

Lessening One's Karmic Retribution



HERE were two brothers named Chudapanthaka.¹ When the name Chudapanthaka was called, either would answer. You three believers are like them. When any one of you comes, I feel as though all three of you were here with me.

The Nirvana Sutra teaches the principle of lessening one's karmic retribution. If one's heavy karma from the past is not expiated within this lifetime, one must undergo the sufferings of hell in the future, but if one experiences extreme hardship in this life [because of the Lotus Sutra], the sufferings of hell will vanish instantly. And when one dies, one will obtain the blessings of the human and heavenly worlds, as well as those of the three vehicles and the one vehicle. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was not abused and vilified, stoned and beaten with staves without reason. He had probably slandered the correct teaching in the past. The phrase "when his offenses had been wiped out"² indicates that, because Bodhisattva Never Disparaging met persecution, he was able to eradicate his offenses from previous lifetimes. (This concludes my first point.)

The twenty-five teachers who transmitted the Buddhist teachings,³ with the exception of Shakyamuni Buddha, were all temporary manifestations of Buddhas or great bodhisattvas whose

advent had been predicted by Shakyamuni. Of these, the fourteenth, Bodhisattva Aryadeva, was killed by a non-Buddhist, and the twenty-fifth, the Venerable Aryasimha, was beheaded by King Dammira. Buddhimitra and Bodhisattva Nagarjuna also suffered many persecutions. Yet others propagated Buddhism under the protection of devout kings, without encountering persecution. This would seem to be because good countries and evil countries exist in the world, and shoju and shakubuku exist as ways of propagation. It was like this even during the Former and Middle Days of the Law, as it was in India, the center of Buddhism. This country is far away from India, and this is the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. I was certain beforehand that such things would happen; I have simply been waiting for the inevitable. (This concludes my second point.)

I expounded this principle a long time ago, so it should not be new to you. One of the six stages of practice in the perfect teaching is the stage of perception and action. At this stage "one acts as one speaks and speaks as one acts."⁴ Those at the stage of being a Buddha in theory only and at the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth believe in the perfect teaching; but even though they praise it,

their actions fail to reflect their words. For example, countless people study the non-Buddhist works known as the *Three Records* and the *Five Canons*, but not even one case in ten million is found where a person governs society and behaves as the texts teach. Thus it is very difficult to establish peace in society. One may be letter-perfect in reciting the Lotus Sutra, but it is far more difficult to act as it teaches. The "Simile and Parable" chapter states, "If this person . . . on seeing those who read, recite, copy, and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them . . ." The "Teacher of the Law" chapter reads, "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?" The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter reads, "Many ignorant people will attack us with swords and staves . . . again and again we will be banished." The "Peaceful Practices" chapter states, "It [the Lotus Sutra] will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe." Although these quotations from the sutra are the Buddha's prophecies, there is no reference to when these persecutions will occur. In the past, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the monk Realization of Virtue

read and lived these passages. But setting aside the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law, now, in the Latter Day, in all Japan only Nichiren seems to be doing so. From the present situation, I can well imagine how followers, relatives, disciples, and lay supporters must have grieved in the past when during the reigns of evil kings so many of their sage monks met persecution.

Nichiren has now read [and lived] the entirety of the Lotus Sutra.⁵ Even a single phrase or verse assures one's enlightenment; since I have read the entire sutra, how much more certain is my enlightenment. I am more confident than ever. Though I may sound presumptuous, my most fervent wish is to realize the security and peace of the entire land. In an age when none will heed me, however, it is beyond my power. I will close now to keep this brief.

Nichiren

The fifth day of the tenth month
in the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271),
cyclical sign *kanoto-hitsuji*

Reply to Ota Saemon-no-jo
Lay priest Soya
Dharma Bridge Kimbara



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the fifth day of the tenth month, 1271, only three weeks after he was nearly executed at Tatsunokuchi. It was sent to three of his leading disciples: Ota Saemon, a government official, the lay priest Soya Kyoshin, and the Dharma Bridge Kimbara. One of them may have visited the Daishonin while he was being held in detention for exile at

the residence of Homma, deputy constable of Sado Island, in Echi. Records indicate that the three disciples lived in Shimosa Province, to the northeast of Kamakura; this letter may well have been an expression of gratitude for the visit and for their concern for the Daishonin's safety.

Following the failure to behead the Daishonin, the government had diffi-

culty deciding what to do with him, so he was temporarily detained at Homma's residence. Just at that time, a wave of arson and murder swept Kamakura, and the Daishonin's followers were blamed. The government then directed that the exile that had been ordered earlier be carried out.

The community of believers in Kamakura was deeply upset by this series of events, and the Daishonin sent a succession of letters to reassure them. In this letter, the Daishonin says that hardships allow one to purge oneself of accumulated evil karma in order to bring forth the state of Buddhahood.

Notes

1. Sons of a Brahman family in Shakyamuni's time, said to have had the same name Chudapanthaka. Therefore, when one was called, both would answer. The Daishonin compares their closeness to the staunch unity of the three believers from Shimosa.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 20.

3. The number and ordering of the successors of Shakyamuni who propagated his teachings in the Former Day of the Law dif-

fer slightly according to the source. Here the Daishonin counts Shakyamuni Buddha among the successors; hence the total of twenty-five. Usually Shakyamuni is excluded so that there are only twenty-four.

4. *Great Concentration and Insight*.

5. By saying that he has "read" the entire sutra, the Daishonin here means he has dedicated his life to it and fulfilled the predictions contained therein.