

# The Simplicity of Nichiren

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**A**T THE VERY TIME that an intense focus on interior response added a new dimension to the traditional search for rebirth in the Pure Land and that a concentration on inner processes offered a new development in Zen discipline, a revival of Hokke Buddhism emerged that would wed a heretofore unknown intensity of faith with the external, social action of man. This revision of Tendai Buddhism appealed less to innovation than to a return to the true doctrine of the Lotus. The age old Buddhist theme that linked protection of the realm with faith in the Lotus sutra appeared in the person of Nichiren (1222–1282).

The cultivation of practice in a concentrated effort of body-mind that is *zazen* was more than matched in Nichiren's "Body-sutra," i.e., *shindoku*,<sup>1</sup> and its union of faith and action. Pure Land faith explicated in the single focus of the *nembutsu* invocation found a counterpart in a faith centered on the one doctrine of the Lotus. The intensity of faith absorbed by the invocation in praise of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu" found resonance in Nichiren's intonation and homage of the *daimoku*, the title of the Lotus sutra, "Namu-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō."<sup>2</sup>

Nichiren presented a doctrine powerful enough to save a people who suffered the trial of institutional collapse and the torment of natural disasters. He confronted the lack of true faith that rendered a people fragile within and vulnerable from without with the one faith he judged restorative of national purpose. The threat of Mongol invasion prepared the context within which his message would have special emphasis and efficacy. The theme of the coming invasion was a conscious reference. Paul D. Jaffe notes that Nichiren considered such an invasion the suffering of divine punishment for a nation inattentive to his prophetic voice. It is in this context that Jaffe notes that the term: "to suffer," *kōmuru* was uniquely written by Nichiren with the first of the two

<sup>1</sup> Nakamura, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, 1:773.

<sup>2</sup> Nakamura, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, 2:935.

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characters that form the word, Mongol, in his admonition to this faithless nation.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the effort of Nichiren, if reduced to an evocation of the energies of a people for a particular national purpose, i.e., nationalism, would have been, even in his own time, an ambiguous achievement at best.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the faith he defined offered a compelling sense of credence and creativity that has endured through the centuries.<sup>5</sup>

### NICHIREN (1222–1282)

Like the teachings of other key religious figures of the age, Nichiren's specific Buddhist formulation was the result of a long period of personal pursuit. A formative period spans his 1233 entry to Kiyosumi monastery at the age of eleven to the day he proclaimed his religious certitude on May 17, 1253. Masaharu Anesaki notes the range of Nichiren's studies and the intensity of his insight in a moment of recorded self-reflection.

"I have gone to many centers of the religion," he says in reminiscence, "during those twenty years, in the quest of Buddhist truths. The final conclusion I arrived at was that the truth of Buddhism must be one in essence. Many people lose themselves in the labyrinth of learning and studies, through thinking that every one of the diverse branches might help to the attainment of Buddhist ideals."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Paul D. Jaffe, "Rising from the Lotus: Two Bodhisattvas from the Lotus Sutra as a Psychodynamic Paradigm for Nichiren," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 13 (March 1986): 92.

<sup>4</sup> Shinohara Kōichi cogently presents evidence that Nichiren's faith did not hinge on influencing contemporary politics but that the influence of the political order did deepen Nichiren's views on the meaning of salvation. He notes that Nichiren's own lifetime experience and sequence of writing offer a shift of emphasis from an effort to influence national purpose to the effort to define a deeper sense of the salvific inspired by the experience of persecution. See Shinohara Kōichi, "Religion and Political Order in Nichiren's Buddhism" in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8 (September–December 1981): 225–234.

<sup>5</sup> Tamura Yoshirō in "Ideas of the Lotus Sutra" notes that faith in the Nichiren sect and veneration of the Lotus Sutra were definable characteristics of the townsman class of the Momoyama and Edo periods with particular reference to the autonomous guilds of Kyoto. He makes specific references to those who were prominent in the arts and in letters up to the end of the Edo period as representative of a "Lotus *machishū* culture." (George J. Tanabe, Jr. and Willa Jane Tanabe, eds., *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989], pp. 50–51.)

<sup>6</sup> Masaharu Anesaki, *Nichiren, The Buddhist Prophet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 14.

It is Nichiren's essential sense of oneness that sets him apart from other traditions. His conviction that Sakyamuni preached the law according to a sequence which distinguished the provisional doctrines from the final revelation of the Lotus sutra colored his works with a critical cast and a unique sense of polemic. Although Amidism took priority as a target, Zen, Shingon, and Ritsu in that order, also came under his critical pen.<sup>7</sup> His knowledge of these sects was not remote. Their doctrines were among those studied during his personal odyssey and scholastic journey. Jacqueline Stone notes Nichiren's comprehensive condemnation.

Nichiren's rejection of the other Buddhist schools was summed up by his later followers in the form of the so-called four declarations (*shika kakugen* 四箇格言), drawn from various passages in his work: "Nembutsu leads to Avici Hell, Zen is a devil, Shingon will destroy the nation, and Ritsu is a traitor."<sup>8</sup>

The Pure Land tradition was most irksome, for it found its matrix in the very tradition which if viewed faithfully would have all that was necessary for universal salvation. Genshin's addition of rebirth to the attainment of enlightenment, Hōnen's mode of *nembutsu* and Shinran's simple faith could only be an anathema to Nichiren. Hence, criticism of Pure Land was itself a clear statement of Nichiren's doctrine. Opposition to the Jōdo sect was an apologia for true Lotus belief. His points of contrast were central and his position unyielding.

But then came Hōnen, and his *Senchakushū* forgot Sakya, the Lord of the Law, and started to venerate only the Buddha of the Western Land. Rejecting the legacy of Dengyō Daishi, he put aside the

<sup>7</sup> "When he (Nichiren) speaks of certain reputable figures such as Shan-tao (Zendō) or Hōnen, the epithets 'stupid,' 'liar,' 'criminal' often appear in his brush stroke. He wrote on the eleventh of October, 1268 to Ryōkan, the superior of Gokurakuji, one of the most respected and influential monks of his time, that he was a 'bandit pretending to possess the three sciences' and 'possessing the blindness of the false sages' and that he was a 'traitor to his country.' His horror of the diverse Buddhist sects exploded in the letters which he wrote on the same date to Dōryū, superior of Kenchōji at Kamakura: 'The *nembutsu* is an act of unending hell; Zen is the doings of the demons, Shingon is an evil doctrine which destroys the country, and Ritsu is a historical lie of traitors,' etc." (G. Renondeau, *La Doctrine de Nichiren*, [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953], p. 6.)

<sup>8</sup> Jacqueline Stone, "Rebuking the Enemies of the Lotus: Nichirenist Exclusivism in Historical Perspective," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21 (June-September 1994): 223.



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Tathagata of the East and gave himself exclusively to the four volumes of the three sutras of the Pure Land and abandoned the other wonderful scriptures taught by our first master during the five periods.<sup>9</sup>

Pure Land belief was distortive of the unique saving role of Sakyamuni. In its misplaced faith, it is a counterfeit credence. Nichiren dismisses all who practice the nembutsu to the abyss of *Muken jigoku*<sup>10</sup> with the brief epithet: "Nembutsumuken . . ."<sup>11</sup> To the nethermost hell used by Genshin to dissuade men from their evil ways and to inspire them toward faith in rebirth, Nichiren consigns all Jōdo believers. Nichiren's polemic posture in general and in specific reference to Pure Land, is based on his conviction that the truth of Buddhism must be one in essence.

He presents unequivocally the one final truth of Buddhism. There is but one sutra that proclaims the unique role of the one Buddha capable of saving mankind in these final times. The revealed identity of Sakyamuni Buddha in the Lotus sutra implies a basic identity in man's faith response. "The perfection of truth is in the Buddha's soul and the same perfection in our soul are one, and it is inherent in us and to be realized by ourselves."<sup>12</sup>

The more Nichiren focused on the interiority of things, the more powerfully was the historical dimension of things and the manifestation of the Buddha nature actively one in the act of faith. This identity inspired his sense of realization. He would speak of a "body-sutra," *shindoku*.<sup>13</sup> This reading of the Scripture by the "bodily life"<sup>14</sup> was an accordance of revealed truth and phenomenal existence. His specific interpretation of faith and practice was unknown in the very tradition of Tendai he espouses but must now interpret for this age of the latter law.

His religious statement markedly distinguishes itself from Tendai's emphasis on contemplation, contemporary Pure Land faith's devaluation of human effort and Zen's meditative disciplines' detachment from current event. Nichiren emphasis on the oneness of truth informs his interpretation of revelation, faith, and practice.

Central to his thesis that the truth of Buddhism must be one in essence is his

<sup>9</sup> Shimizu Ryūzan, ed., *Nichiren Shōnin Zenshū*, 6 vols. (Tokyo: Kobunkan, 1925), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Hanayama, *Ōjōyōshū*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Nakamura, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, 1 :773.

<sup>14</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p. 25.

understanding of the placement of provisional and final truth. From the widest spectrum of world religions to the specific detail of his scriptural analysis, Nichiren presents a concentric pattern focused on the truth revealed in the Lotus sutra. He specifies the kernel of revelation in the very nature of the Buddha with a unique emphasis and concise exegesis.

In regard to his pattern of thought, the format of the *Kaimokushō* outlines the intent of his complete works. This "Eye Opening Thesis" demonstrates the superiority of Buddhism over the religions of India and China, affirms the excellence of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law over all other Buddhist teachings, preaches the message of universal deliverance, and proclaims the eternal character of the Buddha.<sup>15</sup>

The broadest horizon against which Nichiren's understanding of Buddhism finds placement is stated in the *Kaimokushō*'s specific reference to Confucianism in China and to Indian religions outside of Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> Confucianism is viewed as a philosophy of relationships which prepared the Chinese character for the reception of Buddhism.<sup>17</sup> It is criticized as limited in its concerns to the present.<sup>18</sup> The implication is that it was viewed as a datum uninformed by transcendent consideration. On the other hand, Indian religions were critiqued as preoccupied with the future. They were focused on a mode of ascetic escape from this realm in way illusive of true and lasting attainment.<sup>19</sup> In his widest consideration, Nichiren's criticism of former teachings hinged on the relation between present realities and revealed truth, rightly perceived only by true and complete Buddhist belief.

Regarding the excellence of the Lotus sutra over other Buddhist teaching Nichiren uses the established Tendai schema of the teachings of the five periods (*goji*)<sup>20</sup> and the analogy of the five tastes (*gomi*)<sup>21</sup> throughout his works. The five teachings offer a sequential understanding of the salvific role of the sacred personality in accord with the progressive teaching of Sakya-muni Buddha. The Keron sutra is perceived as the basis of the Hinayana and of the *arhat* ideal. The Agon sutra offers a transition to the wider vehicles of Mahayana while the Hōdō sutra taught the superiority of one who would secure attainment only after the assured deliverance of others. The Hannya sutra stated former ways would lead to achievement through the way of the bodhi-

<sup>15</sup> Renondeau, *La Doctrine*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>16</sup> Yoshio Tamura ed., *Nichiren shū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1969), p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>20</sup> Nakamura, *Bukkyōgo daijiten*, 1:362.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1:375.



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sattva. The final teaching of the Nirvana and Lotus sutra disclose without reserve the complete reality of Sakyamuni Buddha and the true nature of the Tathagata.<sup>22</sup>

These five periodic teachings were accorded five flavors. In effect one doctrine was sweeter than the other until the piece de resistance. Fresh milk (*nyū*), cream (*raku*), curdled milk (*shōso*), butter (*shukuso*) and ghee (*daigo*) note degrees of acquired richness and enhanced depth of doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

The most succinct reference to this established analogy of the five tastes and teachings is cited in the *Shugokokkaron*. The mixed metaphor of the passage attests to the images' constant use even in the most improbable contexts. The text itself is telling. "Even if the rivers of the four tastes should exhaust their currents, the ocean of the Great Lotus is ever constant and undiminished in its momentum."<sup>24</sup>

Nichiren wishes to note that former truths lead inevitably to the doctrine of the Lotus without confirming the swift course of current commonly attributed to the flow of rivers to the sea. On the contrary, these tributaries lose their momentum and deplete their tastes. In contrast the ocean is constant and unalterable in its strength and savor. The curious imagery states Nichiren's use of conventional Tendai analogy of the five tastes. Teachings appropriate for former ages run down. Their weakness and meandering are the necessities that impel them toward strength and constancy. Their completion is found in the ever constant ocean of the Lotus doctrine.

A similar contrast between the inadequacies of former teachings vis-à-vis present realities and the necessary recognition of the most powerful of truths for these times, is found in Nichiren's understanding of the content of the Lotus sutra itself. The Lotus sutra is the acknowledged culmination of all revelation. However, he further defines its meaning and refines the focus of its teaching to a central pertinent passage and to the truth it proclaims.

But in these first five hundred years of the age of the latter law, we have come to a time when, even among the second fourteen chapters of the doctrine of the Original Buddha we must disregard the other thirteen and preach only the doctrine of the chapter of the Duration of the Life of the Tathagata . . . The doctrine which is now necessary to save us from the chain of life and death is only the one contained in the chapter on the Duration of the Life of the Tathagata.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Renondeau, *La Doctrine*, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Renondeau, *La Doctrine*, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> Del Campana, "Sandaihihō-shō," p. 217.

His exegesis of the sutra differs from the established categories of interpretation in its concentration. Nichiren concentrates the locus of truth for these times to be the revelation of Sakyamuni's eternal enlightenment. This is the full and complete doctrine for Nichiren. He accepts the established framework of former interpretations of the Lotus sutra. The *Shakumon*, "Gate of the Trace," centers on the earthly existence of the Buddha.<sup>26</sup> The *Hommon*, "Gate of the Origin," declares the eternal character of the Buddha.<sup>27</sup> For Tendai, the true and original nature of the Buddha brings to completion truths suggested in the trace manifestation of the sutra. It must be noted that in the earlier Tendai School "the complete doctrine" (*engyō*) included both the first and second part of the sutra.<sup>28</sup> For Nichiren the doctrine which is now necessary is the direct datum that Sakyamuni Buddha who was born, attained enlightenment, preached the dharma and died, possessed from all eternity, full and complete enlightenment.

The former, more inclusive interpretations offered a completed sense of final revelation. Final truth revealed what was formerly traced; what was hinted at, yet hidden, concealed, yet suggested. A constant reality was finally confirmed in a sequence of presage to proclamation.

Nichiren defines as the complete teaching what was formerly understood as a conclusive teaching: "the full and extensive revelation of the close, present, historical reality of the Buddha manifests his distant, eternal nature," *Kōkai-gon-ken-on*.<sup>29</sup> Nichiren's focus is on the constant immediacy of the fullness of revelation to the apparent distinct phenomenal existence of the historical Buddha.

Nichiren's sole focus on the one truth suggests something more immediate than a historical manifestation of a distant principle. His emphasis is direct. The fullness of truth does not emphasize a validating continuum of innuendo central to former hermeneutic. His instruction: to present only the sutra's revelation of the oneness of the historical and transcendent Buddha and to disregard the other fourteen chapters of the *Hommon*, is new in its concentration and constitutes no restatement of former interpretations. His exposition presents a truth more exclusive in its focus and more immediate in its impact. In this Nichiren confirms the acknowledged power of the revelation. No one is outside of the absolute embrace of the Buddha revealed as one. He reaffirms that every being without discrimination is endowed with the Buddha nature

<sup>26</sup> Renondeau, *La Doctrine*, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Del Campana, "Sandaihihō-shō," p. 212, n. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 213.



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and capable of highest enlightenment. Yet the tenor of his statement is not one of a gradual awareness of this datum. This truth is recognized in the quick extinction of lesser truths. Nichiren writes in the *Kanjin honzonshō*:

This doctrine is difficult to understand. Yet according to the assertion of the one Buddha, the way of the *shōmon* and *engaku*, practitioners of the smaller vehicle and the *sendai (icchantika)* whom according to prior sutras would never attain buddhahood would attain it according to Shakyā. In the merging of the Lotus sutra's trace and original gate, the Buddha extinguishes the two separate explanations, the two expressions of the one Buddha are put out as fire immersed in water.<sup>30</sup>

The originally enlightened Buddha offers the one vehicle to all who possess the one buddhahood. In this latter age, incomplete expressions of the truth and misplaced categories of interpretation extinguish. Only the most powerful of doctrines has the constant power to save. Those unable to be saved by other teachings are embraced by the Lotus. In another often quoted analogy, those who slip through the net of other doctrines are caught and made secure in the teaching of the Lotus.<sup>31</sup>

The contour of his considerations from world religions to Buddhist truths, from the former and latter sections of the Lotus sutra to the one chapter whose doctrine alone is necessary to save us, denotes a dynamic process of selection. The more centered a revealed truth, the more concentrated its doctrine, the more powerful it is, the simpler it is. For Nichiren the historical and eternal aspects of the Buddha are simply one. The historical dimension is already in ultimate reality.

Nichiren's powerful understanding of the one nature of the Buddha is apparent in his sense of practice and faith. It is here that a oneness of the phenomenal and transcendent is most clearly stated. The winding down of the efficacy of other teachings finds an attending corollary in the depletion of man's ability to respond in faith and practice. The weakened condition of man and the devolution of the age evidence the virtue of the doctrine of the one Buddha.

In his essay *Kyō-ki-ji-koku-shō*, "Treatise on the Doctrine, the Capacity, the Time and the Country"<sup>32</sup> Nichiren presents four coordinates supportive of his theory of religious history. It is the Lotus sutra that is the teaching (*kyō*)

<sup>30</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 287.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p. 42, n. 2.



which is appropriate for the level of the capacity (*ki*) of the people during this latter time (*ji*). *Koku* or country designates Japan as the privileged locus of this doctrine's availability. These four elements are points of coordination in the proper sense of the term. For Nichiren, it would not do to preach the final, perfect doctrine at a premature moment, for man's capacities would misunderstand it. Only when mankind's receptivity reaches its low point is the strength of the Lotus a felt need. There is an inverse proportion between the devolution of the age and the entropy of man, and the rising preeminence of the final revelation. The right relationship of these coordinates designate the right path and clearly pinpoint "the real and complete truth, *shin jitsu*."<sup>33</sup> In this regard, *ki* or capacity is a central coordinate. It is in his second section concerning capacity that Nichiren quotes the imperative found in the sutra itself that the *Hokkekyō* must be taught specifically to those who lack all wisdom.<sup>34</sup> The implication of the sutra and his own purpose is clear.

It is exceedingly difficult for one to know the fundamental capacity of man in the *mappō jidai*. Only for the truth of the Lotus, there would be only misled meandering and no path at all. . . . Moreover according to each period in the sequence from the first doctrines of the lesser vehicle to the deep instruction of the great vehicle, there was always teaching that opened the way. However for the lost ignorant ones of this age, of necessity and above all, the real truth (*shin jitsu*) of the great vehicle must be taught. So doing, the seed of becoming buddha is planted for the believer and for the unbelieving slanderer alike.<sup>35</sup>

Masaharu Anesaki translates the intent of Nichiren's second coordinate with the statement:

Secondly as to the capacity of the people taught, mankind in the degenerate age of the latter times could be trained only by the simplest of expressions of the truth, not by a complicated system of doctrine nor by an intricate process of meditating and mysteries.<sup>36</sup>

The depth of Nichiren's appreciation for the power of the essential truth of the Lotus is enhanced by his deep awareness of the demise of other doctrines and of the dimension of man's diminished abilities. This consciousness motivates his constant reinterpretation of categories of achievement.

<sup>33</sup> Renondeau, *La Doctrine*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> Shimizu, *Nichiren zenshū*, 1:54.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>36</sup> Anesaki, *Nichiren*, p. 42.

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The topic of man's capacity to receive the truth and the ability to put it into practice is addressed by Nichiren in one of his most subtle and revealing questions and answers. Here Nichiren's presentation of "the simplest expression of truth" as opposed to "a complicated system of doctrine" focuses on the intimacy between man's receptivity to truth and the capacity of the doctrine to save.

Question: Are there other superior doctrines like the Nirvana sutra which are entrusted only to the bodhisattva?

Answer: Concerning the doctrine of the Nirvana sutra, the Tathagata (*Nyorai*) did not conceal anything in the recesses of his heart. In the Lotus sutra, however, those who reach the level of the arhat (*arakanha*) and those who reach the stage of the settled (*ketsujōsei*) are guaranteed to be future buddhas. Therefore (it would seem) if you were not a bodhisattva, this doctrine would not be capable of being received nor could one put it into practice in one's life. To quote an axiom: Only a great healer can turn poison into medicine. Even the commentator in chapter ninety-three of the *Daichidoron* had a problem with this (the privileged status of the bodhisattva). Only the Buddha himself can grasp the meaning of this. That is to say this sense of status is presented first as skillful means. After, the real truth is explained. The recourse first to skillful means and then to the presentation of truth is exactly the same as the Buddha's preaching of the Dharma (in the Lotus sutra).<sup>37</sup>

The substance of Nichiren's answer lies in the power of a revelation known only to the Buddha and revealed with finality in the doctrine of the Lotus. The *triyāna* of hearers, solitary buddhas and bodhisattva is reduced to the "one vehicle," the *ekayāna* of the Lotus. In the Lotus sutra one is led back to the one fundamental Buddha nature that embraces all sentient beings.

The subtlety of Nichiren's answer lies in the role of the bodhisattva as preachers of the final revelation. The role of preaching commissioned to the bodhisattvas in the Nirvana sutra finds fruition in the Lotus sutra. The bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth at the moment of the final preaching are designated even by name in the Lotus sutra.<sup>38</sup> It has even been attributed to Nichiren that he identified himself with Jōgyō,<sup>39</sup> one of these named messen-

<sup>37</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Bunno Katō, Yoshirō Tamura and Kojirō Miyasaka, trans. *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975), p. 239.

<sup>39</sup> Matsunaga, *Foundation*, p. 137.



gers of the final truth. Hence, the privileged status of the bodhisattva, seemingly at variance with the message of the Lotus, is apparently confirmed. It is confirmed as a means of preaching and effecting a conversion to the far more fundamental truth hidden and revealed in the nature of the Buddha himself.

The nature of the Buddha is intimate to the revelation of the Buddha nature of all sentient beings. It is the Tathagata alone who can see and understand the truth hidden in us and effect our salvation in a way which is not accessible to us: "Only a great healer can turn poison into medicine." However, once the revelation is made known in these end times, the role of the bodhisattva takes its place as does the historical existence of the Buddha in a schema of complete truth vis-à-vis skillful means. "This sequence is exactly identical to the buddha's preaching of the law."<sup>40</sup>

The contention, "Therefore if you were not a bodhisattva, this doctrine would not be capable of being received nor could one put it into practice in one's life,"<sup>41</sup> is answered in Nichiren's assured sense of the direct accessibility of so powerful a doctrine and so effective a cure for men in this present age. It is clear that engagement with such an antidote rests on the attending of the physician and not on the merit of the patient. No more than a hearing of the title (*daimoku*) of the sutra is sufficient for extraordinary effect.

Question: If one just hears the *daimoku* of the Lotus sutra and fails to perceive its meaning or understand the sutra's content, surely one would not escape the three evil ways or could one?

Answer: Born in a land where the Lotus sutra abounds, when one but hears the sacred name of this sutra one becomes alive to faith. In this lifetime, even an evil person who is thoroughly ignorant will certainly become a believer upon hearing the name of the sutra due to the good roots and accumulated merit of the past.<sup>42</sup>

Just the sound of the recited title occasions great benefit known only by its effect. Literally translated the sound of the name of the sutra brings to birth, creates, or produces faith. The attribution to the merit of one's past life is conventional. In this lifetime even the highest attainment of merit does not accrue this wisdom nor does virtuous status attain this doctrine. This is conversion to a doctrine that becomes stronger as man becomes weaker. In this, the receptivity of even the evil and the ignorant to its truth and the capacity of the doctrine

<sup>40</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



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to save are intimate. Nichiren's understanding of the practice of the recitation of the sutra illustrates this same sense of participation.

In interpreting the imperative: "With a distracted mind (*sanshin*), intone the Lotus; without entering into concentration, whether sitting, standing, or walking single-mindedly (*isshin*) focus on the words of the Lotus,"<sup>43</sup> Nichiren states:

The sense of this is that even the slow witted of the Latter Age will be embraced by this practice. The *sanshin* is the opposite of a concentrated mind. The recitation of the Lotus, *juhōkei* means that whether it is the full eight volumes, one volume, one chapter, one paragraph or one phrase of the title, the brevity or length of recitation does not matter. Nor does it matter whether it is the first or the fiftieth reciter to whom this teaching is transmitted. It does not matter if one is going about one's ordinary activity or at the hour of death. *Isshin* does not mean the fixed mind of abstracted thought not the concentrated mind of contemplation but one of the minds within the distracted mind. The words of the recited Lotus, *nen hokkekyō monji* means that unlike the words of other sutras, the intonation of one letter contains within it all the words of all the sutras and holds the merit of all the various Buddhas.<sup>44</sup>

The concern that practice be available to all takes the form of the recitation of truths contained even in the smallest fragment of the Lotus teaching. The Lotus is perceived as the summary of all doctrine. Its efficacy is clear in a single utterance. The power of the practice is dependent on neither the number of times of the recitation nor on the circumstance of recital. The usual loss or attrition of doctrinal accuracy in transmission from one person to another does not apply. It neither weakens the depth of this doctrine nor attenuates its power to save. The practice finds its strength in the undiminished depth of the teaching itself. Unlike learning or contemplation both of which require a decidedly undistracted mind, the *isshin* or "single mind" necessary for the participation in so powerful a truth indicates nothing other than one of the mental moments that make up the chain of daily events of the ordinary scattered mind, one of the single moments which make up the distracted heart. The specific instance of a particular moment has available to it the entirety of revealed truth.

Nichiren alludes to the practices of other contemporary sects in this statement. It is over against these known categories that he defines his sense of par-

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

ticipation. Although his references to recitation even at the hour of death and to concentration needed for meditation are meant as clear contrasts, Nichiren sketches, in effect, a strikingly similar pattern of a simple yet powerful practice as that found in then current Pure Land and Zen. In a later reference he specifies his understanding in contrast to Tendai devotion.

Even without holding on to the eight scrolls of the Lotus sutra, if you but believe this scripture, it is the same as the *Jikkyōsha* whose hand does not leave the sutra day and night.

Even without raising a voice of recitation, if one but believes the *Hokkekyō* it is the same as if one recited all the sutras continually every day, each hour, and every minute.<sup>45</sup>

Nichiren's understanding of the power of this revelation informs his understanding of faith. The mediation of the disciplined mind for contemplation, the mediation of the tutored mind for learning, is replaced by the mind of faith, directly responsive to the power of the revelation itself. Even without raising a voice of recitation, it is enough to believe in the Lotus sutra.

The stated intent of Nichiren to present "the simplest expression of truth" originates in his effort to represent the meaning of Tendai for the latter times. The power of Nichiren's statement is found in his new sense of concentration. His emphasis must be noted. The power of former Tendai was found in its sense of comprehension. The Tendai system invited a comprehensive embrace of sundry practices of which the *Jikkyōsha* is an instance of various Tendai devotions. Over against a perception of the doctrine that inspired ceaseless recitation, Nichiren's understanding of the Lotus sutra offers a certain sense of concentration that is more than a reduction in practice. He presents a fundamental return to faith. His interpretation was a leading back to the true meaning of Tendai, a conversion to belief in the *Hokkekyō* specified in its central truth.

Traditionally understood, the Lotus sutra reveals the one vehicle of the Buddha nature, the *raison d'être* and basis for all skillful means. For Nichiren, all expedient means fall away before the fully manifest and clearly efficacious truth present precisely for these end times. In this, his understanding of the Lotus doctrine is emphatically focused. It may be said of Nichiren's Lotus doctrine that the more refined its focus and the more centered its discerned revelation, the more powerful is it a mode of participation in the sacred. It is an essential truth that evokes faith. Faith is informed by an essential revelation of oneness. In defining *honzon*, the fundamental or original focus of faith

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.

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for Nichiren, Pier Del Campana states that the essential character of Nichiren's belief is a coincidence of time and eternity.

Nichiren discovers it (the object of religious faith and veneration) in the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra; it is the Eternal Buddha manifested historically in Sakyamuni, and in whom the eternal and historical aspects of reality are united. This union of time and eternity can be termed the central point in Nichiren's doctrine, the point which provides the key to explaining his religious system.<sup>46</sup>

The immediate corollary to this identity revealed in the very nature of the Buddha is the coincidence found in the nature of all reality. Over against the dichotomy of time and place inherent in Pure Land fulfillment, Nichiren asserts:

The only Pure Land that is the Pure Land where the eternally attained Shakyamuni Buddha (*kuon jitsujō no Shaka nyorai*) resides is in reality this realm where we live, in this present realm of *edo*.<sup>47</sup>

The distinction of a purified realm, i.e., the classical Pure Land where a future rebirth will effect what is not possible in this realm, and of *edo*, the impure plane of present existence, is dissolved. The coincidence of time and eternity hinges on historical existence and the eternal epiphany of the Buddha revealed as one in the Lotus sutra.

Truly, it is a full eternity that has passed since I became a Buddha.  
(*jitsujō butsu . . . kuon naru koto kaku no gotoshi*)<sup>48</sup>

This coincidence of the historical and transcendent is the non-mediation of Nichiren's focus of faith. Conversion to this coincidence constitutes the central theme of his preaching and is the central doctrine of his centripetal interpretation of the Lotus tradition. It is the completion of the truth that all inherently harbour the seed of becoming a buddha. Nichiren quotes this seminal statement of the datum of eternal enlightenment and states his understanding of its comprehension as coextensive with all reality.

"But, O children of good families, verily it is a full eternity that has passed since I became a Buddha, etc." This the actual doctrine of "One thought contains three thousand worlds," the doctrine which the Great Enlightened One, the Eternal Venerable One, has realized

<sup>46</sup> Del Campana, "Sandaihihō-shō," p. 205.

<sup>47</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 122.

<sup>48</sup> Sakamoto Yukio and Iwamoto Hiroshi, eds., *Hokkekyō* 3 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1962-1967), 3:16.



from eternity. And now, in the age of Nichiren, this is the doctrine I preach and propagate with all my power.<sup>49</sup>

This one truth encompasses all reality and is manifest in the very heart of the believer. It is the wisdom that qualifies the Lotus sutra as the sole teacher of the right way.

Apart from the Lotus sutra, over forty years of expedient teachings have not made clear the meaning of *jikkaigogu* [the ten mutually inclusive realms of existence, the basic constituent of the three thousand worlds in one thought]. If the mutual presence of the ten realms is not understood, one will not know that the Buddha realm is inherent in one's very heart. If one's own heart is not the Buddha realm, belief in the true existence of the Buddha will not be manifest . . . Truly the good and sole instructor in the right way is the *Hokkekyō*. There is no other teacher.<sup>50</sup>

Allusions in the text to Kegon and Shingon-shū imply that Nichiren's sense of Buddha's presence in the heart of man is a far more direct and intimate phenomenon. We deal in Nichiren with no sense of emanation of the Buddha but with an identity revealed in the nature of the Buddha itself.

Nichiren's mission is to offer to his age the opportunity for conversion to this coincidence of time and eternity. His works note this. The *Risshō ankoku ron* is a dialogue with "a visitor who came lamenting." The apex of the work is the conversion of the visitor now conversant with the true teaching. His faith is to inform action. Here as elsewhere, repentance and compunction of heart is the measure of one's desire to protect and establish the Right Law. His faith will restore the natural order of things, and establish the peace of the nation and tranquility of the country.

If you reflect seriously on the present calamities and believe my words, the winds will calm down, the waves will abate, and soon the years will be prosperous. But man's heart changes with the passing of time and the nature of things with the circumstances . . . You believe now while you are sitting here, but you may completely forget later. If you desire the peace of the country and the happiness of your present and future life, you must quickly change your heart and without delay suppress those who slander the Right Law.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Del Campana, "Sandaihihō-shō," p. 223.

<sup>50</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>51</sup> Shimizu, *Nichiren zenhū*, 1:43-44.

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The most comprehensive statement of the relation of faith and the order of things is stated in the *Shugokokkaron*. Indeed if man does not cooperate with revelation, he contributes to the state of entropy, a collapse of order on a personal, national, and cosmic scale. In a rather long section, Nichiren entertains the calamitous consequences of a kingdom that will not practice nor even listen to the preaching of the law. Nichiren states that if the people do not feed on the "nectar (*kanro*) of the Law"<sup>52</sup> that is, the distilled, essential sweetness of the truth, they dissipate their energy. Nothing holds together the country and, with the abandonment of the gods, the stars fall from their orbit.<sup>53</sup> A moral disorder is a cosmic disorder. Conversion is a matter of the heart that makes manifest the true order of things.

Nichiren's focus on man's interior response defines a shared forum with even current Pure Land and Zen and confirms his faith as a continuum of the Tendai tradition. In quite different constellations of meanings, the more closely one focused on the caliber of man's interior religious response, the more powerfully was religion recognized in a simple form of participation. Although it is true that Nichiren simplified the practice of religion, his intimate connection of faith with effort in this world sets him apart in his emphasis. This one distinction separates him from former Tendai teaching and a fortiori from more distant sects. He notes this central difference in his understanding of *daimoku* practice and its prior interpretation in the Tendai tradition.

It [former usage of the *daimoku* recitation] was intended merely as a personal practice and not preached for the benefit of others.

But now as we are living in the age of the latter law, the sacred title which I, Nichiren, recite is definitely different from the previous ages. It is the Namu Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō that embraces both personal practice and the work of leading others to salvation.<sup>54</sup>

Nichiren's faith sponsors action. It is the unfinished quality of things that markedly distances him from any practice perceived as limited to personal perfection or from any faith judged inactive and divorced from the current of things. Nichiren's effort for the benefit of others distances him from Zen's placement of effort in interior processes and from Pure Land's reliance on the other-power.

<sup>52</sup> Tamura, *Nichiren shū*, p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Del Campana, "Sandaihihō-shō," p. 206.

On the deepest of levels, simplicity defines Nichiren's faith as an instance of non-mediation. It defines Nichiren's faith with no less emphasis than found in the identity of practice and enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen or in the oneness of faith-response and the action of Amida in Shinran's Pure Land. For Nichiren, it is the central truth of the revealed oneness of time and eternity that gives significance to human effort in the world. The mode of Nichiren's exposition of the Lotus sutra and the character of the faith evoked in the minds of men by a message so essentially perceived, notes simplicity. It may be said of his teaching that, the more his exegesis is concentrated and centered, the more defined and powerful it is, the simpler it is. The oneness of eternal enlightenment of the Tathagata and of the historical existence of the Buddha is precisely recognized in Nichiren's act of faith. The unity of the historical moment and the sacred is the basis for the salvific quality of human action. The very process of interpretation that delineates so central and singular a truth, the conversion and project sponsored by so direct and essential a revelation, evidences the compelling quality of the sacred perceived as non-mediated in its most fundamental aspect.