

THE MIDDLE WAY[®]

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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The Middle Way

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SLANDERERS

Reverend Raido Hirota
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June 2012

QUESTION: In the goshō "The Problem to Ponder Day and Night"¹ it states, "A wise man should not fear enemy households, snakes, fire, poison, the thunderbolts of Indra, attacks by swords and staves, or the various wild beasts such as tigers, wolves and lions. For these can only destroy one's life, but cannot cause him to fall into the Avichi Hell², which is truly terrifying. What he should fear is slander of the profound Dharma³ as well as companions who are slanderers, for these will surely cause him to fall into the frightful Avichi Hell." In this modern age, who are the slanderers? And how can they cause one to fall into Hell. Also, what is the Avichi Hell?

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): Slanderers are the ones who act against the Law. Since within every one of us is the likelihood to act against the Law to some extent, we cannot say whether someone is a slanderer or not. We all possess the possibility of being a slanderer.

¹ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Five, p. 167

² Avichi Hell – the Hell of Incessant Suffering – the most terrible hell where inhabitants suffering without relief. It is where those who commit the five cardinal sins or slander the Law fall into.

³ Dharma – the Law or ultimate truth, or the teaching of the Buddha that reveals the ultimate Law.

--- There's no one whose role it is to put someone else into Hell. People themselves create the cause to fall into Hell.

--- Avichi Hell is the deepest and harshest hell, where people go who can only realize Namumyōhōrengekyō⁴ after they have suffered the greatest hell. Slanderers of Namumyōhōrengekyō, who have committed the five cardinal sins, go to the Avichi Hell. The five cardinal sins include: 1. killing one's father, 2. killing one's mother, 3. killing a priest or believer of Namumyōhōrengekyō, 4. threatening the life of, or injuring a Buddha, and 5. causing disharmony among believers.

Believer 1 (B1): This quote frightens me. I do recognize those friends and companions who are slanderers. It scares me.

RH: Within my infinite number of lifetimes and your infinite number of lifetimes we have had ancestors, or have experienced ourselves, directly or indirectly, human beings killing each other. Somewhere in the history of each of us are ancestors who are murderers. At the same time the opposite is true. Our ancestors may have been killed by someone. So even though we say we have never killed anyone, or don't know someone who has, our lives are still related to murderers—or related to killing. Perhaps not in our present lives, but in our ancestors' lives. In fact, even though we may not have killed another human being in this life, we have certainly killed other creatures, and consumed it as our food: fish, deer, and poultry. Because we survive by killing

⁴ Namumyōhōrengekyō - the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

other creatures, consuming them for our sustenance, we must reward them by how we live. Vegetarians say they don't eat meat—cows, fish, pork, chickens, etc.—but they take the lives of plants. It's the same as non vegetarians. It's no different. We both are taking away the life of live creatures. To live is to kill. To live is to take another creature's life. You take their life into your life. Therefore you have to be thankful for that. As long as you are alive, you must think about that.

Going back to the concept of Hell, death is not the end of the story, neither is going to Hell. Actually, Hell is the place where you can review, rethink and correct how you live. So, going to Hell or facing death is not the end.

DEVILS

Reverend Raido Hirota
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June 2012

QUESTION: In "Letter to Domyo Zemmon⁵" it states, "The third volume of the Lotus Sutra states, 'Even though the devil and his subjects are there, they will protect the Buddhist Law.'" Could you please explain this sentence? I thought the devil obstructs practice.

RH: Devils are there to test a believer's strength of faith. The harder we try to believe and practice the Law, the stronger is the devils' attempts to test us. If we are

⁵ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 6, p. 173

able to overcome their power to challenge us, and they decide that our belief is true, they will then stop their attempts to disrupt our practice and will begin to protect us. Devils were there to challenge Shakyamuni⁶ when he taught the Law of the Lotus Sutra. The devils decided that Shakyamuni's belief was so strong and his teaching so correct that they began to protect the Lotus Sutra.

B2: In Christianity a devil is someone who has rejected God. But my understanding of Buddhism is that every being has the potential to become a Buddha. So, are the devils simply living out their role to test us, and they too will eventually become Buddhas? They are not eternally slated to be a devil like in Christianity, are they?

RH: In Buddhism the devil is not always going to be a devil. So yes, it is different from Christianity. In Buddhism even devils have the life of the Ten Worlds⁷ - Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven (or Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, Buddha. One of the Ten Worlds is Hell. Since the Ten Worlds are mutually inclusive, the world of Buddha has its own Hell; and likewise, the devil dwelling in Hell has the life of Buddha. Hence, everything has the same life of the Ten Worlds.

The devil doesn't exist only to be malicious towards people who believe in this Buddhism, or to test believers. If people have the correct and true belief, then devils will protect them. Devils can

⁶ Shakyamuni - Shakyamuni Buddha - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE - 949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

⁷ Ten Worlds - ten life conditions which a single entity of life manifests.

change their role towards a person. The teaching of Buddhism explains that bad things are not always bad, and good things are not always good. Bad things have a good side, and good things have a bad side. When looking at the surface of something, you must also realize that there is always something underlying; always something beneath the surface. This is the teaching of Buddhism.

B3: What are devils anyway? In Christianity I think their belief is that the devil is a fallen angel. Is a devil an entity? Is it a force? Also, what is a Buddhist god? Is it an entity or a force? Is a devil a Buddhist god?

RH: Buddhism explains that we were born as human beings and appear as humans. That is our state of being, or condition. Let's take a snake as an example. Some people may not like snakes, while other people may like them. But generally speaking, most people do not like snakes. But that is not the snake's fault. Snakes were born to be snakes. Even though snakes are not thinking of doing something harmful or bad, or doing something good or benevolent, people just don't like them because of the way they look. But that's the snake's life. That is its condition or state of being. Nonetheless, snakes have the Ten Worlds, from the life of Buddha to the life of Hell. As mentioned earlier, everything that exists has the Ten Worlds. In other words, unlike Christian belief, where all devils remain as devils and cannot change, in Buddhism everything, including devils, has the Ten Worlds, from the life of Hell to the life of Buddha. All life possesses the same Ten Worlds.

As human beings we were all born human, but each one of us is at a different

spiritual stage or in a different life condition. For example, some people just love to fight, while some people are very kind. These two types of people are living in different phases of the Ten Worlds. Some people are living in the condition of Hell, and some people are living in the condition of Buddhahood. Even though we are all human beings, we are personally or individually different because we are at different spiritual phases of the Ten Worlds.

Long ago, Devadatta⁸, who was Shakyamuni Buddha's cousin, tried to assassinate the Buddha. Over the years he made many attempts to kill the Buddha because he believed he was better than the Buddha, and wanted to assume the roll of Buddha himself. He was certain that he could do a better job than Shakyamuni at spreading Buddhism throughout the world. Despite his efforts to eliminate the Buddha, Devadatta never succeeded. Finally, on the day of his last attempt there was a great earthquake which created a wide break in the earth just beneath Devadatta's feet. Devadatta reeled and tumbled into the crevice. While still alive he fell into Hell because he made it his life's purpose to try to kill the Buddha. It is said that Shakyamuni, with his supernatural powers, descended into Hell to visit Devadatta. When the Buddha met with him he promised that in the future Devadatta would become Heavenly-King Buddha and live in a land called Heavenly-Way where he will expound the Law to all living beings for twenty kalpas. When Shakyamuni returned from hell his followers and disciples were dismayed and asked the Buddha why he went out of his

⁸ Devadatta - a cousin and disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who later turned against the Buddha.

way to make such a promise to a person who had devoted his life to doing evil and had tried on numerous occasions to assassinate the Buddha. Shakyamuni explained that people's lives extend from the past, through the present, into the future. Throughout all these existences a single person cannot always be bad. Consequently there is no such thing as an inherently evil person in Buddhism. People today probably watch too many horror movies which feature devils, monsters, or evil creatures. This comes out of the Christian tradition or culture. From this perspective devils, or evil beings, are bad and always bad. That is why people usually have this in their minds. Buddhism, however, is totally different. I believe that the way Buddhism considers the devil is more realistic and more natural.

B4: My sister passed away this year. She lived in a life condition of hell. So my question is, now that she has passed away, will she continue to live in a condition of hell, or will she find some peace?

RH: That's a very difficult question. It is the nature of human beings to want to fix things, but they can't. We always think about something we want to fix, but we just don't have enough power to do it. To illustrate, let's take an alcoholic. He knows he shouldn't drink, but he just can't stop drinking. It's the same with drugs. At once, human beings boast self-confidence and yet display vulnerability. People who borrow money, for example, can't seem to pay it back. Yet, even though the person borrowed the money, and can't pay it back, he still wants to pay it back. So he feels terrible about his own actions. Alcoholics feel bad about drinking alcohol. They always have the thought that "I shouldn't

be doing this. I feel bad for doing this.” Their parents, friends, or loved ones see them as being hapless. Unfortunately, if these people who have this addiction can’t end their habit, they die. Nonetheless, the addict always has the thought that he wants to stop—he wants to fix the problem. So those thoughts matter. They count. Even the world of Hell has the life of Buddha.

I don’t know whether your sister is living happily or not. But for the family and friends who remain in this world, you have to recognize and understand that she always had the thought that she wanted to change. You must recognize that.

B3: The Soka Gakkai⁹ teaches that if something bad happens to you, it means your practice is wrong. But actually when something bad does happen to you, it doesn’t really mean you’re doing something wrong, or necessarily mean that the devil is testing you. So what is the correct outlook to have?

RH: The Soka Gakkai teaches what they teach in order to build and maintain membership in their organization. This is how they force people to practice their way. But of course everyone will face good things and bad things in their life. View it as your life experience. If something bad happens, think of it as being a test. View it as a true challenge within your life experience. You were tested, and you learned from it. You have to go through this stage and as a result you gain awareness. You have to overcome the

⁹ Soka Gakkai – SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

difficult or unpleasant things that happen to you. That is the true practice.

In Buddhism there is a concept called *hendoku iyaku*. *Hendoku iyaku* means to turn poison into medicine. This concept would be equivalent to the devil in that the devil is not always evil, just as poison can turn into medicine. To illustrate, if you are bitten by a snake, the antidote for a snake bite is the snake’s own venom. In the same way, if something bad happens to you, you have to turn that bad thing into something good. As I said, you are challenged, you find a solution or meaningful outcome, and you move on. This is an experience that you can apply in the future. Of course, this is not what the Soka Gakkai teaches. As you know, their thinking is that bad things happen to you because you didn’t follow their guidance or you didn’t practice their way. But this thinking is wrong. The important thing to remember is that when something bad happens you just have to turn it into something good. Accept the bad thing as a challenge and opportunity to gain experience.

The opposite can also be said of good things. That is, medicine can be poison. If good things keep happening to you, and if you become used to it, it will lead to poison, or bad things. Therefore, poisons are not always poisons, and medicines are not always medicines. You have to take the experience of dealing with difficulty and apply it in the future.



ACTION, SPEECH & THOUGHT

Reverend Raido Hirota
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June 2012

QUESTION: “Letter to Priest Nichiro in Prison¹⁰” says, “Others read the Lotus Sutra¹¹ with their mouths alone, reading only the words, but do not read it with their hearts.” What does it mean to read the Lotus Sutra with your heart? Should we also read the Gosho¹² with our hearts?

RH: True belief consists of action, speech, and thought (understanding). Everybody can in effect recite the Lotus Sutra without giving any thought to what the verse means. Reading Namumyōhōrengekyō as an action means leading a life based on the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. To recite Namumyōhōrengekyō with the heart means to recite it with deep understanding and to realize the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Yes, the same thing can be said for reading the Gosho.

B5: Is heart understanding? Does it have to do with the mind? With thinking?

RH: The heart referred to hear is not just heart. It is a heart that believes; or a believing heart. As you know, in Nichiren

¹⁰ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Five, p. 127

¹¹ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching taught by Shakyamuni Buddha in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha nature, and that the life of Buddha and all life is eternal.

¹² Gosho – the individual and collected writings of Nichiren Daishonin

Shoshu¹³ you chant the Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō continuously. Some people do it for ten minutes. Some people do it for one hour. Soka Gakkai teaches that if you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō as long as you can, your wish will come true. So that’s what some people have in their mind. But the true meaning of chanting Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō is as it says in this Gosho. You have to feel within yourself that your life is the same as the life of Buddha. That is something you have to feel, not think. It’s not something that comes about if you chant X number of times, or if you chant X number of hours. If you don’t chant with a believing heart, your chanting doesn’t mean much. Even if you chant only one Odaimoku, if it is chanted with a believing heart then that is what counts—that is what is most important. You’ll then feel you have the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō inside you.

B6: Before, I thought that karma was a spiritual thing, but now I believe karma is only a physical and mental manifestation of thoughts and actions caused by our choices. Is this right? Daimoku doesn’t make my negative karma disappear, or make positive things happen. Daimoku is for connecting to the Law in the universe and not for changing karma. Is that right?

RH: There are three types of Karma—action, speech, and thought. These three will be the fundamental cause for all the things that happen to us. Depending on the situation and environment, the outcome can be either good or bad. So it’s

¹³ Nichiren Shoshu – a sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

not only a spiritual thing, nor only a physical thing; rather, the two (the spiritual and the physical) cannot be separated, and the two affect our whole life. Daimoku doesn't make your negative karma disappear, nor does it make positive things happen, because good things and bad things cannot be separated either. Likewise, it is not correct to think that Daimoku is connecting to the Law in the universe because the Law and the Universe cannot be separated. The universe is the Law and the Law is the Universe; our existence—our life—is the Law. This is the teaching of Nichiren.

B1: If we improve our body and mind with Daimoku¹⁴, how does that affect the environment? How does the principle of oneness of self and environment work?

RH: Unlike Christianity which considers human beings to be the most precious being because they are the closest to the image of God, Namumyōhōrengekyō considers all living things, including the Buddha, to be equal. All living things are equal because within each living thing is the life of Buddha. All of life is related to all other forms of life. This extends from the past, through the present and into the future. All forms of life help one another. The world was not created by God or anyone else; we—all life—co-create the environment. We practice the Law not for the fulfillment of our practical affairs in this world, but for the sake of the whole universe both now and in the future.

Believer 2: Is this related to *eshō funi*¹⁵?

¹⁴ Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

¹⁵ Eshō funi – the self and its environment are two integral phases of the same entity.

RH: Yes. *Eshō funi* is a concept that explains that we and our environment are one. By comparison, in Christianity the belief is that our environment and ourselves are two separate and discrete things.

B3: If we truly practice the Law, not for our own desires or our own selfish reasons, but for the sake of the world and the universe with a feeling of true faith and true heart, we are inviting great challenges. So much will come down upon our shoulders because of that deep faith—that true heart. How do we, the average person, handle that? It's a superhuman task. You think of Nichiren Daishonin¹⁶. He was exactly the kind of person who did that. He introduced the Law that would enlighten all living beings, not for himself, but for all living beings living during his lifetime and in the future. We know the challenges he faced: the enmity he incurred from the government who tried to kill him on several occasions; banishment to Sado Island where he could have either died of starvation or hypothermia. Those are things which the Buddha had to deal with. In living from our hearts, we average people are confronted by opposition from family members, other Buddhists who don't understand this Buddhism, and perhaps societal or cultural opposition, all of which can be great.

RH: The Lotus Sutra states that if you practice this Buddhism as the Buddha taught and at the right time, those unwanted occurrences will befall you.

¹⁶ Nichiren Daishonin – Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Mystic Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

Therefore, because it says it in the sutra, you know these things will happen. Nichiren Daishonin says this is your test, and you have to triumph over the test. This is what leads you to realize Buddhahood correctly.

When Nichiren Daishonin tried to teach the Law to the general public, both the people and the government rose up in anger. Nobody thinks their religion is wrong. Of course, everyone thinks that their religion is right. If someone tries to teach people differently, they become angry. This is how it is with the Japanese. If you try to teach them this religion, they don't want to discuss it. They just get angry. Because their parents or their ancestors practiced a religion it is the family's religion. So when someone tries to introduce them to another religious belief or concept, they feel they and their entire family have been insulted. It is this that angers them. I'm not sure how it is with Americans, but this is how it is with the Japanese. They never explain why they believe in their religion. They just become hostile and angry. Without a discussion of the content of a religion the situation becomes very difficult. So when you say you believe in this religion, you must explain the content of the religion: I believe in this because. . .that's why I practice this religion. This religion is not about gaining membership. You must understand the teaching, and cherish the content or substance of the teaching. Therefore, when you face abuse or opposition, you have to ignore it. Don't let it affect you, because you know the reason you believe in this religion.

When people come to me and say they want to join my temple and follow me, I always tell them when they start practicing Namumyōhōrengekyō that this

teaching is the only religion. Namumyōhōrengekyō is the only true belief. I want them to know that they cannot believe in other religions at the same time. I also tell them that when they believe in this religion, it comes with a practice. You just can't attend a temple, hear a sermon and get something from it and then say, I believe in this religion. It's not like that. You have to practice. The practice is Gongyo¹⁷ which is recited morning and evening. Shakabuku¹⁸ is also a part of the practice. Shakabuku is telling people the teaching of this religion, then recommending to others that they teach others. As I previously stated, if you believe in this religion and practice in this way, you will face some difficult situations. I also tell this to people who wish to follow me.

To get people to join, the Soka Gakkai teaches that your illness will be cured; you can make more money; etc. Later, when confronted with difficulty, the Soka Gakkai member will say, I didn't sign up for this. Joining a religion is like a marriage. When you want to marry someone you have to get to know the other person. You learn whether the other person is kind or not; what the person's habits are; whether the person has the same beliefs, or similar interests as you. You come to understand your partner, and then you marry him or her. Religion is the same. If you practice a religion and believe in it, you must at least know basic things about the religion. People must want to

¹⁷ Gongyo – the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

¹⁸ Shakabuku – a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

believe in the religion before they join it. Once they understand what it is about, it is solely the individual's responsibility to join or not. But people have to be taught the basic truths of a religion before they join so that they understand what it is about. But when I teach people the basics, it doesn't mean they have to know this religion 100%. I teach them the basics to prepare them to have a mind to practice this religion for the rest of their lives, or until they die. I do not want them to join and then say later that it is not what they thought it was. I don't want them to join and then quit. I prepare them to join

B5: I've often heard you say keep fighting. Fighting to me means you're at war. I'm not at war with anyone. You also say you should have peace in your heart. Buddhism to me seems to be about having peace in your heart. So what are we fighting? Why are we fighting? Fighting and having peace in your heart seems to be contradictory.

RH: "Keep fighting" refers to when you face some sort of difficulty. If you are facing trouble or a difficult moment, someone for example, is abusing you; it seems on the surface that you are fighting someone. But actually deep within your mind you are very calm and settled. It is subtle. It looks like you're fighting, but your heart is not. These are two opposing things. You know what is right. Your belief is correct. You have that firm core in your mind. And while you can't see it, your mind doesn't waver. It is always calm. Always peaceful. Try not to only see the surface of things. You know your belief. Trust it. That is how you have to practice and believe.

B5: I'm still not sure I understand the word "fight."

B2: Thirty years ago, when I was a Catholic priest, I had a dialog with an Episcopalian priest who wanted to become a Catholic priest. At that time I used a word I thought we all agreed on. I said some people have an "occult" belief that they do not want to accept all Catholic teachings. "Occult," the way I was using it, meant a hidden belief. But they only used the word occult to mean devil worship. So we used the same words but with different context. So does fight and battle in this context mean having the strength and fortitude vs. combat?

RH: "Fighting" basically means you are fighting with yourself. If your mind or heart becomes weak, you just have to fight with your mind or heart. If you can't win against yourself, you cannot win against someone else. Athletes who try to compete in the Olympic Games have to fight with themselves and conquer their own weaknesses. They have to practice, practice, practice. Then they can eventually fight or compete against other athletes. But first, and most importantly you are fighting with yourself.

The Soka Gakkai teaches you about fighting. For example, if you catch a cold the Soka Gakkai will say that you didn't chant enough Odaimoku, or you didn't practice hard enough, or you did something wrong. Because this is their teaching, the upper echelon or senior leaders of the Soka Gakkai cannot catch cold. If they catch a cold they have to hide it. When they become ill they have to hide it. When you teach people that it is weakness, or weak faith that is the cause of illness, then you as a senior leader cannot

show such a weakness. So the Gakkai teaches you to fight.

Nichiren Daishonin's teaching explains that the reason you get a cold is because you didn't take care of yourself. It has nothing to do with belief or faith or practice. It's just common sense. If you don't take care of yourself, you'll catch a cold. In the Soka Gakkai the senior leaders who are above the members think that they are always right and they know what is right. And the people who follow them are always wrong, or weak, or confused. And the leaders are good at telling you "what's wrong with you." So perhaps on the subject of fighting, you are carrying over a residual understanding from the Soka Gakkai. But Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the most important thing is that existence is as it is - things are as they are. Therefore, if you are practicing

incorrectly, it is not for someone else to tell you that you are practicing incorrectly. It is for you yourself to realize what is wrong. Then you correct yourself. The fighting is within you. You correct yourself. This is the Daishonin's teaching. This is the process of becoming enlightened.

Nichiren Daishonin was accused and convicted of a crime he didn't commit by the Shogunate government during the Kamakura period (1192-1333). Before the verdict was rendered Nichiren Daishonin expressed his views and opinions and declared his innocence. But once the verdict was announced, the Daishonin just accepted the outcome and did not contest, fight or oppose the government's ruling because the government was the authority. This was Nichiren's attitude—his action, speech and thought.

GOSHO SELECTION

Letter to Ko-no-ama Gozen¹⁹

I have received three hundred mon¹ of coins from the wife of Abutsu-bo.²⁰ Since both of you are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together.

I have also received the unlined summer robe you sent to me here in the recesses of this mountain in Hakiri Village, Kai Province, all the way from the province of Sado where you live. The Hosshi chapter²¹ in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If there is one who, in his quest for the Buddha Way, shall throughout one kalpa join his palms and in my

¹⁹ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, p. 139

²⁰ Wife of Abutsu-bo: Sennichi-ama. While Nichiren Daishonin was in exile on Sado, she and her husband Abutsu-bo converted to his teaching. The couple frequently visited him in his forlorn hut at Tsukahara, bringing him food, writing paper and other daily necessities. After the Daishonin was pardoned, Sennichi-ama maintained devout faith and sent her husband to visit him at Mt. Minobu three times.

²¹ Hosshi chapter - the 10th chapter of the Lotus Sutra

presence praise me with countless verses, because of this praise of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable benefit. But one who praises the bearers of this sutra will have blessings surpassing even that." This means that the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law²² surpasses that of serving in all sincerity as noble a Buddha as Shakyamuni with one's body, mouth and mind for an entire medium kalpa.²³ Although this may seem unbelievable, you should not doubt it, because such are the Buddha's golden words.

The Great Teacher Miao-lo²⁴ further clarifies this passage from the sutra by saying, "If there is one who troubles [a preacher of the Dharma], then his head will be split into seven pieces; if there is one who makes offerings [to the preacher], his good fortune will surpass that of the ten honorable titles.²⁵ In other words, the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law exceeds that of making offerings to a Buddha endowed with the ten honorable titles. On the other hand, one who persecutes a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the impure age will have his head broken into seven pieces.

I, Nichiren, am the most extraordinary person in Japan. The reason I say so is this. The seven reigns of heavenly gods I will set aside, and the five reigns of earthly gods are beyond my knowledge, but throughout the ninety reigns from the time of the first human emperor Jimmu until the present, or during the more than seven hundred years since the reign of Emperor Kimmei [when Buddhism was introduced to this country], no one has ever been so universally hated as Nichiren on account of either secular or Buddhist matters. Mononobe no Moriya²⁶ burnt down temples and pagodas, and Kiyomori Nyudo²⁷ had Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples destroyed, but the people of their clans did not harbor hatred toward them. Masakado²⁸ and Sadato²⁹ rebelled against the imperial court, and the Great Teacher Dengyo³⁰ incurred antagonism from the priests of the seven major temples of Nara, but these men were not hated by priests, nuns, laymen and laywomen throughout the whole of Japan. In my case, however, parents, brothers, teachers and fellow priests - every single

²² The Latter Day of the Law - *Mappo* - began in 1052 CE, 2000 years after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.

²³ Medium kalpa - A medium kalpa is said to equal 15,998,000 years.

²⁴ Miao-lo - (711-782) - the sixth patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school in China who reasserted the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra.

²⁵ Ten honorable titles - Ten honorable titles: Ten epithets for a Buddha, expressing his power, wisdom, virtue and compassion. For example, "Thus Come One" (Jap nyorai) means that a Buddha manifests the fundamental truth of all phenomena and grasps the law of causality permeating past, present and future.

²⁶ Mononobe no Moriya (d. 587): An official of the Yamato court period (300-710) who opposed the adoption of Buddhism. When an epidemic broke out, he declared to Emperor Bidatsu that it was because of the new religion, and attempted to halt all Buddhist practice. He was killed by Soga no Umako.

²⁷ Kiyomori Nyudo (1118-1181): Taira no Kiyomori, leader of the Taira clan. After winning two brief campaigns, he seized military power; then, by marrying his daughter to the emperor, he was able to consolidate his authority and eventually dominate the court. In 1177 he uncovered a plot against the Taira clan in Nara and had Taira no Shigehira raze Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples in punishment for their support of the conspirators.

²⁸ Masakado (d. 940): Taira no Masakado, a warrior who wielded power in eastern Japan. In 939 he rebelled against the imperial court by proclaiming himself the new emperor. However, he was killed and his rebellion crushed by the joint forces of his cousin, Taira no Sadamori, and Fujiwara no Hidesato.

²⁹ Sadato (1019-1062): Abe no Sadato, the head of a powerful family in eastern Japan. Continuing a rebellion begun by his father, Abe no Yoritoki, he sought independence from imperial rule but was defeated and killed in a battle with the imperial forces.

³⁰ Great Teacher Dengyo - (767-822) founder of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

person from the ruler on down to the common people - treat me as if I were their parents' enemy, and show me more hostility than if I were a rebel or a robber.

Thus, at times I have been vilified by several hundred people; and at other times, besieged by several thousands, I have been attacked with swords and staves. I have been driven from my residence and banished from my province. Finally I twice incurred the regent's displeasure, being exiled once to Izu Province and again to Sado Island. When I was banished to Sado in the northern sea, I had neither provisions to sustain me nor even clothes as coarse as those made of wisteria vines to cover my body. The people there, both priests and laity, hated me even more than did the men and women of Sagami Province.³¹ Abandoned in the wilderness and exposed to the snow, I sustained my life by eating grass.

I felt as though I were personally experiencing the sufferings of Su Wu,³² who survived by eating snow while living in captivity in the land of the northern barbarians for nineteen years, or of Li Ling,³³ who was imprisoned in a rocky cave on the shore of the northern sea for six years. I underwent this ordeal not because of any fault of my own but solely because of my desire to save all the people of Japan.

However, while I was in exile there, you and your husband Ko Nyudo, avoiding the eyes of others, brought me food by night. You were ready to give your lives for my sake without fearing punishment from the provincial officials. Therefore, although life in Sado was harsh, I was loath to leave, feeling as if my heart were being left behind, and I seemed to be pulled back with each step I took.

I wonder what karmic bonds we formed in the past. Just when I was thinking how mysterious it was, you sent your most precious husband as your messenger to this distant place. I thought it must be a dream or an illusion. Even though I cannot see you, I am convinced that your heart remains here with me. Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun which rises in the morning and the moon which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon. In the next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak. Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the sixth month
Jun 16, 1275
Ko-no-ama

³¹ Sagami Province: The province where Kamakura, the seat of the military government, was located.

³² Su Wu (140-60 B.C.): A minister of Emperor Wu of the Former Han dynasty. In 100 B.C., Emperor Wu sent Su Wu to the land of the northern barbarians (nomadic Hsiung-nu tribes) to demand that they acknowledge fealty to him. The shan-yu, their chieftain, rejected the demand and had Su Wu seized. Imprisoned in a cave, he was for a time forced to survive by eating snow, and endured many hardships before the efforts of his retainer enabled him to return to the Han nineteen years later.

³³ Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.): A military commander during the Former Han dynasty. During a battle, he was captured by the northern barbarians and imprisoned. When news of his defeat reached the court, Emperor Wu mistakenly believed that he had revolted against the Han dynasty, and had all the members of his family killed. Later, the emperor repented and offered to secure his return. But Li Ling refused and died in the land of the northern barbarians.