teacher Miao-lo further says, “It is the time when the great teaching will be propagated.” All these passages indicate

that, during the last five-hundred-year period, the Lotus Sutra will be propagated, and thereafter will continue to exist throughout Jambudvīpa and never disappear.

The “Peaceful Practices” chapter refers to those who, “in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, should accept and embrace, read and recite this sutra.” And the “Supernatural Powers” chapter says: “At that time the Buddha spoke to Superior Practices and the others in the great assembly of bodhisattvas, saying: ‘If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were [to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas] to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One- all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.’ ”

The meaning of these various passages is that, whether one speaks of it as the fifth five-hundred-year period following Shakyamuni Buddha’s passing, or calls it the future age, or the defiled and evil age, it is apparent that at the present time, when the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law have ended and we are more than two hundred years into the Latter Day, only the Lotus Sutra should be propagated. The reason for this is that in this age the people’s minds

have become twisted, and the teachings produce no actual effect. The Buddhas and gods no longer manifest their awesome powers, and prayers for this life and for future existences go unanswered. At such a time the heavenly devil, or Papiyas, will take advantage of the situation and come rampaging, and the nation will be troubled by constant famine and drought. Disease and plague will rage everywhere, and we will suffer the disasters of foreign invasion and internal strife, our nation being constantly at war within, and later assaulted by invading warriors from another country. In such an age of conflict, when the pure Law of the other sutras ceases to be effective, the wonderfully efficacious medicine of the Lotus Sutra will provide the cure for all these grave disasters.

If one uses the Lotus Sutra to pray for the welfare of the land, it will prove to be a great pure Law that will secure and protect the nation, insuring joy and prosperity to everyone from the ruler on down to the common people. King Ajatashatru and King Ashoka started out as evil rulers. But the former heeded the counsel of his high minister Jivaka, while the latter put a strong mind in the guidance of the Venerable Yasha, and as a result each left behind a reputation as a worthy ruler. Likewise, the emperor of the Ch'en dynasty [in China], who cast aside the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north and relied on the Dharma Teacher Chih-i, and Emperor Kammu [of Japan], who spurned the eminent priests of the six schools and instead heeded the Dharma Teacher Saicho, are known to this day as worthy rulers. Chih-i is the man who was later honored with the title of the Great Teacher

T'ien-T'ai, while Saicho later became known as the Great Teacher Dengyo.

The present ruler of Japan is in a position to do the same. If he will put his a strong mind in this great pure Law, which assures its believers of "peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences," and propagate it throughout the nation, then he will be looked up to by the people of all the provinces, and his name will be handed down in later ages as that of a worthy man. Indeed, he may come to be regarded as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Boundless Practices. And the wise man that works to propagate the five characters of the Mystic Law, no matter how lowly his station, should be looked upon as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, or perhaps as an envoy of Shakyamuni Thus Come One.

The bodhisattvas Medicine King, Medicine Superior, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and Great Power, on the other hand, were envoys of the Buddha during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law. Because their turn has already passed, they can no longer benefit people as they did in those ancient times. Just observe what happens when prayers are offered to them at present! All such prayers go unanswered. Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, it is the turn of the bodhisattvas Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, and the others.

Only when one understands all this clearly and believes in it can the Law manifest its power and

the Buddhas and bodhisattvas bring benefit to the people. To illustrate, in kindling a fire, three things are needed: a good piece of steel, a good flint, and good tinder. The same is true of prayer. Three things are required— a good teacher, a good believer, and a good teaching— before prayers can be effective and disasters banished from the land.

A good teacher is a priest who is free from any fault in secular affairs, who never fawns upon others even in the slightest, who desires and is satisfied with little, and who is compassionate; a priest who reads and upholds the Lotus Sutra precisely as it teaches and also encourages and leads others to embrace it. Such a priest the Buddha has praised among all priests as the finest teacher of the Law.

A good believer is one who does not depend upon persons of eminence or despise those of humble station; who does not rely on the backing of superiors or look down on inferiors; who, not relying upon the opinions of others, upholds the Lotus Sutra among all the sutras. Such a person the Buddha has called the best of all people.

As for a good teaching, the Buddha has told us that this sutra, the Lotus, represents the foremost among all doctrines. Among all the sutras the Buddha “has preached,” among those he “now preaches,” and among those he “will preach,” this sutra is designated as foremost, and therefore it is a good teaching.

The scriptural doctrines of the Zen, True Word, and other schools stand in second or third place by

comparison, and indeed, the doctrines of the True Word School in particular deserve to be put in seventh place. And yet in Japan, these second-rate, third-rate, or even seventh-rate doctrines are used as the basis for prayers, though any proof of their efficacy has yet to be seen.

This wonderful Law, which is foremost and unexcelled, should in fact be the basis of prayers. The Buddha himself has declared, “Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way,” and that “[the Buddhas appear in the world] solely for this one reason, which is true.” Who, then, could have doubts in the matter?

Question: If ignorant persons should come and ask what path leads to emancipation from the sufferings of birth and death, what teachings of which sutras should one explain for them? What has the Buddha taught concerning this point?

Answer: You should teach them the Lotus Sutra. For example, the “Teacher of the Law” chapter says: “If someone should ask what living beings will be able to attain Buddhahood in a latter-day existence, then you should show him that all these people in a latter-day existence are certain to attain Buddhahood.” And the “Peaceful Practices” chapter says, “If he is asked difficult questions, he should not reply in terms of the teachings of the lesser vehicle. He should explain things solely in terms of the great vehicle.” The meaning of these passages is that, if someone should ask what kind of persons are capable of attaining Buddhahood, you should reply that persons who embrace the Lotus Sutra are

certain to attain Buddhahood. This represents the Buddha's true intention.

Here a question may arise: "People differ widely in their capacity and inclination. Some will want to hear the Nembutsu teachings, while others will want to hear the Lotus Sutra. If one expounds the Lotus Sutra to those who want to hear about the Nembutsu, what benefit will they derive from it? If someone has come and specifically asked to hear about the Nembutsu, should one insist on teaching that person the Lotus Sutra? The true intention of the Buddha was to preach the Law in accordance with people's capacities so that they could gain benefit thereby, was it not?"

If someone should raise objections of this kind, you should explain as follows. As a matter of principle, in the world of the Latter Day of the Law, without considering whether or not it conforms to the capacity of ignorant people, one should go ahead and teach them the five characters that compose the title of the Lotus Sutra and enable them to embrace it.

As for the reason, when Shakyamuni Buddha spread the Lotus Sutra long ago as a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging, the laymen and laywomen, the nuns and monks, all refused to heed his words. On the contrary, he was cursed and reviled, beaten and driven away, being subjected to numerous types of persecution. But though he was hated and envied, he did not allow it to daunt him in the slightest, but kept on assertively preaching the Lotus Sutra, and for that reason he appeared in

our present world as Shakyamuni Buddha. The people who had cursed Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did not find their mouths twisting out of shape, and those who had beaten him likewise suffered no stiffening of their arms.

The Venerable Aryasimha, who inherited Shakyamuni's teachings, was murdered by a non-Buddhist, and the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face and exiled to the region south of the Yangtze River. How much more so, in the Latter Day of the Law, will an insignificant monk who attempts to propagate the Lotus Sutra encounter such difficulties! Indeed, the sutra makes this very clear. Therefore, although the people may not heed it or may say that it does not suit their capacity, one should nevertheless persist in expounding to them the five-character title of the Lotus Sutra, because there is no other way than this to attain Buddhahood.

Again, someone might object, saying: "Rather than insisting on preaching the Lotus Sutra when it does not accord with the people's capacity, and thus causing them to slander it so that they fall into the evil paths, it would be better to preach the Nembutsu, which does suit their capacity, and thus awaken in them the aspiration for enlightenment. If someone not only fails to bring benefit to others, but on the contrary causes them to commit slander and fall into hell, he is no votary of the Lotus Sutra but rather a person of false views."

In reply to such objections, you should point out that in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha states that, whatever

the people's capacity may be, in the Latter Day of the Law one should persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra. Ask the questioner how he interprets that injunction. Does he claim that Shakyamuni Buddha, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, T'ien-T'ai, Miao-lo, and Dengyo are persons of false views or non-Buddhists?

Then again, with regard to persons of the two vehicles, who have not fallen into the evil paths and have also escaped from rebirth in the threefold world, the Buddha declares that it is better to arouse in oneself the mind of a dog or a fox than to have the mind of the two vehicles. He also warns that it is better to commit the five cardinal sins or the ten evil acts and fall into hell than to have the mind of the two vehicles. Not falling into the evil paths might appear to be a considerable benefit, but the Buddha did not regard this as his true intention. Even if one should fall into hell, because one has heard the Lotus Sutra, which leads to Buddhahood, with this as the seed, one will invariably become a Buddha.

Thus, T'ien-T'ai and Miao-lo, following this principle, state in their commentaries that one should persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra. For instance, a person who stumbles and falls to the ground pushes himself up from the ground and rises to his feet again. In the same way, though persons [who slander the Lotus Sutra] may fall into hell, they will quickly rise up again and become Buddhas.

The people of today in any event already turn their backs on the Lotus Sutra, and because of that error

they will undoubtedly fall into hell. Therefore, one should by all means persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra and causing them to hear it. Those who put their a strong mind in it will surely attain Buddhahood, while those who slander it will establish a “poison-drum relationship” with it and will likewise attain Buddhahood.

In any event, the seeds of Buddhahood exist nowhere apart from the Lotus Sutra. If it were possible to attain Buddhahood through the provisional teachings, then why would the Buddha have said that one should insist on preaching the Lotus Sutra, and that both those who slander it and those who believe in it will benefit? Or why would he say, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives [but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way]”? Persons who have set their minds upon the way should clearly understand these matters.

Question: If ignorant persons put a strong mind in the Lotus Sutra, can even they attain Buddhahood in their present form? And in what pure land will they be reborn?

Answer: In upholding the Lotus Sutra, of those who profoundly grasp the sutra’s meaning, practice the seated meditation described in Great Concentration and Insight, and concentrate on the meditative disciplines pertaining to the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the ten objects, and the ten meditations, there may be some who indeed attain Buddhahood in their present form and achieve enlightenment. As for other types of people, it would appear that, even if they do not understand

the meaning of the Lotus Sutra and are ignorant but have earnest a strong mind, then they will invariably be reborn in a pure land. For it says in the Lotus Sutra, "They will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions," and "She will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight." These passages give clear proof that one who has a strong mind in the Lotus Sutra will be reborn in a pure land.

Someone may raise objections, saying: "Since I am only one person, I do not understand how I can be reborn in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions. Surely I am limited to one direction. Therefore, in which direction should I trust and be reborn?"

To reply, there is a very good reason why the sutra speaks of ten directions and does not specify which one. This is because, when the life of one who believes in the Lotus Sutra comes to an end, among all the worlds of the ten directions, that person will be reborn in the land of a Buddha who is preaching the Lotus Sutra, and will never be reborn in a pure land where the other sutras, such as the Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, are being preached.

There are many pure lands in the ten directions. There are pure lands where the way of the voice-hearers is preached, pure lands where the way of the pratyekabuddhas is preached, and pure lands where the way of the bodhisattvas is preached. Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra will never be reborn in any of these, but will at once be reborn in

a pure land where the Lotus Sutra is being preached. They will take their seats among the assembly, listen to the Lotus Sutra, and as a result become Buddhas.

Yet in spite of this, there are those who urge others to set aside the Lotus Sutra in this lifetime, saying that it is not suited to their capacity, and that they will master its teachings when they are reborn in the western pure land. It is obvious, however, that such people will never master the Lotus Sutra even in Amida's Pure Land, nor will they be reborn in any of the other pure lands of the ten directions. Rather, because the offense of turning one's back upon the Lotus Sutra is grave, they will fall into hell and remain there for a long time. The sutra is referring to such a person when it says, "When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell."

Question: The sutra states, "She will immediately go to the World of Peace and Delight where the Buddha Amida dwells." The meaning of this passage is that a woman who embraces the Lotus Sutra will be reborn in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. It is also said that by reciting the Nembutsu one will be reborn in Amida's Pure Land. Since one is reborn in the Pure Land in either case, may we not assume that the Nembutsu and the Lotus Sutra are equivalent?

Answer: The Meditation Sutra belongs to the provisional teachings, while the Lotus Sutra represents the true teaching. In no way are they equivalent. The reason is that when the Buddha appeared in the world, though he spent forty years

and more preaching various doctrines, he had a great aversion to persons of the two vehicles, to evil persons, and to women, and said not a single word about the possibility of their attaining Buddhahood. In this one [Lotus] sutra, however, he stated that even those of the two vehicles, for whom the seeds of Buddhahood had rotted; Devadatta, who had committed three cardinal sins; and women, who are ordinarily hindered by the five obstacles, could all become Buddhas. This is clearly stated in the text of the sutra.

The Flower Garland Sutra states, "Women are messengers of hell who can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood. They may look like bodhisattvas, but at heart they are like yaksha demons." The Silver-Colored Woman Sutra says that, even though the eyes of the Buddhas of the three existences should come out and fall to the ground, no woman in the entire realm of phenomena could ever attain Buddhahood. Another sutra says, "Women are great evil spirits who devour all people." Bodhisattva Nagarjuna's Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says that just looking upon a woman once forms the karma to fall into hell for a long time. Thus, although I do not know if it is true or not, it is said that the Reverend Shan-Tao, though he was a slanderer of the Law, spent his entire lifetime without ever looking at a woman. And Narihira was comparing women to demons in his poem:

*My horror of that ruined,
Creeper-grown house is because,
Even briefly,
It swarms with demons!*

Moreover, women are burdened with the five obstacles and the three obediences, and so their sins are said to be profound. The five obstacles mean that, first, a woman cannot become a Brahma; second, she cannot become a Shakra; third, she cannot become a devil king; fourth, she cannot become a wheel-turning king; and fifth, she cannot become a Buddha. The three obediences mean that, when a woman is young, she cannot follow her own mind, but must obey her parents. When she reaches maturity, she cannot do as she desires, but must obey her husband. And when she is old, she cannot do as she desires, but must obey her sons. Thus, from the time she is a child until she becomes an old woman, she cannot do as she pleases, but must obey these three categories of persons. She cannot say what she thinks, she cannot see what she wants to see, and she cannot hear what she wants to hear. This is what is meant by the three obediences.

For this reason, Jung Ch'i-ch'i numbered among his three pleasures the fact that he had not been born a woman. Women are thus despised in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures. And yet, in the case of the Lotus Sutra, even though they neither read nor copy the text, women who receive and uphold it in body, mouth, and mind, and in particular chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo with their mouths, will be able to attain Buddhahood readily, as did the dragon king's daughter, Gautami, and Yashodhara, who lived at the same time as the Buddha. This is the meaning of the passage you have cited from the sutra.

Moreover, concerning the phrase “the World of Peace and Delight,” all the various pure lands are indicated by the words “Peace and Delight.” And again, the Amida Buddha spoken of here is not the Amida Buddha of the Meditation Sutra. The Amida Buddha of the Meditation Sutra was originally a monk named Dharma Treasury, the master of forty-eight vows and a Buddha who attained the way ten kalpas in the past. In the Lotus Sutra, the Amida mentioned in the theoretical teaching was the ninth son among the sixteen princes who were sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, an Amida Buddha who made a great vow to propagate the Lotus Sutra. The Amida who appears in the essential teaching is an emanation of Shakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, a commentary says, “One should understand that this does not refer to [the Amida of] the Meditation and other sutras.”

Question: The Lotus Sutra says, “[The door to this wisdom is] difficult to understand and difficult to enter.” The persons of our time cite this passage to argue that the Lotus Sutra is not fitted to the capacities of the people, and this seems to me very reasonable. What is your opinion?

Answer: Such an assertion is quite unfounded. The reason is because it is put forward by persons who have not grasped the true meaning of this sutra.

The sutras that were preached prior to the Lotus Sutra were indeed difficult to understand and difficult to enter. But when we come to the assembly where the Lotus Sutra was preached, then we can

say that the Buddha's teaching became easy to understand and easy to enter. For this reason, the Great Teacher Miao-lo says in his commentary, "The sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra are incomplete teachings, and therefore it is said that they are difficult to understand. But in this present teaching, it is indicated that all persons whosoever can in fact enter the realm of truth. Hence the teaching is easy to understand." This passage means that in the case of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra, because the people's capacity was inferior, these sutras were difficult to understand and difficult to enter. But by the time the Buddha preached the present sutra [the Lotus], the people's capacity had become sharper, and therefore the teaching was easy to understand and easy to enter.

In addition, if those sutras that declare themselves to be difficult to understand and difficult to enter do not fit the people's capacity, then you ought first of all to abandon the Nembutsu teaching. I say this because in the Two- Volume Sutra we read, "[To embrace this sutra is] the most difficult of difficult things. Nothing is more difficult than this." And the Amida Sutra speaks of itself as a doctrine that is "difficult to believe." The meaning of these passages is that to accept and uphold these sutras is the most difficult of difficult things, that nothing could in fact be more difficult, and that their doctrines are difficult to believe.

Question: The sutra reads, "In these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth." It also reads, "[As for those living beings who are unable to

hear this sutra . . .] though immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhya kalpas may pass, they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment.” Just what are these passages saying?

Answer: The meaning of these passages is that, among the various doctrines that Shakyamuni Buddha expounded in the fifty years of his preaching life, he did not expound the truth in the Flower Garland Sutra, which represents his first teaching, nor did he expound the truth in the Correct and Equal and the Wisdom sutras, which he preached later on. For this reason, people who carry out the practice taught by the Zen and Nembutsu schools or who uphold the precepts will never attain Buddhahood, even though immeasurable and boundless kalpas may pass.

After the Buddha had spent forty- two years preaching, he then expounded the Lotus Sutra, and in that sutra he said, “The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth.” When they heard and understood these words of the Buddha, Shariputra and the others of the twelve hundred arhats; the twelve thousand voice-hearers; Maitreya and the others of the eighty thousand bodhisattvas; Brahma, Shakra, and the others of the ten thousands of millions of heavenly beings; and King Ajatashatru and the countless and innumerable other rulers said, “Since times past often we have heard the World- Honored One’s preaching, but we have never heard this kind of profound, wonderful, and superior Law.” Thus they declared that, although they had constantly

attended the Buddha and heard him preach various doctrines over forty-two years, they had never heard anything like this precious Lotus Sutra.

How can the people of the world so misunderstand such clear passages as to think that the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras are equal? Not only that, but they say that the Lotus Sutra, because it does not suit the people's capacity, is like brocade worn in the dark of night, or like last year's calendar. When they happen to encounter someone who upholds the sutra, they look on that person with scorn and contempt, hate and envy, and purse their lips in disapproval. This is nothing less than slander of the Law. How, then, could they be reborn in the pure land or attain Buddhahood?? It appears that such people will surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

Question: Generally speaking, people who have a correct understanding of the Buddhist teachings and who act in accordance with the Buddha's will are looked up to by the world and respected by all. And yet in our present age, in the case of those who uphold the Lotus Sutra, the world joins in hating and envying them, treats them with contempt and scorn, sometimes driving them away, sometimes condemning them to exile, never dreaming of giving them alms but rather hating them as though they were deadly enemies. It would almost seem as though the followers of the Lotus Sutra were evil-minded people who were going against the Buddha's will and interpreting the Buddhist teachings in a distorted manner. How do the sutras explain this?

Answer: According to the sutra text, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, who are so a strong mindful in upholding the sutra that they are hated by others, are the true priests of Mahayana. They are the teachers of the Law who will propagate the Lotus Sutra and bring people benefit. As for priests who are thought well of by others, who go along with other people's desires and so come to be revered, one should regard them as the enemies of the Lotus Sutra and as evil influences to the world. A sutra passage likens persons of this type to a hunter who spies sharply about him as he stalks a deer, or to a cat who hides its claws as it creeps up on a mouse. In just such a way, we are told, do they flatter, deceive, and mislead the laymen and women.

In addition, the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter mentions three groups of people who are enemies of the Lotus Sutra. The first group consists of laymen and laywomen. These lay men and women will hate and curse the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, beat them, put them to the sword, drive them from their dwellings, or slander them to the authorities so that they are exiled to distant places. They behave toward them with pitiless enmity.

The second group consists of monks. These men are arrogant at heart, and though they have little true understanding, they pretend to be very wise and are looked upon by the people of the world as great authorities. When these men see the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, they hate and envy them, treat them with contempt and scorn, and speak evil of them to

others as if they were inferior to dogs or foxes. In their opinion, they alone have truly understood the Lotus Sutra.

The third group is made up of monks living in secluded places. These monks have all the outward signs of being holy men. They possess only the prescribed three robes and one begging bowl, and live in seclusion in a quiet spot in a mountain forest, so that everyone looks up to them as though they were the arhats living at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, and all people revere them as though they were Buddhas. When these men see the monks who read and uphold the Lotus Sutra in accordance with its teachings, they hate and envy them, calling them great fools or holders of grave erroneous views, claiming that they are completely lacking in compassion, and that they preach non-Buddhist doctrines. And because the ruler looks up to such men and believes what they say, everyone down to the common people gives alms to them as though they were Buddhas. Thus the Buddha taught that persons who read and uphold the Lotus Sutra in accordance with its teachings will invariably be hated by these three types of enemies.

Question: Is there any evidence to indicate that one should embrace in particular the name of the Lotus Sutra in the same way that people embrace the name of a particular Buddha?

Answer: The sutra states, "The Buddha said to the demon daughters, 'Excellent, excellent! If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be

immeasurable.’ ” The meaning of this passage is that, when the ten demon daughters made a vow to protect those who embrace the title of the Lotus Sutra, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment praised them, saying, “Excellent! Excellent! The blessings you will enjoy for protecting those who accept and uphold Namu-myoho-rence-kyo will be impossible to fathom! They will be splendid blessings! Truly wonderful!” This passage implies that we ordinary people, whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, should chant Namu-myoho-rence-kyo.

As for the meaning of Myoho-rence-kyo: The Buddha nature inherent in us, ordinary people; the Buddha nature of Brahma, Shakra, and the other deities; the Buddha nature of Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and the other voice-hearers; the Buddha nature of Manjushri, Maitreya, and the other bodhisattvas; and the Mystic Law that is the enlightenment of the Buddhas of the three existences, are one and identical. This principle is called Myoho-rence-kyo. Therefore, when once we chant Myoho-rence-kyo, with just that single sound we summon forth and manifest the Buddha nature of all Buddhas; all existences; all bodhisattvas; all voice-hearers; all the deities such as Brahma, Shakra, and King Yama; the sun and moon, and the myriad stars; the heavenly gods and earthly deities, on down to hell-dwellers, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human and heavenly beings, and all other living beings. This blessing is immeasurable and boundless.

When we revere Myoho-renge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. This is what "Buddha" means. To illustrate, when a caged bird sings, birds that are flying in the sky are thereby summoned and gather around, and when the birds flying in the sky gather around, the bird in the cage strives to get out. When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law, our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. The Buddha nature of Brahma and Shakra, being called, will protect us, and the Buddha nature of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, being summoned, will rejoice. This is what the Buddha meant when he said, "If one can uphold it [the Mystic Law] even for a short while I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas."

All Buddhas of the three existences, too, attain Buddhahood by virtue of the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo. These five characters are the reason why the Buddhas of the three existences appear in the world; they are the Mystic Law whereby all living beings can attain the Buddha way. You should understand these matters thoroughly and, on the path of attaining Buddhahood, chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo without arrogance or attachment to biased views.

Nichiren

This last Gosho is included to show the importance of good friends and teachers as well as further scholarship on the five teaching periods and the evolution of the understanding of the Buddhas' teachings after his passing.

The Bodies and Minds of Ordinary Beings

The sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra deal with the bodies and minds of ordinary beings. The Buddha preached them in terms that would be accessible to the minds of ordinary people, and therefore, though they represent the preaching of the Buddha, they do not go beyond the scope of the minds of ordinary people. Hence they are called the sutras that were preached in accordance with the minds of others.

To illustrate, suppose that there are parents who do not care for sake themselves, but who have a beloved son who is extremely fond of it. Feeling tenderly toward their son and desiring to win his affection, they urge him to have some sake and in so doing pretend that they themselves like it, too. The foolish son thereupon concludes that his father and mother in fact like sake.

The Trapusha Sutra deals with the realms of human and heavenly beings. The Agama sutras deal with persons of the two vehicles. The Flower Garland

Sutra deals with bodhisattvas. The Correct and Equal and the Wisdom sutras in some respects resemble the Agama and Trapusha sutras, and in others, the Flower Garland Sutra.

When ordinary people in this latter age read these various sutras, they suppose that these sutras accord with the mind of the Buddha. But if we ponder the matter closely, we will see that in fact what they are reading is only a reflection of their own minds. And since their very minds are naturally uncultivated, there is little merit to be gained thereby.

The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, is known as a sutra that was preached in accordance with the Buddha's own mind. Because the Buddha's mind is an excellent mind, persons who read this sutra, even though they may not understand its meaning, will gain inestimable benefit.

Mugwort that grows in the midst of hemp, or a snake inside a tube [will as a matter of course become straight], and those who associate with people of good character will consequently become upright in heart, deed, and word. The Lotus Sutra exerts a similar influence. The Buddha will look upon one who simply puts faith in this sutra as a good person.

Concerning the Lotus Sutra, however, the form of its teaching will vary depending upon the people's capacity, the time, the country, and the individuals who propagate it. Yet it seems that even bodhisattvas who have reached the stage of near-

perfect enlightenment do not understand these relationships. How much less can ordinary people in the latter age ever fathom them!

In general, there are three kinds of messengers. The first kind is extremely clever. The second is not particularly clever but is not foolish, either. The third is extremely foolish but nevertheless reliable.

Of these three types, the first will commit no error [in transmitting the message]. The second, being somewhat clever but not quite as clever as the first type, will add his own words to his lord's message. Thus he is the worst possible type of messenger. The third type, being extremely foolish, will not presume to insert his own words and, being honest, will relay his lord's message without deviating from it. Thus he is a better messenger than the second type, and occasionally may be even better than the first.

The first type of messenger may be likened to the four ranks of sages in India. The second type corresponds to the teachers in China. And the third type may be likened to the ignorant but honest persons among the ordinary people of this latter age.

I will set aside here the period when the Buddha lived in this world. The period of a thousand years that followed from the day after his passing is known as the Former Day of the Law. This thousand-year period of the Former Day is divided into two. During the first five hundred years, the teachings of the Hinayana sutras spread. The

persons who propagated them were Mahakashyapa, Ananda, and others. In the second five hundred years, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Asanga, Vasubandhu, and others spread the teachings of the provisional Mahayana sutras. Some among these scholars wrote about parts of the Lotus Sutra, and others made no mention of it whatsoever. Of the scholars who appeared after this thousand-year period of the Former Day, their views in a few cases resembled the Buddha's own teaching, but for the most part they fell into error. Of those who [appeared in the Former Day and] were not in error, but whose treatises were incomplete, we may name Mahakashyapa, Ananda, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Asanga, and Vasubandhu.

In the thousand-year period of the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was introduced to China. But at first, because of controversy with the Confucians, there was apparently no time to delve into the internal divisions of Buddhism, such as the distinction between Mahayana and Hinayana, and between provisional and true teachings.

As the Buddhist teachings spread more widely and one doctrine after another was introduced from India, some persons who had earlier seemed discerning now appeared, in the light of more recently introduced sutras and treatises, to have been foolish. There were also some who had earlier been thought foolish, but who were now seen to have been wise. In the end, ten different schools developed, and a thousand or ten thousand different interpretations were propounded. Ignorant

people did not know which to adhere to, while the attachment to their own views of those thought to be wise was extreme.

In the end, however, there was one opinion that all agreed upon. It was, in short, that of all the teachings set forth in the course of the Buddha's lifetime the Flower Garland Sutra ranked first, the Nirvana Sutra, second, and the Lotus Sutra, third. No one from the ruler on down to the common people disputed this interpretation, because it was shared by the Dharma Teacher Fa-yün, the Dharma Teacher Chihtsang, and the other leaders of the ten schools, who were all looked up to as great sages.

Then, in the time of the Ch'en and Sui dynasties during the Middle Day of the Law, there appeared a young priest named Chih-i, who was later to be known as the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai Chih-che. Although he taught many doctrines, his teachings ultimately centered upon this single issue of the relative superiority of the Lotus, Nirvana, and Flower Garland sutras.

The Dharma Teacher Chih-i declared that the teachers of Buddhism had these three works ranked upside down. The ruler of the Ch'en dynasty, in order to determine the truth of the matter, thereupon summoned a group of more than a hundred men, including the Administrator of Priests Huiheng, the Supervisor of Priests Huik'uang, the Dharma Teacher Hui-jung, and the Dharma Teacher Fa-sui, all among the most eminent leaders of the ten schools of the north and south, and had them confront Chih-i in debate.

The Dharma Teacher Chih-i said: "The Lotus Sutra itself says, 'among the sutras, it holds the highest place.' It also says, 'Among the sutras I [Shakyamuni] have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.' The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra makes clear that the sutras the Buddha already 'has preached' here refer to 'the teaching of great wisdom and the Flower Garland teaching of the ocean-imprint meditation' and so forth. And with regard to the sutras he 'will preach,' the Nirvana Sutra says, '. . . from the prajna-paramita (the teachings of the perfection of wisdom) he brought forth the Nirvana Sutra.' These scriptural passages show that the Lotus Sutra is superior to the Flower Garland and Nirvana sutras; they make it abundantly clear, clear as could possibly be. You should understand accordingly."

Rebuked in this manner, some of his opponents simply shut their mouths, others spewed out abuse, while still others turned pale. The Ch'en ruler then rose from his seat and bowed three times, and all the hundred officials pressed their palms together in reverence. Powerless to prevail, the leaders of the other schools conceded defeat.

Thus it was established that the Lotus Sutra holds the highest place among the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime.

Then, during the latter five hundred years of the Middle Day of the Law, new translations of the sutras and treatises appeared one after another. In

the third year of the Chen-kuan era (629) in the reign of Emperor T'ai-tsung, a priest named Hsüan-tsang journeyed to India. He spent seventeen years mastering the various Buddhist doctrines of the five regions of India and returned to China in the nineteenth year of the same era (645), introducing the Profound Secrets Sutra, The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice, The Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Doctrine, and the other teachings of the Dharma Characteristics School.

Hsüan-tsang declared, "Although there are many different schools in India, this school is the foremost." Emperor T'ai-tsung was one of the worthiest rulers China has known, and he took Hsüan-tsang to be his teacher.

In essence, what this school teaches is that for some persons the three vehicles are a mere expedient and the one vehicle represents the truth, while for others the one vehicle is an expedient and the three vehicles represent the truth. It also teaches that the five natures are completely separate, and that those sentient beings whose nature predestines them [to the two vehicles] or who lack the nature of enlightenment can never attain Buddhahood.

Such doctrines were as incompatible with those of the T'ien-T'ai school as are fire and water. But by this time both the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai and the Great Teacher Chang-an had passed on, and their successors were not the men they ought to have been. Hence it appeared that the T'ien-T'ai school had already gone down in defeat.

Later, during the reign of Empress Wu, the Flower Garland School appeared in China. The translation of the Flower Garland Sutra in sixty volumes, which the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai had criticized, was set aside, and thereafter the school was established on the basis of a new translation of the Flower Garland Sutra in eighty volumes, introduced by the Tripitaka Master Jih-chao. In general, this school teaches that the Flower Garland Sutra represents the "root teaching" of the Buddha while the Lotus Sutra represents the "branch teachings." Empress Wu was a Buddhist nun, and she had a certain degree of understanding of both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist scriptures. In her arrogance she looked down upon the T'ien-T'ai school. Between the Dharma Characteristics and Flower Garland schools, the Lotus Sutra thus became doubly obscured.

Later, in the reign of Emperor Hsüantsung, the three Tripitaka masters Shanwuwei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k'ung traveled to China from India, bringing with them the Mahavairochana, Diamond Crown, and Susiddhikara sutras. In both their character and doctrine, these three men were quite beyond comparison with the earlier teachers of Buddhism in China. And, in addition, because they introduced mudras and mantras, which had been previously unknown, it was thought that Buddhism had not really existed in China before their arrival. These men declared that the T'ien-T'ai school was superior to the Flower Garland, Dharma Characteristics, and Three Treatises teachings, but that it could not measure up to the doctrines of the True Word sutras.

Still later, the Great Teacher Miao-lo produced refutations of the Dharma Characteristics, Flower Garland, and True Word schools, schools that the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai had of course not criticized. But he did not carry out his refutations in a public debate, as the Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai had done. Thus the Lotus Sutra became like a piece of fine brocade worn in the dark of night, while the mudras and mantras, which are not to be found in the Lotus Sutra, were clearly visible before people's eyes. Therefore, everyone believed the True Word School to be superior.

During the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Kimmei (545). During the more than two hundred years from the reign of Emperor Kimmei to the reign of Emperor Kammu, the six schools—the Three Treatises, Establishment of Truth, Dharma Characteristics, Dharma Analysis Treasury, Flower Garland, and Precepts—were propagated. The teachings of the True Word School were introduced during the reign of the forty-fourth sovereign, Empress Gensho, and those of the T'ien-T'ai school, during the reign of the forty-fifth sovereign, Emperor Shomu. But neither of these teachings was propagated at the time.

During the reign of Emperor Kammu, there lived the priest Saicho, who was later known as the Great Teacher Dengyo. Before journeying to T'ang China, he mastered the teachings of the six schools, and in addition, he spent fifteen years in seclusion on the mountain examining the doctrines of the T'ien-T'ai

and True Word schools. Therefore, even before going to China he was able to criticize the earlier six schools from the viewpoint of the T'ien-T'ai teachings, and his criticisms persuaded all the leaders of the seven major temples of Nara to acknowledge themselves as his disciples. Thus the doctrines of the six schools were refuted.

Later, in the twenty-third year of the Enryaku era (804), he journeyed to China, returning to Japan in the twenty-fourth year of the same era. At that time he propagated the T'ien-T'ai and True Word teachings in Japan. But as far as their relative superiority was concerned, though he discerned it in his heart, it appears that he did not expound it to others.

During this same period lived Kukai, later known as the Great Teacher Kobo. He, too, went to China in the twenty-third year of the Enryaku era and returned to Japan in the third year of the Daido era (808). He studied only the teachings of True Word and propagated them in Japan. In his opinion, the Lotus Sutra could not measure up even to the Flower Garland Sutra, much less to the True Word teachings.

The Great Teacher Dengyo had a disciple named Ennin, who was later known as the Great Teacher Jikaku. He went to China in the fifth year of the Jowa era (838) and returned to Japan in the fourteenth year of the same era. During those ten years he studied both the True Word and T'ien-T'ai doctrines. While in Japan, he had thoroughly studied the Tendai and True Word doctrines under

the Great Teacher Dengyo, Gishin, and Encho, and in addition, during his ten years in China he studied True Word fewer than eight distinguished teachers and received instruction in the T'ien-T'ai teachings from Tsung-jui, Chih-yüan, and others. After returning to Japan, he announced that the T'ien-T'ai and True Word schools alike represented the flavor of ghee, and that the sutras of both schools were profound and subtle. An imperial edict was issued supporting these opinions.

After him there appeared Enchin, later known as the Great Teacher Chisho. Before journeying to China, he was a disciple of the Reverend Gishin. While in Japan, he studied the Tendai and True Word teachings under Gishin, Encho, Ennin, and others. In addition, he went to China in the third year of the Ninju era (853), returning in the first year of the Jogan era (859). During his seven years in China, he made a thorough study of the two teachings of the T'ien-T'ai and True Word schools under such men as Fach'ü an and Liang-hsü.

He declared that the relative merits of the two schools of Tendai and True Word were as clear as though reflected in a mirror, but that this point would surely be disputed in later times, and so he would settle the matter. He therefore stated his opinion that the two schools of Tendai and True Word were comparable to the two eyes of a person or the two wings of a bird. Those who held interpretations at variance with this were going against the founder, the Great Teacher Dengyo, and should not remain on the mountain. An imperial edict was again promulgated in support of this

position, and Enchin spread his interpretation throughout the country.

Thus it would appear that, though there have been many wise persons in both China and Japan, there have been none who could refute this interpretation. If it is valid, then those who practice in accordance with it are certain to attain Buddhahood, and those rulers who pay respect to it are bound to enjoy peace and safety in their realm.

I had thought that, should I venture to share my own opinion with others, they would not only refuse to heed it but in fact would try to do me harm, and that my disciples and lay supporters who heard my views would also be placed in peril. And in fact everything has turned out just as I anticipated. Nevertheless, I believe that the interpretations put forth by the persons I have mentioned simply do not accord with the Buddha's true intention. Judging from the eight volumes and twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra, if there should be any other sutra that surpasses it, then the Lotus Sutra would represent no more than a gathering of the Buddhas of the ten directions who came together to pile up great lies. But in fact when we examine the Flower Garland, Nirvana, Wisdom, Mahavairochana, and Profound Secrets sutras, we do not find any passage that controverts the Lotus Sutra's clear statement that "among the sutras, it holds the highest place."

Thus, although Shan-wu-wei, Hsüantsang, Kobo, Jikaku, Chisho, and the others put forth a variety of clever arguments, they could produce no passage of

scripture proving the Lotus Sutra to be inferior to the Mahavairochana Sutra. Their whole argument rests solely on the question of whether the sutra includes mudras and mantras. Rather than writing hundreds of volumes of argument, traveling back and forth between China and Japan with their unending schemes, and arranging for the promulgation of imperial edicts in order to intimidate people, they would have been better off producing some clear passage of proof in the sutras themselves. Who then could have doubted their assertions??

Dewdrops accumulate to form a stream, and streams accumulate to form the great ocean. Particles of dust accumulate to form a mountain, and mountains accumulate to form Mount Sumeru. And in the same way, trifling matters accumulate to become grave ones. How much more so in the case of this matter, which is the gravest of all! When these men wrote their commentaries, they should have exerted themselves in examining both the principles and documentary evidence of the two teachings, and when the court issued imperial edicts, it, too, should have delivered its admonitions after thoroughly investigating both sides and citing some clear passage of proof.

Not even the Buddha himself could repudiate his statement that, among all the sutras he has preached, now preaches, and will preach, [the Lotus Sutra stands supreme]. How much less, then, can scholars, teachers, and rulers of states use their authority to do so! This statement [of the Buddha] has been heard by Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the

sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings, and duly recorded in their respective palaces.

So long as the people truly did not know of this statement, it seems that the false interpretations of the teachers I mentioned spread without anyone incurring retribution. But once a person of forceful character has come forward to make this sutra passage known in a bold and uncompromising fashion, then grave matters are certain to occur. Because people have looked down on this person and cursed him, struck him, sent him into exile, or attempted to take his life, Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings have risen up in anger and become that votary's allies. Thus unexpected censures have come down from heaven, and the people are about to be wiped out and the nation destroyed.

Though the votary of the Lotus Sutra may be of humble background, the heavenly deities who protect him are fearsome indeed. If an asura tries to swallow the sun or moon, its head will split into seven pieces. If a dog barks at a lion, its bowels will rot. And as I view the situation today, the same sort of retribution is happening here in Japan.

On the other hand, those who give alms and support to the votary will receive the same benefit as though making offerings to the Lotus Sutra itself. As the Great Teacher Dengyo says in his commentary, "Those who praise him will receive blessings that will pile up as high as Mount Calm and Bright, while those who slander him will be

committing a fault that will condemn them to the hell of incessant suffering.”

The person who offered a humble meal of millet to a pratyekabuddha became the Thus Come One Treasure Brightness. He who offered a mud pie to the Buddha became the ruler of Jambudvipa. Though one may perform meritorious deeds, if they are directed toward what is untrue, then those deeds may bring great evil, but they will never result in good. On the other hand, though one may be ignorant and make meager offerings, if one presents those offerings to a person who upholds the truth, one’s merit will be great. How much more so in the case of people who in all sincerity make offerings to the correct teaching!

In addition, we live today in a time of trouble, when there is little that ordinary people can do. And yet, busy as you are, in your sincerity you have sent me thick-stemmed bamboo shoots of the moso variety as offerings to the Lotus Sutra here in the mountains. Surely you are sowing good seeds in a field of fortune. My tears never cease to flow when I think of it.

Nichiren

In Closing

There is much more study to be made of the eighty thousand teachings. I hope that I have provided enough here to illustrate the Buddhas' true intent and the sole supremacy of the Daimoku of the Wonderful Law.

Please chant Namumyohorengekyo, to yourself, out loud, as you sleep, and any time you feel joy or hardship. The Buddha guarantees that wisdom and good fortune will come to you as a result.

Love and Respect,

Rev. Sylvain Chamberland - Nyudo