

## Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain



WHEN a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up. But even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak. Even a feeble person will not stumble if those supporting him are strong, but a person of considerable strength, when alone, may fall down on an uneven path.

Moreover, had the Buddha not appeared in the world, then, with the exception of the Venerable Shariputra and the Venerable Mahakashyapa, every single person in all the major world system would have sunk into the three evil paths. But through the strong bonds formed by relying upon the Buddha, large numbers of people have attained Buddhahood. Even wicked people such as King Ajatashatru or Angulimala, who one would expect could never reach enlightenment but would invariably fall into the Avichi hell, by encountering a great person, the Buddha Shakyamuni, were able to attain Buddhahood.

Therefore, the best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a good friend. How far can our own wisdom take us? If we have even enough wisdom to distinguish hot from cold, we should seek out a good friend.

But encountering a good friend is the hardest possible thing to do. For

this reason, the Buddha likened it to the rarity of a one-eyed turtle finding a floating log with a hollow in it the right size to hold him, or to the difficulty of trying to lower a thread from the Brahma heaven and pass it through the eye of a needle on the earth. Moreover, in this evil latter age, evil companions are more numerous than the dust particles that comprise the land, while good friends are fewer than the specks of dirt one can pile on a fingernail.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds of Mount Potalaka acted as a good friend to the boy Good Treasures, but though the bodhisattva taught him the two doctrines of the specific and perfect teachings, he did not reveal to him the pure and perfect teaching [of the Lotus Sutra]. Bodhisattva Ever Wailing sold himself as an offering in his quest for a good teacher, whereupon he encountered Bodhisattva Dharmodgata. But from the latter he learned only the three doctrines of the connecting, specific, and perfect teachings, and did not receive instruction in the Lotus Sutra. Shariputra acted as a good friend to a blacksmith and gave him instruction for a period of ninety days, but succeeded only in making him into an icchantika, or a person of incorrigible disbelief.<sup>1</sup> Purna discoursed on the Buddhist doctrine

for the space of an entire summer, but he taught Hinayana doctrines to persons who had the capacity for Mahayana doctrines, and thereby turned them into Hinayana adherents.

Thus even great sages [such as Perceiver of the World's Sounds and Dharma-dgata] were not permitted to preach the Lotus Sutra, and even arhats who had obtained the fruit of emancipation [such as Shariputra and Purna] were not always able to gauge people's capacity correctly. From these examples, you may imagine how inadequate are the scholars of this latter, evil age! It is far better to be an evil person who learns nothing of Buddhism at all than to put one's faith in such men, who declare that heaven is earth, east is west, or fire is water, or assert that the stars are brighter than the moon, or an anthill higher than Mount Sumeru.

In judging the relative merit of Buddhist doctrines, I, Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact.

In the past, around the fifth year of the Bun'ei era (1268), when the Ezo barbarians rebelled in the east and the Mongol envoys arrived from the west with their demands, I surmised that these events had come about because people did not put faith in the correct Buddhist doctrines. I guessed that prayer rituals would surely be performed to subdue the enemy, and that such rituals would be conducted by the priests of the True Word school. Of the three countries of India, China, and Japan, I will leave aside India for the moment. But I am certain that Japan, like China, will be undone by the True Word school.

The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei journeyed to China from India in the reign of Emperor Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang dynasty. At that time there was a

great drought, and Shan-wu-wei was ordered to conduct prayers for rain. He succeeded in causing a heavy rain to fall, and as a result, everyone from the emperor on down to the common people was overcome with joy. Shortly thereafter, however, a great wind began to blow, wreaking havoc throughout the land, and the people's enthusiasm quickly palled.

During the same reign, the Tripitaka Master Chin-kang-chih came to China from India. He too prayed for rain, and within the space of seven days, a heavy rain fell and people rejoiced as they had earlier. But when a great wind of unprecedented violence arose, the ruler concluded that the True Word school was an evil and fearsome doctrine and came near to sending Chin-kang-chih back to India. The latter, however, made various excuses and contrived to remain.

Again, in the same reign, the Tripitaka Master Pu-k'ung prayed for rain. Within three days a heavy rain fell, producing the same kind of joy as before. But once more a great wind arose, this time even fiercer than on the two previous occasions, and raged for several weeks before subsiding.

How strange were these occurrences! There is not a single person in Japan, whether wise or ignorant, who knows about them. If there is anyone who wishes to find out, that person had better question me in detail and learn about these matters while I am still alive.

Turning to the case of Japan, in the second month of the first year of the Tencho era (824), there was a great drought. The Great Teacher Kobo was requested to pray for rain in Shinsen'en garden.<sup>2</sup> But a priest named Shubin came forward and, protesting that he had been a member of the priesthood longer and ranked higher than Kobo, asked that he be allowed to conduct the ritual. Shubin was granted permis-

sion and carried out the prayers. On the seventh day a heavy rain fell, but it fell only on the capital and not in the surrounding countryside.

Kobo was then instructed to take over the task of praying, but seven days went by without any rain falling, then another seven days, and still another seven days. Finally, the emperor himself prayed for rain and caused it to fall. But the priests of To-ji, Kobo's temple, referred to it as "our teacher's rain." One need only consult the records to learn the details.

This was one of the greatest frauds ever known in our nation. And in addition, there were the matters of the epidemic that broke out in the spring of the ninth year of the Konin era (818)<sup>3</sup> and of the three-pronged diamond-pounder,<sup>4</sup> which were also frauds of a most peculiar kind. These things had best be shared in person.

There was a major drought in China in the period of the Ch'en dynasty, but the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai recited the Lotus Sutra, and in no time at all rain began to fall. The ruler and his ministers bowed their heads, and the common people pressed their palms together in reverence. Moreover, the rain was not torrential, nor was it accompanied by wind; it was a soft shower. The Ch'en ruler sat entranced in the presence of the great teacher and forgot all about returning to his palace. At that time, he bowed three times [in acknowledgment to the great teacher].

A great drought occurred in Japan in the spring of the ninth year of the Konin era. Emperor Saga ordered Fuyutsugu<sup>5</sup> to send the lower-ranking official Matsuna<sup>6</sup> [to the Great Teacher Dengyo to ask him to offer prayers for rain]. The Great Teacher Dengyo prayed for rain, reciting the Lotus, Golden Light, and Benevolent Kings sutras, and on the third day thin clouds appeared and a gentle rain began to fall. The emperor was so overjoyed that he gave permis-

sion for the building of a Mahayana ordination platform,<sup>7</sup> the establishment of which had been the most difficult undertaking in Japan.

Gomyo, the teacher of the Great Teacher Dengyo,<sup>8</sup> was a sage and the foremost priest in Nara, the southern capital. He and forty of his disciples joined together in reciting the Benevolent Kings Sutra to pray for rain, and five days later rain began to fall. It was certainly splendid that rain fell on the fifth day, but less impressive than if it had fallen on the third day, [as in the case of the Great Teacher Dengyo]. Moreover, the rain was very violent, which made Gomyo's performance inferior. From these examples, you may judge how much more inferior were Kobo's efforts to produce rain.

Thus, the Lotus Sutra is superior, while the True Word school is inferior. And yet, as though deliberately to bring about the ruin of Japan, people these days rely exclusively on the True Word.

Considering what had happened in the case of the Retired Emperor of Oki,<sup>9</sup> I believed that if the True Word practices were used to try to subdue the Mongols and the Ezo barbarians Japan would surely be brought to ruin. Therefore, I determined to disregard my own safety and speak out in warning. When I did so, my disciples tried to restrain me, but in view of the way things have turned out, they are probably pleased at my actions. I was able to perceive what not a single wise man in China or Japan had understood in more than five hundred years!

When Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k'ung prayed for rain, rain fell, but it was accompanied by violent winds. You should consider the reason for this. There are cases of people making rain fall even through the use of non-Buddhist teachings, even those of the Taoists, which are hardly worth discussion. And of course with Bud-

dhist teachings, even if those of the Hinayana are correctly applied, then how could rain fail to fall? And how much more so if one uses a text such as the Mahavairochana Sutra, which, though inferior to the Flower Garland and Wisdom sutras, is still somewhat superior to the Agama sutras [of the Hinayana]! Thus rain did indeed fall, but the fact that it was accompanied by violent winds is an indication that the doctrines being applied were contaminated by grievous errors. And the fact that the Great Teacher Kobo was unable to make rain fall although he prayed for twenty-one days, and that he misappropriated the rain that the emperor had caused to fall and called it his own, indicates that he was even more gravely in error than Shan-wu-wei and the others.

But the wildest falsehood of all is what the Great Teacher Kobo himself recorded when he wrote, "In the spring of the ninth year of the Konin era, when I was praying for an end to the epidemic, the sun came out in the middle of the night."<sup>10</sup> This is the kind of lie this man was capable of! This matter is one of the most important secrets that is entrusted to my followers. They should quote this passage to drive their opponents to the wall. Setting aside for the moment the question of doctrinal superiority, I simply wish to stress that the matters I have written of above are of the utmost importance. They should not be discussed lightly or passed on to others. It is because you have shown yourself to be so sincere that I am calling them to your attention.

And what of these admonitions of mine? Because people regard them with suspicion and refuse to heed them, disasters such as those we now face occur. If the Mongols should attack us with great force, I am sure that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra will spread far and wide in this present life-

time. At such a time, those persons who have treated me harshly will have reason to regret.

The non-Buddhist teachings [of India] date from about eight hundred years before the time of the Buddha. At first they centered around the two deities<sup>11</sup> and the three ascetics, but eventually they split into ninety-five schools. Among the non-Buddhist leaders were many wise men and persons endowed with supernatural powers, but none of them was able to free himself from the sufferings of birth and death. Moreover, the people who gave allegiance to their teachings, whether faithful or not, all ended by falling into the three evil paths.

When the Buddha appeared in the world, these ninety-five groups of non-Buddhists conspired with the rulers, ministers, and common people of the sixteen major states of India, some of them reviling the Buddha, others attacking him or slaying his disciples and lay supporters in incalculable numbers. But the Buddha did not slacken his resolve, for, he said, were he to cease preaching the Law because of intimidation from others, then all living beings alike would surely fall into hell. He was deeply moved by pity and had no thought of desisting.

These non-Buddhist teachings came about through a mistaken reading of the various sutras of the Buddhas who preceded Shakyamuni Buddha.

The situation today is much the same. Though many different Buddhist doctrines are being taught in Japan, originally they all derive from the eight schools, the nine schools, or the ten schools.<sup>12</sup> Among the ten schools, I will set aside for the moment the Flower Garland and others. Because Kobo, Jikaku, and Chisho were deluded as to the relative merits of the True Word and Tendai schools, the people of Japan have in this life been attacked by a foreign country, and in their next

life they will fall into the evil paths. And the downfall of China as well as the fact that its people were destined to fall into the evil paths also came about through the errors of Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k'ung.

Moreover, since the time of Jikaku and Chisho, the priests of the Tendai school have been constrained by the false wisdom of these men and developed their school into something quite unlike what it once was.

"Is this really true?" Some of my disciples may be asking. "Does Nichiren really have an understanding superior to that of Jikaku and Chisho?" But I am only going by what the Buddha predicted in the sutras.

The Nirvana Sutra states that, in the Latter Day of the Law, those people who slander the Buddha's teaching and fall into the hell of incessant suffering as a result will be more numerous than the dust particles that comprise the land, while those who uphold the correct teaching will be fewer than the specks of dirt one can pile on a fingernail. And the Lotus Sutra says that, even though there might be someone capable of lifting up Mount Sumeru and hurling it away, it will be hard indeed to find anyone who can preach the Lotus Sutra just as it teaches in the Latter Day of the Law of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The sutras Great Collection, Golden Light, Benevolent Kings, Protection, Parinirvana, and Sovereign Kings record that, when the Latter Day of the Law begins, if a person who practices the correct teaching should appear, then those who uphold false teachings will appeal to the ruler and his ministers. The ruler and his ministers, believing their words, will revile that single per-

son who upholds the correct teaching or attack him, send him into exile, or even put him to death. At that time, the king Brahma, Shakra, and all the other innumerable gods as well as the heavenly and earthly deities will take possession of the wise rulers of neighboring countries and cause them to overthrow the nation where these things take place. Doesn't the situation we face today resemble that described in these sutras?

I wonder what good causes formed in your past lives have enabled all of you to visit me, Nichiren. But whatever you might discover in examining your past, I am sure that this time you will be able to break free from the sufferings of birth and death. Chudapanthaka was unable to memorize a teaching of fourteen characters even in the space of three years, and yet he attained Buddhahood. Devadatta, on the other hand, had committed to memory sixty thousand teachings but fell into the hell of incessant suffering. These examples exactly represent the situation in the world in this present latter age. Never suppose that they pertain only to other people and not to yourselves.

There are many other things that I would like to say, but I will stop here. I do not know how to thank you for all you have done in these troubled times, so I have here outlined for you some important points in our doctrine.

Thank you for the cowpeas and green soybeans.

Nichiren

The twenty-second day of the sixth month

Reply to Nishiyama



## Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the first year of Kenji (1275) and sent to the lay priest Nishiyama, who lived in Nishiyama Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province. Nishiyama appears to have been the steward of that village and a sincere believer who often visited the Daishonin at Minobu, bringing offerings and provisions.

In the opening of this letter, Nichiren Daishonin explains the importance of “good friends” who assist or encourage one in one’s Buddhist practice. Stating that good friends are rare and “evil companions”—those who hinder one’s quest for enlightenment—are too numerous to count, he goes on to point out the distortions of the True Word school, to which Nishiyama had previously belonged. He then declares that, while documentary and doctrinal evidence is important in considering the efficacy of a Buddhist teaching, far more important is “the proof of actual fact,” that is, the power of a religion to positively affect the human condition.

The “three Tripitaka masters” in this letter’s title are Shan-wu-wei, Chinkang-chih, and Pu-k’ung, three Indian monks who introduced the esoteric teachings to China in the eighth century that later in Japan became known as the True Word school. The Daishonin relates instances in which each of these three men prayed for rain at the request of the throne, in each case appearing to have produced destructive gales. He

then cites instances in which prayers based on the Lotus Sutra, such as those offered by T’ien-t’ai in China and Dengyo in Japan, brought down gentle, life-giving rain. Publicly sponsored prayer rituals to bring about rain were not uncommon in ancient China and Japan, where rice crops depended on abundant precipitation and a drought could mean widespread famine.

After citing instances in both China and Japan in which True Word rituals were known to have brought disaster, the Daishonin further criticizes the errors and deceptions of Kobo, the founder of Japan’s True Word school, and warns against relying on the prayers of this school for the nation’s safety. Japan at this time was facing an impending attack by the Mongol forces. After one attempted invasion that had been foiled by adverse weather, the Mongol emperor had again sent envoys demanding Japan’s allegiance; anxiety gripped the nation as the people prepared to defend themselves against overwhelming odds.

The Daishonin himself, in his admonitory treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, had predicted this specter of foreign invasion. Quoting various sutras, he declares that Japan finds itself in this predicament because of the people’s attachment to mistaken forms of Buddhism and their rejection and slander of the Lotus Sutra.

## Notes

1. According to the Nirvana Sutra, Shariputra attempted to instruct a blacksmith by teaching him to meditate on the vileness of the body, and a washerman, by teaching him to count his breaths in meditation. As a result, neither gained the slightest understanding of the Buddha’s teaching but fell into erroneous views. Later, Shakyamuni Buddha reversed the instruc-

tion, teaching the blacksmith to count his breaths and the washerman to meditate on the vileness of the body, after which they are both said to have quickly reached the stage of arhat.

2. A garden established on the grounds of the imperial palace in Kyoto by Emperor Kammu. It was the site of a large pond where prayers for rain were performed.

According to *The Genko Era Biographies of Eminent Priests*, a dragon lived in this pond, and when it made an appearance, rain would fall.

3. This refers to Kobo's claim, made in his *Secret Key to the Heart Sutra*, which the Daishonin cites later, that while he was praying to end an epidemic the sun came out at night. See also the text on pp. 722–24.

4. A ritual implement used in esoteric Buddhism, symbolizing the adamantine resolve to attain enlightenment, which can destroy any illusion. *The Biography of the Great Teacher Kobo* states, "On the day when he set out by ship from China . . . he faced in the direction of Japan and threw the diamond-pounder up into the air. It sailed far away and disappeared among the clouds," and "He journeyed to the foot of Mount Koya and determined to establish his place of meditation there . . . and later it was discovered that the three-pronged diamond-pounder that he had thrown out over the sea was there on the mountain."

5. Fuyutsugu is Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu (775–826), a court official of the early Heian period (794–1185), who eventually became minister of the left.

6. Matsuna is Wake no Matsuna (783–846), a son of Wake no Kiyomaro. As a court noble, he and his brother Hiroyo sponsored a lecture by the Great Teacher Dengyo at Takao-dera temple in Kyoto.

Fourteen representatives of the six schools of Nara attended the lecture.

7. Priests in Japan had been ordained exclusively in the Hinayana precepts. Dengyo had repeatedly sought imperial permission to establish a Mahayana ordination center at Mount Hiei, over the fierce objections of the Nara schools. His continued efforts in this direction, coupled with his dramatic success in the prayers for rain and with the requests of Fujiwara no Fuyutsugu and others, finally moved Emperor Saga to consent.

8. There is no source for the statement that Gomyo (750–834), a Dharma Characteristics priest, was Dengyo's teacher.

9. Reference is to the eighty-second emperor, Gotoba. In 1221, after having retired, he attempted to overthrow the Kamakura government and had a great number of priests offer esoteric True Word prayers for the victory of the imperial forces. However, the leader of the Kamakura shogunate emerged victorious.

10. *Secret Key to the Heart Sutra*.

11. Shiva and Vishnu.

12. The eight schools are the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Garland, Tendai, and True Word schools. The nine schools comprise these eight plus the Zen school, and the ten schools are those nine plus the Pure Land school.

