

CHAPTER VII

THE CLIMAX OF NICHIREN'S LIFE; GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SUPREME BEING

A PEACEFUL summer had passed, the short days of autumn followed one another, and the dreary winter was nigh. The exile continued to ponder on his mission, now more deeply and calmly than ever before. His faith in his mission was firmly established, and his aggressive propaganda was bearing fruit, not only in winning many converts, but even in inspiring awe in his opponents. Toward the end of the year in which he was banished, the Mongols caused fresh alarm by sending a number of ships, which were followed in the next year by another embassy. Family strife broke out among the Hōjōs, and members of the clan killed one another. All these events were interpreted by Nichiren and his followers as the results of the injustice done the prophet, and also as a fulfilment of his warning predictions. This was a triumph for Nichiren, but what concerned him more was the future of the nation and of the religion. In the Sacred Title he had given his religion a standard and a form of worship suitable to every people in the Latter Days; he had also explained who Buddha is, and the relation between Buddha and ourselves. But the object of worship had not yet been clearly defined. What should it be? How should it be presented to men's physical and spiritual vision? The next task, the consummation of his activities hitherto, was the solution of this problem, the revelation of the Supreme Being, and a preparation for the complete fulfilment of his great mission.

The thought had occupied him, as he tells us, since the autumn (eleventh month) of 1272. The way in which he solved the problem was quite characteristic of his philosophical cast of mind, as well as of his practical nature — philosophical, because Nichiren always emphasized the Truth, the metaphysical basis of existence, and was never content to worship a personal god, whether Buddha or any other deity, merely as a being existing beside ourselves; practical, because his special endeavor was to seize the very quintessence of Truth, and to present it in a way so simple and concrete that even the least intelligent might be inspired and moved by it.

Surely, the Lord Śākya-muni, when understood as the primeval Tathāgata, is the ultimate entity of the universe, and consequently the object of worship. Yet, when he is simply represented, as he is represented by other Buddhists, in an image, or in any other manner suggesting a particular person, the erroneous conception immediately arises, that the person is different from the Truth which he embodies. On the other hand, Nichiren's religion was not the worship of an abstract truth, but a life to be lived by every being, human, or other. Thus, the thing to be done was to unite the Truth and the Person in a concrete representation, and to regard it as the embodiment of the Supreme Being. This had been partly accomplished in the formula of worship symbolized in the Sacred Title. But this latter means of religious worship, chiefly intended for oral utterance, was to be supplemented by providing the soul with a representation of the Supreme Being which symbolized a perfect union of the eternal Truth with the primeval person of Buddha. The result was set forth in the "Spiritual Introspection of the Supreme Being," an essay finished on the

twenty-fifth of the fourth month (May 13);¹ and a tangible symbolic representation was made on the eighth day of the seventh month (August 21), 1273. Now let us see what the idea and representation were.

The fundamental teaching of the Lotus concerning the reality of the universe amounts to this, that every being exists and subsists by virtue of the inexhaustible qualities inherent in each. There are innumerable individuals, and also groups of beings, including Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, celestial beings, mankind, furious spirits, beings in the purgatories, etc. Their respective characteristics are unmistakably distinct, but their qualities and conditions are constantly subject to change, because in each of the beings are inherent the qualities manifest in others, the differences arising simply from the varying configuration of the manifest and the potential qualities. Moreover, even taking the existences as they are at a given moment, they cannot subsist but by mutual interaction and influence. To subsist by itself by no means signifies to be separate from others; on the contrary, to interact one with another is the nature of every particular being. These features of existence are the laws or truths (*dharma*), and the cosmos is the stage of the infinite varieties and interactions of the *dharmas*, in other words, the realm of "mutual participation."²

These teachings are stated in the Lotus of Truth, and have been explained and elucidated by many a great master of the past; but they remain simply doctrines, so long as they are merely understood, and not personally experienced. Vain is all talk and discussion concerning existences and reality, unless the virtues of existence are realized in one's own person. Noble and sublime may be the conception of

¹ *Works*, pp. 928-949.

² For these doctrines, see Appendix.

the Supreme Being, but it is but an idol or image, a dead abstraction, if we ourselves do not participate in its supreme existence and realize in ourselves its excellent qualities. Thus, worship or adoration means a realization of the Supreme Being, together with all its attributes and manifestations, first, through our own spiritual introspection, and, second, in our life and deeds. The practice of introspection is carried on in religious meditation. This, however, does not necessarily mean intricate and mysterious methods, such as are employed by many Buddhists; the end can be attained by uttering the Sacred Title, and by gazing in reverence at the graphic representation of the Supreme Being as revealed by Nichiren. The truths of universal existence and "mutual participation" remain abstractions if detached from the true moral life; but any morality, however perfect it may seem, is vain apart from the profound conviction in the truth of the "mutual participation," and from an apprehension of our primeval relation to the Lord of the Universe.

Thus, to participate in the virtues of the Supreme Being is the aim of worship; but that participation means nothing but the restoration of our primeval connection with the eternal Buddha, which is equivalent to the realization of our own true nature. In other words, the true self of every being is realized through full participation in the virtues of the Supreme Being, who, again, reveals himself—or itself—in the perfect life of every believer. The relation between the worshipped and the worshipper exemplifies most clearly the truth of "mutual participation," because the worshipped, the Supreme Being, is a mere transcendence if it does not reveal itself in the believer's life, while the worshipper realizes his true being and mission only through the elevating help (*adhiṣṭāna*) of the Supreme Being. Thus,

mutual participation is at the same time mutual revelation — realization of the true being through mutual relationship, to be attained by us through spiritual introspection and moral living. Religious worship, in this sense, is at the same time moral life; and moral relationships in the human world are nothing but partial aspects of the fundamental correlation between us and the Supreme Being. The point to be emphasized in regard to this conception of the religious relation is that the Supreme Being alone, without our worship of it in enlightenment and life, is not a perfect Being, just as, without a child, “father” is but an empty name, if not a contradiction in terms.

With these thoughts on the truth of mutual revelation, and with a special emphasis on the necessity of a simple and concrete representation of the Supreme Being, Nichiren composed the treatise on “The Spiritual Introspection of the Supreme Being, Revealed for the First Time in the Fifth Five Centuries after the Tathāgata’s Great Decease.” He describes the symbolic representation as follows: ¹

The august state of the Supreme Being (*Svādi-devatā*) is this: The Heavenly Shrine is floating in the sky over the Sahā world ² ruled by the Primeval Master, the Lord Buddha. In the Shrine is seen the Sacred Title of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth, on either side of which are seated the Buddhas Śākya-muni and Prabhūta-ratna, and also on the sides, at a greater distance, the four Bodhisattva leaders, the Viśiṣṭa-cāritra and others. The Bodhisattvas like Manjuśri and Maitreya are seated farther down, as attendants of the former, while the innumerable hosts of the Bodhisattvas, enlightened by the manifestations of Buddha, sit around the central group, like a great crowd of people looking up toward the court nobles surrounding the throne.

¹ *Works*, p. 940.

² A name for the world, as the abode of mankind. For Nichiren’s idea of the world as a paradise, see below, pp. 104, 106–108.

In his graphic representation of this scene, Nichiren makes place for all other kinds of beings, men and gods, spirits and demons, all surrounding the central Sacred Title. His idea was to represent adequately, from his point of view, the perfect union of the Truth and the Person, manifested not only in Buddhas and saints, but inherent even in the beings immersed in illusion and vice. The whole was intended to be a visible embodiment of the truth of cosmic existence, as realized in the all-comprehensive conception of "mutual participation, and illuminated by the all-enlightening power of the Truth."

The universe is the stage of mutual participation and reciprocal interaction, which proceed according to the truths, or laws, of existence. Buddha, in his real entity, is nothing but another name for this cosmos of orderly existence. Seen from this angle, the Truth is fundamental and the Person is secondary; but the Truth and its laws cannot exist nor work without everlasting wisdom, the cosmic soul which is the source of all wisdom, which ordains all laws and causes all beings to exist. This is the personal aspect of the universe, and is the real personality of the eternal Buddha. Buddha, the Lord of Truth, as he declares himself to be, in the second chapter of the Lotus, and the eternal Father of the world, as he reveals himself in the sixteenth chapter, is the Father and Master of all beings. This Buddha has appeared, as is made known in the chapter on the Apparition of the Heavenly Shrine, in the person of two Buddhas, Śākya-muni and Prabhūta-ratna; and this celestial manifestation was meant to show the efficacy of Buddha's wisdom to lead all beings alienated from it to the full enlightenment of the universal truths. The basic truth of existence and its everlasting laws are inherent in every being, while the personal manifestations of Buddhahood are

working to bring all beings to full consciousness of their own real nature. In other words, all beings, participating in the primeval wisdom of the universe, are developing their proper nature in conjunction with the educative activity of the Buddhas. Taking this view of the cosmic movement, the Supreme Being is nothing but the union of the Truth and the Person, as realized in the person of Buddha and to be realized in each of us.

This union is now graphically represented in the Cycle, or *Maṇḍala*, in the centre of which the Truth stands, surrounded by all kinds of existences. And the Cycle is the means to inspire our spiritual life with the truth of mutual interaction, and to induce us to full participation in the universal harmony. Seen in this light, the object of worship, the Supreme Being is to be sought nowhere but in the innermost recess of every man's nature, because the final aim of worship is the complete realization of the Supreme Being in ourselves. Ethically speaking, Buddha is our Lord and Father, but metaphysically the Lord and Father is the means of perpetuating Truth and Life, which are to be made actual by us. These two sides are united in the act of religious worship, which is, on the one hand, adoration of the universal Truth embodied in the person of Buddha, and, on the other, the realization, in thought and life, of the Buddha-nature in ourselves. These principles of ethical, metaphysical, and religious teaching were formulated by Nichiren in a further exposition of the conception of the Supreme Being, in the essay on "The Reality as It Is,"¹ written in the fifth month (June), that is, between the composition of the "Spiritual Introspection" and the revelation of the graphic representation in the *Maṇḍala*.

¹ *Works*, pp. 958-964.

This conception of the Buddha-nature, and of its realization in ourselves through worship, are consequences of the time-honored theory of the Threefold Personality (*tri-kāya*) of Buddha. But the characteristic feature in Nichiren's ideas is that he never was content to talk of abstract truth, but always applied the truth taught to actual life, bringing it into vital touch with his own life. Ethics and metaphysics are never to be separated, but to be united in religion, and religion means a life actually embodying truth and virtue. Truths are revealed and virtues inculcated in the Lotus of Truth, and consequently the true religious life is equivalent to "reading the Scripture by person." Thus, the essay, which begins with discussions of the metaphysical entity of Buddha-nature, proceeds naturally to a consideration of the Buddhist life, especially as exemplified in Nichiren's own life. In it he says:¹

I, Nichiren, a man born in the ages of the Latter Law, have nearly achieved the task of pioneership in propagating the Perfect Truth, the task assigned to the Bodhisattva Viśiṣṭa-cāritra. The eternal Buddhahood of Śākya-muni, as he revealed himself in the chapter on Life-duration, in accordance with his primeval entity; the Buddha Prabhūta-ratna, who appeared in the Heavenly Shrine, in the chapter on its appearance, and who represents Buddhahood in the manifestation of its efficacy; the Saints (Bodhisattvas) who sprang out of the earth, as made known in the chapter on the Issuing out of Earth — in revealing all these three,² I have done the work of the pioneer (among those who perpetuate the Truth); too high an honor, indeed, for me, a common mortal! . . .

I, Nichiren, am the one who takes the lead of the Saints-out-of-Earth. Then may I not be one of them? If I, Nichiren, am one of them, why may not all my disciples and followers be their kinsmen? The Scripture says, "If one preaches to anybody the Lotus of Truth,

¹ *Works*, pp. 959-964.

² Nichiren meant the threefold aspects of Buddhahood, *Dharma-kāya*, the eternal essence of Buddha Śākya-muni, *Sambhoga-kāya*, the blissful manifestation in the person of Buddha Prabhūta-ratna, and *Nirmāna-kāya*, the condescension and actual working of the Bodhisattvas.

even just one clause of it, he is, know ye, the messenger of the Tathāgata, the one commissioned by the Tathāgata, and the one who does the work of the Tathāgata.”¹ How, then, can I be anybody else than this one? . . .

By all means, awaken faith by seizing this opportunity! Live your life through as the one who embodies the Truth, and go on without hesitation as a kinsman of Nichiren! If you are one in faith with Nichiren, you are one of the Saints-out-of-Earth; if you are destined to be such, how can you doubt that you are the disciple of the Lord Śākya-muni from all eternity? There is assurance of this in a word of Buddha, which says: “I have always, from eternity, been instructing and quickening all these beings.”² No attention should be paid to the difference between men and women among those who would propagate the Lotus of the Perfect Truth in the days of the Latter Law. To utter the Sacred Title is, indeed, the privilege of the Saints-out-of-Earth. . . .

When the Buddha Prabhūta-ratna sat in the Heavenly Shrine side by side with the Tathāgata Śākya-muni, the two Buddhas lifted up the banner of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth, and declared themselves to be the Commanders (in the coming fight against vice and illusion). How can this be a deception? Indeed, they have thereby agreed to raise us mortal beings, to the rank of Buddha. I, Nichiren, was not present there in the congregation, and yet there is no reason to doubt the statements of the Scripture. Or, is it possible that I was there? Common mortal that I am, I am not well aware of the past, yet in the present I am unmistakably the one who is realizing the Lotus of Truth. Then in the future I am surely destined to participate in the communion of the Holy Place. Inferring the past from the present and the future, I should think that I must have been present at the Communion in the Sky. (The present assures the future destiny, and the future destiny is inconceivable without its cause in the past.) The present, future, and past cannot be isolated from one another.

When I meditate on these things, my joy has no limit, in spite of the miseries of the life of an exile. Tears in joy, tears in afflictions. . . . I shed tears in thinking of the present perils and sufferings; my tears cannot be checked even in the midst of rejoicing over the destiny of Buddhahood that is before me. Birds and insects cry and weep, but shed no tears; I, Nichiren, neither cry nor weep, yet no moment passes without tears. These are shed, indeed, not on account of any worldly matter but for the sake of the Lotus of Truth. If this be so, these tears are drops of ambrosia. . . .

¹ Yam., p. 321; Text, p. 227, line 1; SBE., p. 216.

² Yam., p. 445; Text, p. 310, verse 43; SBE., p. 293.

In this document, the truths most precious to me are written down. Read, and read again; read into the letters and fix them into your mind! Thus put faith in the Supreme Being, represented in a way unique in the whole world! Ever more strongly I advise you to be firm in faith, and to be under the protection of the threefold Buddhahood. March strenuously on in the ways of practice and learning! Without practice and learning the Buddhist religion is nullified. Train yourself, and also instruct others! Be convinced that practice and learning are fruits of faith! So long as, and so far as, there is power in you, preach, if it be only a clause or a word (of the Scripture)! *Namu Myōhō-rengē-kyō! Namu Myōhō-rengē-kyō!* Sincerely, in reverence.

Let me add: Herewith I have delivered to you the truths revealed to me, Nichiren. Precious truths are specially transmitted to you. What a mysterious dispensation! . . . O, may I, Nichiren, be a kinsman of the Saints-out-of-Earth, six myriads of Gangā-sands in number? All this I do with the sole aim of leading all men and women in this country, Japan (nay in the world), to the communion of those who utter "*Namu Myōhō-rengē-kyō.*" Does not the Scripture say, "The one called Viśiṣṭa-cāritra . . . and he, (together with the three other leaders) is the leader in utterance?"¹ That you have become my disciple is indeed the result of a remote connection. Keep this letter carefully for yourself! Know that I, Nichiren, have therein recorded the truths realized personally by myself! Good-by.²

The above essays were the introduction to the revelation of the Supreme Being in graphic representation. When he had thus expounded his thoughts, he undertook, in the summer of 1273, the work of the "revelation," the climax of his life work. The design was as described above, and beneath were added two postscripts. On the right side, "This is the great *Maṇḍala*, which has never before appeared throughout the whole Jambu-dvīpa (world) during the two thousand

¹ Yam., p. 431; Text, p. 300, lines 13-15; SBE., p. 284.

² The import of the treatise is further expanded, on its practical side, in the "*Nyosetsu-Shugyō-shō*," or " (Religious) Practice in Accordance with the Statements of the Scripture," written in the same month; in its metaphysical aspect, in the "*Tōtai-gi-shō*," or "Doctrine of the Entity," finished in the autumn of the same year. Between these, on the eleventh of the fifth month (May 28), was written the "*Ken-Butsu-mirai-ki*" or the "Realization of Buddha's Prophecies," which is cited below.

two hundred and twenty and more years elapsed since Buddha's decease." On the left side, "Having been sentenced (to death) on the twelfth day of the ninth month, in the eighth year of Bunnei, and having been later exiled afar to the island of Sado, on the eighth day of the seventh month, in the tenth year of the same, Nichiren makes this representation, for the first time."

Whatever Nichiren's followers may claim about this *Maṅḍala* and the postscripts, and whatever criticism modern scholars may make, it remains an undoubted fact that Nichiren attached the greatest importance to this work, as being the pivotal point in his life. After this, begins the last part of his life, the consummation, and preparation for the perpetuation, of his religion, in accordance with the threefold division of the Scripture mentioned above.

Let me conclude this chapter by quoting another letter, written at the same time with the "Reality as It Is." It is entitled "The Realization of Buddha's Prophecies,"¹ and is an additional witness to Nichiren's firm conviction of his mission.

What a great fortune it is to extinguish in this life the sins we have accumulated from eternity by degrading the Truth! What a joy to serve the Lord Śākya-muni, whom we had thought never to see or hear! Let these be my earnest desires, first of all, to persuade the rulers who have persecuted me, to announce to the Lord Śākya (the names of those) of my followers who have assisted me; and to recommend the highest good to my parents, who gave me birth, before they die.²

I have seen, as in a vision, the spirit of the "Apparition of the Heavenly Shrine." The text says,³ "To grasp the world-mountain, Sumeru, and to throw it to the innumerable lands of Buddhas in

¹ *Works*, pp. 973-978.

² His parents had died before this time; but Nichiren spoke, not simply for himself, but for all his followers.

³ Yam., pp. 360-361; Text, p. 253; SBE., p. 240.

various directions — even this is not a thing impossible; but a thing most difficult would it be adequately to preach the Scripture in the degenerate ages after Buddha's decease," etc.

The Great Master Dengyō said: "Śākya-muni has shown a clear distinction between the shallow, which is easy to grasp, and the profound, which is difficult to receive; and it should be the ambition of a great man, leaving the shallow, to take up the profound. The Great Master Tendai promulgated, in obedient faith in Lord Śākya, the doctrines of the Lotus of Truth in the land of Cathay; and our school, having its centre at Hiei, is doing the same in Japan, in accordance with the tradition of Tendai, for the sake of the Lotus of Truth."

I, Nichiren, a native of Awa, am most probably the man whose mission it is, succeeding to the heritage of the three masters, to propagate the doctrines of the Lotus of Truth throughout the ages of the Latter Law. Now another is added to the three, and we shall be called the four great masters of the three countries.