

Propagation by the Wise



THE correct teaching of the time can be propagated only by a person of wisdom. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha, after expounding all the sutras, entrusted the Hinayana sutras to Ananda and the Mahayana sutras to Manjushri. Concerning the heart of the Lotus Sutra, however, the Buddha refused to transfer it to any of the voice-hearers [such as Ananda] or to bodhisattvas such as Manjushri. The Buddha instead summoned Bodhisattva Superior Practices and entrusted it to him.

Even if a person of wisdom who embraces the correct teaching existed, how could he propagate it without lay believers who supported him? Shakyamuni Buddha had the support of Brahma and Shakra, who were his patrons in heaven. From among the six paths, the Buddha chose the worlds of human and heavenly beings, and of these two, he chose to be born among human beings. Of all the places in the major world system inhabited by human beings, he appeared in the center, the five regions of India, and within the five regions, in the kingdom of Magadha.

The king of this land should have been a patron of the Buddha, but instead the country's ruler, King Ajatashatru, was an evil man. The most unfortunate destiny for a sage is to be born during the reign of an evil monarch.

King Ajatashatru had murdered his father, a worthy ruler. Even worse, he had taken Devadatta as his mentor. Devadatta had committed three cardinal sins, the worst of which was injuring the Buddha and causing him to bleed. The unfilial and evil king joined forces with this blasphemous teacher, thus laying a double burden on the people.

Not only for one or two years but for several decades, this king repeatedly harassed the Buddha and killed countless numbers of his disciples. This infuriated the heavenly gods, and the skies reacted violently. Moreover, the earthly gods were so provoked that great disasters occurred on earth. Month after month violent gales raged, and year after year famines and epidemics struck, killing the majority of the people. Furthermore, neighboring kingdoms attacked on all sides, driving Magadha to the brink of ruin.

Then, motivated by a revelation in a dream, by the advice of Jivaka and, finally, by his own inner doubts, King Ajatashatru left Devadatta and presented himself before the Buddha to repent of his sinful deeds. As a result, his illness was cured immediately, the invasions ceased, and the entire country became peaceful. Not only that, he was also able to thwart the prophecy that he would die on the seventh day of the third month and in fact prolonged his

life by forty years. In gratitude, he assembled a thousand arhats to record all the Buddha's teachings, especially the Lotus Sutra, for future generations. It is therefore owing to King Ajatashatru that we have the Lotus Sutra we embrace today.

But let us set aside the story of Ajatashatru. If I were to repeat the teachings given by the Buddha to King Ajatashatru, the Japanese would consider them to be merely my own fabrications. But since you are my disciple and supporter, I will reveal them to you. The Buddha states: "After my death, in the Latter Day of the Law, the land will be filled with those who pretend to be pious by observing the five ascetic practices¹ as Devadatta did. They will persuade an evil ruler to act against the one person of wisdom. They will curse or strike him, cause him to be exiled, and even make an attempt on his life. At that time there will be ominous changes in the heavens and strange occurrences on earth, as well as violent winds, famines, and epidemics greater than ever witnessed before, and these disasters will continue year after year. The land will be attacked by another country." This is the substance of the tenth volume of the Protection Sutra.

The present age has developed exactly as the Buddha predicted it would, and Nichiren may be the person of wisdom whom the Buddha described. Though some people wish to help me, either their determination is weak, or, though firmly resolved, they are unable to act on their intentions. Thus, you are one of the very few whose actions match their will. You surpass others in your resolve, and it is because of your devoted support that I have been able to survive. The heavens are certainly

aware of this; the earth surely knows about it, too. If any misfortune were to occur to you, it could only mean that heaven wanted my life itself. Wherever one may be, whether in the mountains, on the seas, in the skies, or in the cities, one cannot escape death. Nevertheless, a sutra explains that even one's fixed karma can be changed.² T'ien-t'ai's commentary also states that one can prolong one's fixed span of life.

As I have advised you before, until the Mongol forces actually attack this country, continue to conduct yourself in a circumspect manner. As for the reply to your lord, declare to him firmly: "Since I am ill, it is most distressing for me to be transferred to a remote place. Moreover, the entire country is already in turmoil. Should an emergency arise, how could I possibly be a coward? At this moment I am resolved to sacrifice my life for my lord if anything grave happens. But should a sudden crisis occur, it is doubtful whether I could reach you in time from the distant province of Echigo. Therefore, even at the risk of losing my estate, I will not leave you this year. Anything else you command of me, I will obey without hesitation or fear. Even more important to me than this, however, are the priest Nichiren and my deceased parents."

Say in a ringing voice, "Even if you disown me, I will devote my life to you. My next life I have entrusted to the priest Nichiren."

Nichiren

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

To Shijo Kingo



Background

This letter was sent from Minobu to Shijo Kingo in the ninth month of 1276. Because Lord Ema disapproved of his retainer Shijo Kingo's belief in the Daishonin's teachings, he harassed Kingo in various ways. At one point he even threatened to transfer the samurai to the remote province of Echigo on the Sea of Japan if he refused to re-

nounce his allegiance to the Daishonin. This letter was the Daishonin's answer to Kingo's request for guidance in these circumstances.

The letter clarifies the two necessary elements for the propagation of Buddhism: a person of wisdom and supporters to aid him.

Notes

1. The five ascetic practices refer to the five precepts expounded in Hinayana Buddhism: to wear discarded ragged clothes, to seek alms, to have only one meal a day, to remain out of doors always, and to avoid sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, and salty food.

2. This statement is adopted from a passage in *The Annotations on "The Words and*

Phrases of the Lotus Sutra." Karma is the potential force inherent in one's life that influences one's future. Fixed karma means a span of life fixed by karma. The reference in the next sentence to T'ien-t'ai's commentary indicates *Great Concentration and Insight*.

