

## On Consecrating an Image of Shakyamuni Buddha Made by Shijo Kingo



IN your daily records you write that you have fashioned a wooden image of Shakyamuni Buddha. With regard to the eye-opening ceremony appropriate for such a statue, the Universal Worthy Sutra states, “This great vehicle sutra<sup>1</sup> is the treasure storehouse of the Buddhas, the eye of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences.” It also says, “This correct and equal sutra<sup>2</sup> is the eye of the Buddhas. It is through this sutra that the Buddhas are able to acquire the five types of vision.”

Concerning the phrase “acquire the five types of vision” in this sutra, this refers to the physical eyes, the heavenly eye, the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, and the Buddha eye. These five types of vision are naturally acquired by one who upholds the Lotus Sutra, just as the person who becomes the ruler of a state will naturally be obeyed by all the people of that state, or as the lord of the great ocean will as a matter of course be followed by the fish who dwell there.

The Flower Garland, Agama, Correct and Equal, Wisdom, and Mahavairochana sutras may possess the five types of vision in name, but they do not possess them in reality. The Lotus Sutra possesses them in both name and reality. And even if it did not possess them in name, you may be certain that it would possess them in reality.

With regard to the three bodies of a Buddha, the Universal Worthy Sutra states: “A Buddha’s three types of bodies are born from this correct and equal sutra, which is the great seal of the Law that assures entry into the sea of nirvana. It is from this sea that a Buddha’s three types of pure bodies are born. These three types of bodies are fields of good fortune for human and heavenly beings and are highest among those worth of alms.”

The three bodies are as follows: first, the Dharma body of a Thus Come One; second, the reward body of a Thus Come One; and third, the manifested body of a Thus Come One. These three types of bodies of a Thus Come One are invariably possessed by all Buddhas. If we use the moon as an illustration, we may say that the moon itself is comparable to the Dharma body, its light to the reward body, and its reflection to the manifested body. Just as a single moon has these three different aspects, so a single Buddha possesses the virtues of these three different bodies.

These doctrines of the five types of vision and the three bodies are not expounded anywhere outside of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai has said, “The Buddha consistently possesses the three bodies throughout the three existences. But in

the various teachings, he kept this secret and did not transmit it."<sup>3</sup> In this passage of commentary, the phrase "in the various teachings" refers not only to the Flower Garland, Correct and Equal, and Wisdom sutras, but to all sutras other than the Lotus Sutra. And the phrase "he kept this secret and did not transmit it" means that, throughout the entire body of scriptures outside of the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, concealed and avoided expounding it. Therefore, in performing the eye-opening ceremony for painted or wooden Buddha images, the only authority to rely on is the Lotus Sutra and the T'ien-t'ai school.

In addition, the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life arises from the concept of the three realms of existence. The three realms of existence are as follows: first, the realm of living beings; second, the realm of the five components; and third, the realm of the environment. Let us set aside the first two for now. The third, the realm of the environment, refers to the realm of plants and trees. And the realm of plants and trees includes those plants and trees from which are produced the five shades of pigment used in painting. From this pigment, painted images are created, and from trees, wooden statues are made.

It is the power of the Lotus Sutra that can infuse such paintings and statues with a "soul" or spiritual property. This was the realization of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. In the case of living beings, this doctrine is known as attaining Buddhahood in one's present form; in the case of painted and wooden images, it is known as the enlightenment of plants and trees. This is why [the Great Teacher Chang-an] wrote, "There has never been anything to compare to the brightness and serenity of concentration and in-

sight,"<sup>4</sup> and why [the Great Teacher Miao-lo] stated, "They are nevertheless shocked and harbor doubts when they hear for the first time the doctrine that insentient beings possess the Buddha nature."<sup>5</sup>

This doctrine [of three thousand realms in a single moment of life] was never heard of in the ages [before the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai], nor was it known in the ages that followed. And even if it did appear, one may be certain that it had been stolen from him.

However, some two hundred years after the time of T'ien-t'ai, Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chieh, and Pu-k'ung founded the so-called True Word school on the basis of the Mahavairochana Sutra. And then, although there is no mention of any such doctrine in the Mahavairochana Sutra as the Buddha expounded it, they stole the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life from the Lotus Sutra and T'ien-t'ai's commentary, and proceeded to make it the heart and core of the True Word school. Moreover, they pretended that the doctrine had originated in India, and in this way deceived and misled the later-day scholars of China and Japan. No one knows the truth of the matter, but all alike assent to and put faith in the assertions of the True Word school. This has been going on now for more than five hundred years.

This being the case, the wooden and painted images that were made and consecrated before the time of the True Word school [when the T'ien-t'ai practices were followed] have manifested extraordinary powers, but those in temples and pagodas built after True Word [practices were adopted for the eye-opening ceremony] produce very little benefit. Since there are many instances of this, I will not go into detail.

This Buddha of yours, however, is a living Buddha. It differs in no respect

from the wooden image of the Buddha made by King Udayana,<sup>6</sup> or that fashioned by King Bimbisara. Surely Brahma, Shakra, the deities of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings will attend you as a shadow accompanies a body and protect you always. (This is the first point I wish to make.)

Your daily records also indicate that each year, during the ninety-day period from the eighth day of the fourth month through the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you perform acts of devotion to the god of the sun. The god of the sun lives in a palace made of the seven kinds of treasures. This palace occupies an area of 816 *ri* or 51 *yojanas*. In the midst of it dwells the god of the sun, attended by two consorts, Victorious and Invincible. To his right and left range the seven luminaries and the nine luminaries,<sup>7</sup> and in front of him stands the heavenly goddess Marichi. The god of the sun rides a chariot made of the seven treasures and drawn by eight fine horses, and in the space of one day and one night he circles about the four continents, acting as an eye to all the living beings who dwell in them.

In the case of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as the other deities, we hear that they bestow superb blessings, but with our dull eyes we have yet to see it. In the case of the sun deity, however, there can be no doubt, for his blessings are before our very eyes. Were it not for Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, how could such blessings as these be bestowed? And were it not for the power of the wonderful sutra of the one vehicle, how could such marvels appear before us? It is wondrous to contemplate!

In inquiring how to repay this deity for his favor, we find that, in the ages before the appearance of Buddhism, people of a discerning nature all bowed before him or presented offerings, and all of them received evidence of bless-

ings in return. At the same time, those who turned against him were all punished.

Now if we consider what the Buddhist writings have to say, we may note that the Golden Light Sutra states, "The god of the sun and the god of the moon, because they listen to this sutra, are able to obtain vitality in abundance." And the Sovereign Kings Sutra states, "Through the power of this sutra king, these luminaries are able to circle the four continents."

You should understand, therefore, that it is the power of the Buddhist Law that enables the deities of the sun and moon to make their rounds of the four continents. The Golden Light and Sovereign Kings sutras are mere expedient teachings leading to the Lotus Sutra. When compared with the Lotus Sutra, they are like milk compared with ghee, or metal compared with precious gems. And yet, inferior as these sutras are, they enable the heavenly deities to circle the four continents. How much more power can these deities gain, then, by tasting the sweet ghee of the Lotus Sutra!

Therefore, in the "Introduction" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find the deities of the sun and moon ranged side by side with the god of the stars. And in the "Teacher of the Law" chapter, it is predicted that the deity of the sun will attain supreme perfect enlightenment and be known as the Thus Come One Fire-Sustaining.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to all this, your late father initiated this worship of the sun deity, and you have succeeded him in the second generation, carrying on these ceremonies over a long period of time. So how could the deity possibly abandon you?

I, Nichiren, have also put my trust in this deity, and in this manner have carried on my struggles in Japan over the past several years. Already I have the feeling that I have achieved victory.

Such clear blessings can only be attributed to this deity.

There are many other admirable points in your daily records, but I cannot go into them all in this letter.

As for the thing that I admire most: In your letters in the past, you have from time to time mentioned your concern for your parents. And when I read your present letter, I could not hold back my tears, so moved was I by pity at your sorrow over the thought that your parents might perhaps be in hell.

Among the Buddha's disciples was one called the Venerable Maudgalyayana. His father was named Kissen Shishi and his mother was named Shodai-nyo. His mother, after passing away, fell into the realm of hungry spirits. While Maudgalyayana was still an ordinary mortal, he was unaware of this fact, and so had no reason to grieve over it. But after he became a disciple of the Buddha, he achieved the status of arhat and, acquiring the heavenly eye, was able to perceive that his mother was in the realm of hungry spirits. When he became aware of this, he made offerings of food and drink to her, but these only turned into flame and increased her torment. Thereupon he rushed back to the Buddha and reported what had happened. Think how he must have felt at that time!

Now you are an ordinary person, possessing no more than the physical eyes, and so you cannot see what realm your parents now occupy and grieve at the thought that perhaps they are in hell. This in itself is an expression of filial devotion. Brahma, Shakra, the deities of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings are certain to look upon you with pity.

The Flower Garland Sutra says, "Those who do not understand their obligations will in many cases meet with an untimely death." And the Meditation on the Buddha's Ocean-like

Characteristics Sutra says, "This [failure to repay a debt of gratitude] is the cause that leads to rebirth in the Avichi hell." But now you have already manifested a sincere concern for your parents, and the heavenly gods are certain to heed your prayers. (This is the second point I wish to stress to you.)

In your letter you also mention certain things that, on thoroughly considering the heart of the matter, I believe you ought not to do. I, Nichiren, am hated by the people of Japan. This is entirely due to the fact that the lord of Sagami regards me with animosity. I grant that the government has acted quite without reason, but even before I encountered my difficulties, I foresaw that troubles of this kind would occur, and I resolved that, whatever might happen to me in the future, I must not bear any hatred toward others. This determination has perhaps acted as a prayer, for I have been able to come safely through any number of trials. And now I am faced with no such difficulties.

Whose aid was it that allowed me to escape death from hunger when I was exiled to the province of Sado, or that makes it possible for me to recite the Lotus Sutra here in the mountains as I have up until now? It is your aid alone. And if we inquire who has made it possible for you to offer this aid, we would have to say that it is your lord, the lay priest Ema. Though he himself is not aware of this fact, it has undoubtedly acted as a prayer on my behalf. And if that is so, then your lord's prayer has also become a prayer on your behalf as well.

Moreover, it is thanks to your lord that you have been able to fulfill your obligations to your parents. Regardless of what might happen, it would not be right to leave the service of someone to whom you are so indebted. If he repeatedly rejects you, then there is no help for it. But you yourself must not

abandon him, no matter how your life may be endangered.

The passage from the sutra that I quoted above says that those who do not understand their obligations may meet with an untimely death. Conversely, those who discharge their filial duties will not meet with such a death.

The bird known as the cormorant is capable of eating iron, but though its insides can digest iron, they do no harm to the unborn chicks in the body of the mother. There are fish that eat pebbles, but this does not kill the unspawned young in the fish's body. The tree called sandalwood cannot be burned by fire, and the fire in the heavens of purity cannot be quenched by water. The body of Shakyamuni Buddha could not be burned, though thirty-two strong men applied torches to it, and when fire emanated from the Buddha's body, the dragon deities of the threefold world all poured down rain in an effort to put it out, but it would not be extinguished.

Now you have aided Nichiren in his acts of merit. Therefore, it will be very difficult for evil persons to do you harm. And if by chance something should happen to you, then you may be certain that it is a retribution in this present life for the hatred that you manifested in some previous existence toward a votary of the Lotus Sutra. Retribution of that kind can never be avoided, no matter how deep one may be within the mountains or how far away at sea. That is why Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was attacked with sticks and staves, and why the Venerable Maudgalyayana was killed by a group of Brahmans of the Bamboo Staff school. Therefore, what cause have you to grieve?

To avoid unforeseen troubles, it is best to endure patiently. After you read this letter, during the hundred days that follow, you must not heedlessly go out drinking at night with your associates

or others at places besides your own home. If your lord should summon you during the daytime, then go to him with all haste. But if the summons should come at night, then plead some sudden illness for the first three times he calls you. If he persists in calling you more than three times, then inform your retainers or someone else and have them watch out for trouble at the crossroads before you set out to answer the summons.

If you conduct yourself with such circumspection, and the Mongols attack our country in the meantime, then people's feelings toward you will change from what they were before, and they will no longer think of attacking you as they would an enemy.

With regard to what you have written me, even if you should be at fault, you should not think lightly of leaving your lord's service—even less so if you are guilty of no error. In that case you must pay no heed, regardless of what others may say.

As for your desire to become a lay priest, you may do so in the future. Even then, if circumstances should arise that do not suit you in body or mind, evil influences will again seek to work upon you. These days there are women who become nuns in order to deceive others, and men who become lay priests and commit great evil. You must never become involved in such matters.

Even though you suffer from no illness, you should receive moxibustion treatment on one or two places on your body so that later you can plead illness should it become necessary. And if some kind of disturbance should occur, for the time being send someone else to observe what is going on.

It is difficult to write down all that I would like to tell you. That is why I have not gone into matters of doctrine here. As for the sutra, I will copy

it out for you when the weather gets a little cooler.

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

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

Reply to Shijo Kingo



## Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu to Shijo Kingo in 1276, when he was fifty-five. Evidently Shijo Kingo had made a wooden image of Shakyamuni Buddha for the benefit of his deceased parents and asked the Daishonin to perform the eye-opening ceremony to consecrate it. This letter is the Daishonin's reply.

In the opening section, the Daishonin says that only when the Lotus Sutra is used at the eye-opening ceremony to consecrate a Buddha image will that image become endowed with the five types of vision and the Buddha's three bodies.

Making Buddha images was a widespread practice, and, in an age when most people revered the Buddha Amida, the Daishonin was tolerant of the making of images of Shakyamuni as an act leading toward correct understanding.

## Notes

1. "This great vehicle sutra" indicates the Lotus Sutra. The Universal Worthy Sutra is regarded as an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra.

2. "This correct and equal sutra" here refers to the Lotus Sutra.

3. *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.

4. *Great Concentration and Insight*, preface. "Concentration and insight" is used to refer to the system of meditation set forth by T'ien-t'ai.

5. *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*

6. A king of Kaushambi in India in Shak-

A similar attitude also underlies the next section of the letter, in which the Daishonin comments on Shijo Kingo's hereditary practice of worshiping the sun deity at certain times of the year. He explains here that the power and workings of the sun deity ultimately derive from the Buddhist Law, which the Lotus Sutra expounds.

The Daishonin then praises Shijo Kingo for his filial devotion and points out that, by providing him with a livelihood, Lord Ema has enabled him to discharge his filial duties and to make offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra. It would be wrong, the Daishonin says, to lightly abandon someone to whom one is so deeply indebted. At this time Shijo Kingo was in physical danger due to the animosity of his fellow samurai, and the Daishonin warns him to be on guard.

yamuni's time. According to the Increasing by One Agama Sutra, when Shakyamuni ascended to the heaven of the thirty-three gods to preach the Law to his mother Maya, King Udayana lamented that he could no longer worship the Buddha and fell ill. His ministers then made a five-foot wooden image of the Buddha; as a result, Udayana recovered from his illness. This is said to have been the first Buddha image ever made. The source for the Daishonin's reference to a Buddha image made by King Bimbisara of Magadha in India is not known.

7. The seven luminaries are the sun, the

moon, Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn. The nine luminaries are the seven luminaries, comets, and a heavenly body called Rahu (Skt), said to cause eclipses.

8. The "Teacher of the Law" chapter itself does not mention that the god of the sun will receive the name Fire-Sustaining Thus Come One. It does, however, predict supreme enlightenment for all those who uphold even a single phrase or verse of the sutra. In commenting on this passage

in *Words and Phrases*, T'ien-t'ai cites the *Awakening to True Meditation Sutra*, which says that the four heavenly kings shall all become Buddhas named Fire-Sustaining. In his *Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,"* Miao-lo in turn suggests that the gods of the heavenly bodies and others will also attain Buddhahood under this name. Nichiren Daishonin appears to have accepted Miao-lo's interpretation.