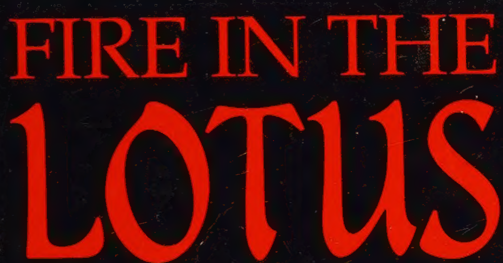

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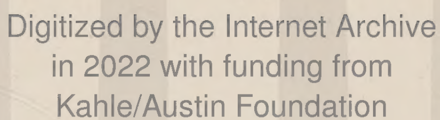
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FIRE IN THE LOTUS

The Dynamic Buddhism of Nichiren

Daniel B. Montgomery

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Contents

Acknowledgements 7
Introduction 11
1 Prince of India 15
2 Mahayana: the Great Vehicle 29
3 The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma 39
4 The Eternal Buddha 47
5 The Lotus Blossoms 59
6 The Three Thousand Things 69
7 Buddhism in Japan 83
8 The Son of a Fisherman 97
9 Days of Wrath 111
10 Death and Resurrection 123
11 Death and Dismemberment 138
12 Nichiren Shu: the Nichiren Order 152
13 Nichiren Shoshu 168
14 Sokagakkai: the Creation of Values 181
15 From Backwater Sect to World Religion 192
16 Have a Gohonzon: Nichiren Shoshu in America 202
17 Reiyukai: the Spiritual Friendship Society 214
18 Rissho Kosei-kai: Buddhism Applied 231
19 Other Nichiren Groups Abroad 247
20 'To Save All the People of the World' 260
Appendix 1: How to Practise Nichiren Buddhism 268
Appendix 2: Statistics 280
Glossary 283
Notes 298
Bibliography 307
Index 317

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Introduction

Many believe that the twenty-first century will be the Century of Japan. The East is said to be beating the West at its own game. Its business conglomerates, which lay in ruins only a few decades ago, now outperform those of Europe and America. This has happened and will continue to happen because Japanese firms enjoy a better rapport between labour and management, take seriously the contributions to quality and production offered by workers, and make their marketing programmes more responsive to the wishes of consumers. In order to compete with the Japanese economic onslaught, American and European businessmen need to become humble students, adopt Japanese methods, learn to think in the long term rather than in terms of immediate profits, and become more concerned with the success of their companies than with their own individual careers. In other words, in order to remain competitive they must imitate the Japanese.

Japanese products now flood the world markets. Japanese ideas, on the other hand, are little known outside their land of origin. The Japanese are thought to be adapters, not originators. First they copied the Chinese; now they copy the West. Indeed, the Japanese themselves tend to underestimate their own intellectual originality. They are more likely to study the thoughts of Plato, Nietzsche, or Marx than those of their own intellectual forefathers. The modern world was built by the West, not the East, and most Japanese feel they must learn its way in order to master it.

During the 1950s and '60s, before the Japanese economic boom had reached its present level, the West expressed an interest in some of the more picturesque aspects of Japanese culture — martial arts, flower arranging, and Zen. However, these fruits of old Japan hardly explain the new Japan. What is the origin of this driving work ethic, this sense

of loyalty between employer and employee, this confidence in innate Japanese abilities? It certainly comes neither from the Greek Plato nor from Chinese Zen. Rather it derives from something very deep within the Japanese psyche.

It is not my intention to analyse what this 'something' might be. However, this inner force has been tapped and put into an intelligible form. There is a philosophy of action which is purely Japanese. It was born on Japanese soil and formulated by a native son. Although it is based on a foreign import, Buddhism, in its final form it is exclusively Japanese. It is the one purely original Japanese contribution to world thought. From its inception it has been committed to a mission — a mission to enlighten and save not only its native country but the world beyond. It claims to be the universal truth, manifested in Japan but applicable everywhere. It is called Nichirenism.

Nichirenism bears the name of its founder, the 13th century Japanese religious reformer Nichiren. During the first two centuries of its existence, it spread among all classes of Japanese society in spite of sometimes violent official opposition. It even travelled abroad to Manchuria and China — the only Japanese philosophy ever to do so. But then it split into competing sects, and was effectively boxed in by the Tokugawa dictatorship (1600–1868). It degenerated into formalism, revived in the 20th century as an ally of militant Japanese nationalism, and then surged ahead after the Second World War as it broke free from all government entanglements.

Nichirenism was first introduced to America around 1913 by Professor Masaharu Anesaki at Harvard. Ten years later it was presented to England by Kishio Satomi, son of Chigaku Tanaka, who had invented the term, 'Nichirenism'. Tanaka, one of the leaders in the Nichiren revival in Japan, had coined the name to distinguish the general philosophy from sectarian Nichiren Buddhism. These Japanese scholars, however, seem not to have aroused much enthusiasm in the West, which was then eyeing Japanese nationalism with increasing apprehension.

After the Second World War, the Nichiren revival became a torrent. Nichiren sects, fuelled by ardent lay enthusiasts using the latest evangelical techniques of mass communications, grew so explosively that together they now number more adherents than any other religion in Japan. Some groups have felt strong enough to organize their own political societies and in one case even their own political party. Several have extended their missionary outreach abroad, where they have enjoyed considerable success among non-Japanese.

In October 1960 President Daisaku Ikeda of Sokagakkai, a Nichiren lay organization, arrived in California and was greeted by a handful of Japanese-American followers. He announced modestly that his arrival in America would be as significant to the history of the world as the arrival of Columbus in 1492. Like other Eastern *gurus* who had come

before him, he declared that he would build a temple in the New World from which his religion would spread across the continent. But unlike his predecessors, he solicited no funds. All expenses would be borne in Japan. Today his organization has indeed spread over the United States, Canada, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. It has crossed the Atlantic to Europe and Africa and spread southwards to Australia and southern Asia. Thirty years after Ikeda's first missionary excursion, Sokagakkai International claimed twenty million members in 115 countries.

Still no funds have been solicited abroad. All major bills are paid from Japan. The world is its mission field, an investment in the future. By the twenty-first century, Sokagakkai expects to be the most powerful political-religious force in the world. It alone claims to preach the truth, and the truth means success. The Japanese economic miracle is believed to have its origin in the spirit of Japan as elucidated by Nichiren. To prosper further it must renovate the world.

For the first time in centuries, the West finds itself the receiver of cultural values rather than the maker of them. Spiritual values from the East have been coming westward for a long time. But none have had the intensity of Nichiren Buddhism, fuelled as it is by the explosive Japanese economic power.

We may not concur with Ikeda that the secret of this power is Nichirenism. The Japanese themselves do not all adhere to Nichirenism, and some, indeed, are strongly opposed to it. Nevertheless, it remains the most important indigenous expression of the Japanese national spirit and one which has recruited enthusiastic adherents among non-Japanese as well. It is time we looked at it more closely.

Chapter 1

Prince of India

The sixth century before Christ was one of the great watersheds of human history. Never before or since have so many men of genius appeared on our planet. Their words and deeds inspired generations who came after them and looked back to them as the final arbiters of right and wrong. It was centuries, even millennia, before the influence of any of them began to be replaced by that of newer sages.

In China there were Kung Fu-tzu (Confucius), who taught people how to live in society, and Lao Tzu, who taught them how to live with nature. In Persia, Zoroaster proclaimed an eternal struggle between good and evil. In India Mahavira taught non-violence and extreme asceticism, while Gautama the Buddha countered with the Middle Way. In Mesopotamia and Palestine, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel proclaimed one God who rules all nations. In Greece, there were philosophers, poets, and scientists such as Solon, Thales, Pythagoras, Zeno, and Heraclitus. The whole civilized world seemed to catch fire in a blaze of inspiration.

The light of some of these great teachers has faded with the passing of time. But one of them, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, still commands the veneration of hundreds of millions around the globe. The details of his life, like those of most of the others, are sketchy. There are references to him interspersed among records of his teachings, but no detailed biography appeared until five or six hundred years after his death, when Ashvaghosha (1st/2nd centuries A.D.) wrote his masterpiece, *Buddhacarita*, 'Acts of the Buddha'. By that time it was in the form of a 'gospel', a sacred narrative designed to carry a religious message. Nevertheless it is here we must begin if we want to see the man of flesh and blood, even though much of what we discern may be the invention of later generations.

The exact dates of the Buddha are uncertain, although most modern authorities believe that he lived from 563 to 483 B.C. A traditional dating from China places him back in the 10th century B.C., but this was probably contrived to make him appear older than Confucius or Lao Tzu, his 'ideological rivals'.

We do not have any portraits of him. The thousands of statues and paintings of the Buddha, which are found throughout the East, are as unreliable as his biography. At first it was considered impious to depict him at all. Buddhist art used symbols to show his presence — a throne for his teaching authority or a footprint to show where he had trod. However the conquests of Alexander the Great linked India to Greece. It was Greek artists from the Graeco–Indian kingdom of Gandhara who broke the taboo and sculptured the Buddha in the form of a Greek hero.

Although the Buddha's ancient followers were not interested in knowing what he had looked like, they were very concerned to know what he had said and where he had travelled. They went to great pains to keep each of his sermons in its proper geographical and temporal setting. Buddhist scriptures always begin with a description of the occasion on which the sermon had originally been preached by the master. Only later did his followers become curious about details in his life not associated with any particular sermon. The more they venerated his words, the more they wanted to know about the one who had spoken such words.

Gautama had warned them against this: 'Do not seek for me in a physical form. If you understand my words and put them into practice, then you have seen me as I am.' But those who loved him could not be restrained forever from wanting to find out as much about him as they possibly could, and where details were lacking, they did not hesitate to invent them. The life of the Buddha became itself a sermon, one which eventually became better known than the words he had actually spoken.

He was born, it was said, in the Lumbini Gardens, just over the Indian border in modern Nepal, while his mother was on a journey from the local capital of Kapilavastu in northern India. He may not have been a member of the dominant Aryan race. His teachings have more in common with the anthropocentric pre-Aryan systems of yoga, Sankhya, and Jainism, than with the theocentric legends of the Aryans. By caste he was a Kshatriya (warrior), by clan a Shakya (hence the later title, Shakyamuni, 'Sage of the Shakyas'), and his family name was Gautama. His father Suddhodana Gautama was king of the area and raja of the Shakya clan. His mother Maya died within a week of giving him birth.

The grieving father determined to give his child every advantage which money and power could obtain. He named the child Siddhartha and placed him in the custody of Queen Maya's sister, Prajapati. The

young prince of the Shakyas grew up in the palace of Kapilavastu within sight of the world's mightiest mountain range, the Himalayas. Although motherless, he never lacked parental affection either from his father or his step-mother. They did everything possible to shield him from the sorrows of the outside world. Rarely, indeed, was the boy permitted to stray beyond the palace grounds. The king, still mourning his lost bride, had premonitions that someday his son, too, would leave him. This he would prevent at any cost, and he anticipated his son's every desire.

In spite of so much pampering, the boy remained strangely unspoiled. Everyone loved him, even the animals. One day while he was playing in the garden, a white swan, its wing pierced by an arrow, fluttered to the ground near his feet. Calming the frightened creature, the prince gently removed the arrow and massaged the wounded wing. As he sat there with the bird on his lap, his cousin Devadatta burst into the garden.

'There is my bird!' he said, 'Give it to me! It was I who shot it.'

'No,' answered Siddhartha. 'If it were dead, perhaps you could claim it. But it is alive and a free creature.'

'Alive or dead,' protested the hunter, 'what is the difference? It was free when it flew above, but now it is mine, for I brought it down.'

The argument was logical, but Siddhartha only pressed the wounded swan to his breast and answered solemnly, 'No. It is mine, the first of many things which shall be mine by right of mercy. And I shall teach compassion to all men, and speak for those who have no speech.'

Much annoyed, Devadatta took his case to the learned doctors and lawyers of the court. 'If I shot the bird, isn't it mine by rights?'

However, the court sided with Prince Siddhartha: 'Life belongs not to him who takes it, but to him who saves it.'

Devadatta never forgave Siddhartha for having humiliated him before the court. He would eventually become the Buddha's most implacable enemy.

It is significant that Siddhartha Gautama's first recorded act of mercy was towards an animal. It was not to be the last such act, by any means. Later in his life he was to speak out strongly against cruelty to animals, especially the age-old practice of sacrificing animals to appease the gods. 'If man expects mercy from the gods,' he asked, 'should he not himself be merciful to those creatures that look upon him as a god?'

As Siddhartha Gautama grew to young manhood, he continued to lead a sheltered, peaceful, and happy life. From time to time he would be momentarily disturbed by rumours of evils and tragedies in the world outside, but the distant rolls of thunder would soon fade away and be forgotten. His father now tried to interest him in the opposite sex, and saw to it that the palace had frequent visits from eligible princesses. Siddhartha was only mildly interested until he met the lovely Princess Yashodhara; then his world turned upside-down. He

could think of nothing except her. He must marry her or die.

His father was delighted, but her father was not so sure. How could this pampered prince carry on the traditions of the warlike Shakya clan? He wanted no dreamer for a son-in-law, but a warrior worthy of their ancestors. Let him prove himself in a tournament on the field of valour.

He had underestimated his daughter's suitor. Siddhartha at 19 was a natural athlete of agility and strength — strength which would later carry him through physical trials that would kill an ordinary man. Previously he had avoided competing with his peers because he always felt sorry for the loser, but for Yashodhara he would do whatever was necessary. He would challenge all comers.

In the tourney, Siddhartha easily defeated his rivals at archery, swordplay, and horsemanship. Mounted on his great white charger, Kantaka, he looked the very picture of a Kshatriya, the mighty men from the west who in those days were conquering all of India. Crowds gathered about him for a closer look, and even his future father-in-law knew that with such a leader the Shakya clan could never know defeat. What more could he ask for than a son-in-law like this one?

And so the prince was wed. King Suddhodana constructed a pleasure palace for the young lovers, sparing no expense. If his paternal affection were not enough to keep the prince by his side, surely the love of Yashodhara would do so. When Yashodhara bore Siddhartha a son, the king's joy knew no bounds. It seemed that all his plans were working out. He had sired a noble progeny who would increase the fortunes of his family, clan, and caste.

Ten years passed happily for Siddhartha. However, the rolls of distant thunder were growing more ominous. Was the world really such a happy place? Was his pleasure garden the real world, or was it just a dream which might burst at any time? Were other people as content with life as he was? Were his beloved wife and child really secure? What sustained their paradise? What was the outside world really like?

He decided to find out. One fateful morning he announced that he would take his chariot into the city. His father was expecting this, but reasoned that perhaps if the prince could see how happy the people were, he would stop worrying about matters which need not concern him. Therefore he ordered the streets to be cleaned and garlanded for a festival, and all beggars and other undesirables to remain out of sight. Siddhartha would see the town at its best.

So it was that when the prince rode into the city, he saw only smiling happy faces. The people were enjoying the unexpected holiday and the rare opportunity to view their beloved but seldom seen prince. They waved and cheered him as he waved back, delighted with all that he saw. He wished that the day would never end, and when finally he reached the town limits, he instructed the charioteer to keep going. He wanted to see everything.

But outside the city there was no festival. Here life went on as usual. And here Siddhartha saw four sights which changed his life.

The first sight was an old man, tottering and feeble. 'What's wrong with him?' asked the prince. 'Why does he drag himself so painfully?'

'He is just old, sir,' replied the charioteer, 'as we all will be if the gods will have us live so long.'

'Will I, too, come to that?' thought Siddhartha, 'And Yashodhara and even the baby? Is that our destination in life?'

The second sight was a sick man lying by the roadside and crying for alms. His body was a mass of sores.

'Don't let it disturb you, sir,' said the charioteer. 'He is sick. Just look away.'

Look away? Where?

The third sight was a funeral procession — death, the inevitable end of us all. Suddenly Siddhartha was depressed. 'Turn back,' he said. 'I don't want to see any more.'

On the way home, they passed a fourth man, a wandering mendicant such as are common in India to this day, a man who had given up all his worldly goods and set off to seek the meaning of life. 'That man,' thought the prince, 'is the only one who has seen the world as it really is — a dance of death.'

Thereafter, the pleasures of home and family were hollow to Siddhartha Gautama. The world had lost its flavour. He was haunted by the three deadly curses of old age, sickness, and death from which there was no escape and which would sooner or later assault not only himself, but his beloved wife and child as well. Was there really no escape? Perhaps not. But if there was, he would find it. He must find it!

Thus he came to the hardest moment of his life. With a great wrench, he tore himself away from everything that he held most dear. One night, he stole quietly into the bedroom to look for the last time at his sleeping wife and child. Then he left, mounted his favourite horse, and quietly rode out of the palace accompanied only by one attendant. When they had ridden some distance from Kapilavastu, he stopped, dismounted, took off his jewels, and presented them to the unhappy servant. He took a sword and cut off his long black hair. Finally he exchanged his fine clothes with those of a beggar who had been observing the strange scene.

His last words to his attendant were, 'Tell the people of Kapilavastu that either I will soon return, the conqueror of age and death, or that I myself, will fail and perish.' With a final pat to his horse Kantaka, he turned and vanished into the forest.

Siddhartha was 29 years old when he left home to become a mendicant. For the next six years he drove himself mercilessly, racking his brain and punishing his body. At first he visited famous teachers and philosophers, but found that each one was anxious only to refute the other. They generally agreed on one thing, however: the soul is a

prisoner of the body. The body must be subjugated so that the soul can liberate itself and unite with the Over-soul, Brahman. While this theory did not quite satisfy him, it did suggest a practical method he could try for himself. He became an ascetic and reduced his physical needs to the bare minimum.

There is a remarkable Indian statue which depicts him at this stage of his life. Called 'Buddha Fasting', it shows him seated in thought. The body of the once stalwart Shakya prince is wasted away to a living skeleton. Bones and veins stand out against his nearly transparent skin. For Shakyamuni — as we will now call him — was determined that if deliverance could come by fasting and physical austerity, he would outfast everyone. His fame spread, and five fellow-ascetics became his disciples. They marvelled at his endurance and wondered how he stayed alive.

But he pushed himself too far. One day while he was bathing in a river, he reached up for an overhanging branch, only to discover to his horror that he scarcely had strength enough to drag himself from the water. It seemed to take him forever to get out, and the effort left him limp and exhausted. For hours afterwards he lay on the river bank, bitterly disappointed with himself. He knew then that he had been on the wrong track. Seeking the meaning of life, he had been pursuing death, instead.

Finally a shepherd girl came by, took pity on him, and offered him some goat's milk. Shakyamuni accepted gratefully, forgetting his fast. As the milk coursed through his body, he felt new life surging up inside him. How good it was to be alive! When he had recovered his strength, he got up and began to eat and drink normally again, much to the disgust of his fellow-ascetics, who promptly abandoned him as a renegade.

Shakyamuni did not care. He felt more relaxed and happier than he had for years. He found that he could think clearly and calmly. He knew that he was very close to something wonderful, something that would come of its own accord without his having to strain for it.

In the weeks that followed he experienced a peace of mind that he had never known before. Gradually he approached the town of Gaya in Bihar, where the Great Enlightenment was to take place. He accepted food if it was offered to him. He spoke little, and then to the most unlikely people. He was deeply touched one day when a young housewife told him of her simple faith in the gods and her love for her husband and child. 'You teach the teachers,' he told her. 'In you I see why there is hope for mankind.'

Arriving finally at Gaya, he knew that his time had come. One evening he seated himself calmly beneath a fig tree, called later the Bodhi-tree, the Tree of Enlightenment, knowing that when next he rose, he would be Buddha, the Enlightened One.

The story says that during that long night Shakyamuni was assaulted

by three temptations: lust, fear, and social obligations. But he resolutely rejected them all until at last 'there arose insight, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, light.' His mind penetrated to the heart of all compounded things; he clearly perceived the inner reality of everything. He was enlightened; he was the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

With the Buddha's enlightenment, we pass over from the mundane to the beyond. Until this point we could perceive Shakyamuni as a mortal man on a quest. His questions were like our questions and his hypothetical answers were like our own imaginings. As the enlightened Buddha, however, this was no longer so. He was now in a different dimension from the rest of us and spoke from a different perspective. He even called himself by a new name, the Tathagata (Tut-hah-guh-tuh).

The first people he spoke to after his enlightenment were his five former companions, whom he found in the Deer Park near Varanasi. At first they received him coldly, resentful that he had abandoned rigid asceticism. But there was something about him now which commanded their attention, and before the day was done they had become his first disciples. Later he went to Rajagriha and converted an old friend, King Bimbisara. Other important converts were the teachers Maudgalyayana and Shariputra, who brought all their followers into his fold. After that his movement increased rapidly.

His curious title, *tathagata*, was as much of a puzzle to the ancient Buddhists as it is to us today. 'Without much doubt,' says Leon Hurvitz, '*tathagata* is a non-Indic word refurbished to have an Indic appearance long after it had come into current use among India's Buddhists' (Hurvitz 1976, xxiii); What did Shakyamuni mean by it? We cannot say for sure. Perhaps it was an old pre-Aryan term still comprehensible to his people. Later generations, thinking it must be of Sanskrit derivation, etymologized *thata gata*, 'thus gone', and *tatha agata*, 'thus come'. In any case, by giving himself this singular title in a foreign tongue, Shakyamuni further emphasized that now he was no longer Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the seeker after truth, but himself the bearer of the truth and manifestation of the Absolute.

For the next 45 years, he travelled round north-eastern India preaching his doctrine, the Dharma. He did return home as he had promised, and taught Dharma to his father, his stepmother, his wife, and his young son Rahula. Then he moved on. His teachings were for the world, not just for his family. His son Rahula joined his father's band of disciples, and even Devadatta followed him for a while. In time, however, Devadatta, who was always jealous of his cousin, withdrew to found a rival religious order of his own. Devadatta's smouldering jealousy grew into implacable hatred, and until his death he was a thorn in the side of the Buddha.

There are hundreds of stories about Shakyamuni and his many colourful followers. He lived to the age of 80, moving from place to place as he taught the Dharma and settling down for extended stays

only during the rainy seasons. But one day, sick from having eaten spoiled meat which had been offered to him by a well-meaning blacksmith (although he was a vegetarian, he made it a general policy never to refuse a gift made in good faith), Shakyamuni lay down between two sala trees near Kusinagara and prepared to breathe his last.

'My disciples,' he said, 'my end is approaching; our parting is near, but do not lament. Life is ever-changing; none can escape the dissolution of the body. This I am now to show by my own death, my body falling apart like a dilapidated cart. Do not vainly lament, but realize that nothing is permanent and learn from it the emptiness of human life. Do not cherish the unworthy desire that the changeable might become unchanging.

'My disciples, the last moment has come, but do not forget that death is only the end of the physical body. The body was born from parents and was nourished by food; just as inevitable are sickness and death.

'But the true Buddha is not a human body: it is Enlightenment. A human body must die, but the Wisdom of Enlightenment will exist forever in the truth of the Dharma. He who sees merely my body does not truly see me. Only he who accepts my teaching truly sees me.

'After my death, the Dharma shall be your teacher. Follow the Dharma and you will be true to me.

'During the last forty-five years of my life, I have withheld nothing from my teachings. There is no secret teaching, no hidden meaning; everything has been taught openly and clearly. My dear disciples, this is the end. In a moment, I shall be passing into Nirvana. This is my instruction' (*The Teaching of Buddha*, 14–15).

He died quietly reclining on his right side. In spite of his final words of comfort, it is said that all the beasts of the forest and even the twin sala trees bowed their heads and wept. But worse was yet to come. The disciples cremated his body and were preparing to inter the ashes, when some chiefs and petty rulers began to arrive and demand that the ashes be buried in their respective domains. Serious quarrels broke out, and swords were drawn in anger. There were even threats of war. The disciples were horrified at this unexpected turn of events. Finally one of them, Dona, was able to convince the eight quarrelling monarchs to divide the ashes into equal shares placed in identical urns. Even the embers of the fire and the earthen jar which had held the ashes were ground up and given to two other princelings who arrived late on the scene.

One of these urns, which was once revered by the Shakyas, themselves, and contained relics of Shakyamuni, was discovered in Piprahwa, India, late in the nineteenth century. It bears the inscription: 'This is the urn of the relics of the Bhagavat (Blessed One), the Buddha of the Shakya tribe, that is enshrined (by honorable brothers and sisters, wives and children)' (Mizuno 1980, 14, 85).

In his 45 years as a teacher, Shakyamuni had preached an enormous

number of sermons to a great variety of listeners. None of these sermons were put into writing, but instead they were passed down orally from the listeners to succeeding generations. This avoidance of the written word was probably deliberate. In those days literacy meant power. The early Buddhists were well aware of the power the Brahmin priesthood exercised over the illiterate masses. Buddhism, which criticized the haughty Brahmins and their caste system, wanted to be open to all. It therefore transmitted the Dharma in the spoken tongues of the people.

On the other hand, this meant that if someone wanted to learn the Dharma, he had to 'join the club' where the Dharma was retained. This was the Sangha, the brotherhood of disciples. If the student could not join the Sangha, at least he could go to it for instruction and support it by his donations. Thus Buddhism was built on three bases which it named the Three Treasures: the Buddha (the teacher), the Dharma (the teaching) and the Sangha (the fellowship of those who observed and transmitted the teachings).

Since Buddhism is not so much a doctrine to be believed in as a path to be travelled, individual followers had much latitude in which to emphasize which steps on the way were the more important and even to interject ideas and interpretations of their own. By the first century BC, Buddhism was in danger of fragmenting into small sects. It became imperative to set down the 'true' teachings in writing before they were lost beyond all recognition. But it was already too late. By the time the writings began to appear, differing schools of thought had long been in existence. There were two major streams of interpretation and various sub-divisions of each. The two major branches were the narrowly monastic Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana) and the broader-based Great Vehicle (Mahayana).

The Chinese, who received Buddhism mostly in the Mahayana form, were bewildered by the quantity and variety of scriptures which came pouring in from India. How could they tell which ones were authentic and which were not? In the sixth century, Chih-i (Zhi-yi), who was probably the greatest of all Chinese Buddhist scholars, came up with an ingenious solution. *All* the received scriptures, he said, were authentic. Their styles and contents differed only because they had been preached at different times and to different audiences. They only seemed to contradict each other. In reality, they harmonized in one grand Dharma taught by the Buddha over a period of 45 years. The one Dharma, he said, could be found in four types of teachings to four kinds of listeners (thus making eight teachings) during five periods of Shakyamuni's public life.[1]

Modern philology and textual criticism can no longer accept the details of Chih-i's classification. However, as Bruno Petzold has pointed out, if we dismantle the Buddhist Canon according to the latest philological methods, we are left with the task of creating a new classi-

fication of our own, one which will then be open to new criticisms as the latest discoveries and interpretations come into being.

> All dismemberment of the Buddhist Canon by modern text-criticism will not lead to a definite dissolution of Buddhism; it will only lead to a new synthesis of the texts and teachings. When this new synthesis is tried, then the genius of Chisha Daishi (Chih-i) will once more become clear to the world. He had made his classification of the whole of Buddhism on purely ideological grounds, possessing none of the auxiliary means of scholarship, which are now at the disposal of every young student of philology. And yet his classification, from the point of view of his own time, was as cogent and convincing as it could possibly be; it has moreover exercised its influence for no less than 1,500 years . . . What makes this classification so great, what makes its real importance, is not so much its details, but the spirit pervading it . . . We may characterize it as the idealistic tendency of the mind, which tries to harmonize all seeming contractions into one logical unity.
>
> (*Tendai Buddhism* 283-4)

The first teaching period, according to Chih-i, was what he called the Time of the Garland.[2] It was of very short duration, only 21 days. Here Shakyamuni meditates on the meaning of his enlightenment. These are transcendent teachings belonging to the world of the Absolute. Many people consider them the most profound and comprehensive teachings to be found in all of world literature. Chih-i almost agrees, but not quite. They are *too* profound, he says, incomprehensible to most people. Moreover, they do not include the teachings of the Three Baskets (Hinayana), which the Buddha preached immediately after his Enlightenment. The perfect teaching, which will include everything, is to come later in the form of the *Dharma Flower.* The Garland is like a dramatic prelude opening the opera, sounding forth mighty themes that will be elaborated and developed later.

Indian legends say that the gods now came and begged Shakyamuni to share his light with all, but he did not need to be persuaded. It is a central principle of the Garland teachings that all life, all existence, is interrelated. Living beings are like blossoms on a garland or knots in a net. All are connected. When any single knot is raised up, it pulls the others along with it. Just as a Hitler can drag millions of people down to misery and destruction, so a Buddha can lift up millions to a nobler and happier life. Nothing exists in isolation. If a sparrow dies in China, the ecological balance of the cosmos is altered. When a baby smiles, the clouds laugh. The reverse is also true: when the clouds laugh, a baby smiles. We are like jewels in the net of the god Indra: each jewel reflects all the others.

The three weeks of meditation on the Garland lead naturally into the next period, public ministry. The Dharma is not only to be understood; it must be shared. Buddha's first students were his old companions from his years of austerities, the same ones who had deserted him when he began to eat and drink normally. He found them in the Deer Park near Benares, and it was to them that he preached his famous first sermon. It is the best known of his sermons and often considered to be the summary of the Dharma. Chih-i says it is the summary only of a distinct type of teaching which takes its name from the locale of this first sermon, the Deer Park. Sometimes these teachings are called the Three Baskets after their three categories: sermons (*sutras*), monastic rules (*vinaya*), and later commentaries (*abhidharma*). They are essentially the same as the teachings of Hinayana Buddhism, (the Lesser Vehicle).

These teachings, says Chih-i, were directed primarily at seekers after the truth such as he himself had been — to those who had left home and family to search out life's deepest mysteries. Some of these men wandered alone in the forests, others lived in little groups. The latter became the nucleus of the Sangha (the Buddhist brotherhood).

Gradually the Buddha broadened his teachings to include men and women from all walks of life. As the circle extended, the teachings had to change accordingly. What was good advice for a lonely hermit would not necessarily apply to monks living in a community. And what was true for monks would not be of much help to a housewife, a farmer, a merchant, or a king. Chih-i says that this extension is the origin of the Mahayana sutras.

From Chih-i's point of view, the 'lower' teachings were those applicable to the most limited audiences and to those taking their first steps along the path. This makes the Deer Park not the one 'true' teaching but the beginning teaching, the teaching for monks only. The 'perfect' teachings would be those with the most universal application and outreach. These would be for all of humanity, humble as well as noble. However, such teachings, if presented too abruptly, could be misinterpreted; they had to be preceded by careful preparation.

The Deer Park teachings are generally given in numerical groups for easy memorization. Thus we have the two extremes to be avoided (self-indulgence and self-denial), the Three Signs of Being, the Three Kinds of Concentration, the Three Roots of Evil (ignorance, greed, and aversion), the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), the Four Noble Truths, the Four Levels of Meditation, the Eightfold Noble Path, the Twelve Links of Conditioned Co-production, and other such classifications. All of them are logical and above all practical. The student is invited to test each item for himself by means of specific techniques.

First, said Shakyamuni, there are the Three Signs of Being, or Seal of the Three Laws:

1. Change is universal; nothing is permanent.
2. Just as everything changes in the outer world, so is the inner world in constant flux. There is no permanent 'thing' inside us called an 'immortal soul'.
3. There is, nevertheless, an immovable centre: Nirvana.

The second point does not mean that there is no individuality or self. It means that there is no permanent individuality, no *unchanging* self. (Malalasekera. *Aspects of Reality*, 14) We, like everything else, are a process, an ever-flowing stream, which could be broken down into Five Aggregates: 1) physical form, 2) sense reactions to contacts, 3) awareness and assimilation of sensations, 4) conditioned reflexes and volitions, and 5) consciousness. We can separate them in analysis but not in fact, although if any one is more important than the others, it is the penultimate, volition (the thirst to exist and to expand). It is the greatest energy in the world, the power that propels the evolution of all life.

On these bases are built the Four Noble Truths:

1. Suffering is universal.
2. The cause of suffering is craving for what we cannot get or keep, since all is impermanent.
3. Suffering can be eliminated if its cause is eliminated.
4. The method for eliminating blind craving is by practising the Middle Way of the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path consists of: 1) right view of life, 2) right aim in life, 3) right speech (courteous and truthful), 4) right action (harming neither oneself nor others), 5) right livelihood (not to harm self or others while earning one's living), 6) right effort, 7) right mindfulness, and 8) right contemplation on reality.

The Eightfold Path is not eight consecutive steps because all eight components are to be practised concurrently. Their symbol is a wheel, wherein each spoke is a necessary part of the whole. Without morality there can be no peace of mind, and without peace of mind there can be no insight into reality.

Great emphasis is put on calming the mind in order to be able to gain true insight into reality. Shakyamuni taught various techniques to do this. One is to sit quietly and concentrate on the natural function of breathing by counting the breaths up to ten, and then repeating the process over and over until the mind is fully aware of what is happening. A Hinayana manual for laymen by Narada Thera and Bikkhu Kassapa (*The Mirror of the Dhamma*) says, 'This harmless concentration may be practised by any person irrespective of religious belief' (23).[3]

The Twelve Links of Conditioned Co-Production explain that all life

arises from a series of causes. The series, sometimes called the Wheel of Life, is often depicted in Buddhist art. Turning the wheel backwards, we find that each link on the chain depends on the preceding one. Beginning at the end, death, it implies that death was preceded by birth. Birth implies that something came into being. Coming into being implies clinging together. Clinging together implies desire, and there can be no desire without perception. Perception implies sense contact, which could not have happened without the organs of sense, which are enumerated as six (the five physical senses plus mind). The six senses imply 'name and form', that is, mind and matter. Mind implies the subconscious mind, which again implies coming into being, clinging, desire, perception, and so on back all over again.

At a deeper level, the unconscious implies blind activity, which could only result from the unconscious state. The unconscious is a continuation of death, so death does not release us from the wheel. Unconsciousness (or the subconscious) leads to blind actions resulting in coming into being all over again.

As the wheel turns forward, the energy of each preceding stage brings the next stage into being. Even at death, the action of one being will cease, but the action-influence (*karma*) remains to propel a new being towards birth. This does not mean reincarnation as popularly understood, for there is no 'soul' to incarnate. But it does mean that so long as there is energy, it is going to work. The Wheel of Life keeps turning, blindly and unconsciously, forever.

A living being determines its own nature by its own actions. In other words, we are self-created. We consist of the effect of our past actions and the cause of our future. In the words of U Chan Htoon of Burma:

> The act of creation is one that is taking place continually within ourselves. The idea is one that will be familiar to all who are acquainted with Bergson's theory of creative evolution; the Buddha expressed it succinctly and with profound meaning when he said, 'Within this fathom-long body, equipped with mind and sense perceptions, O Monks, I declare to you is the world, the origin of the world, and the path to its cessation.' If the human mind with its limitations cannot envisage an infinity of time, neither can it form any picture of a state outside its temporal and spatial situation. Nevertheless, the third of the Four Noble Truths asserts the reality of Nibbana (Nirvana), which is precisely the release from the bondage of time, space and conditioned existence.
>
> (*Buddhism and the Age of Science*, 9)

This brings us to the culmination of these teachings: Nirvana. The Buddha stated that there is a way out of this terrible wheel of birth and death.

> There is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed. If there were not this Unborn . . . escape from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed, would not be possible. But since there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed, therefore is escape possible from the world of the born, the originated, the created, the formed.
>
> (*Udana* VIII, 3)

Nevertheless, if we stop here — as, indeed, many have done — we are left with a problem. There seems to be only sorrow on the one hand and escape from it into the Unborn on the other. If this is the case, what motivates the Buddha to participate in this world of pain? Why does he not — why did he not — just give up? There is something vital still missing here among all these analytical systems. if the negative forces of greed, aversion, and ignorance cause the negative result of suffering, what positive force motivates the beautiful life of Shakyamuni?

It was Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, which undertook to answer this question. It pointed beyond the Buddha's words to his heart, the same heart which beats at the core of the universe. This it called the Great Compassion.

Chapter 2

Mahayana: The Great Vehicle

One of the Buddha's favourite disciples was his cousin Ananda. Ananda had an enquiring mind and a good heart. He had an excellent memory, and the others often relied upon him to recount the exact words of the master. But he liked women and found it difficult to be a celibate monk. The lengthy sermon known as the Great Crown Sutra was delivered by the Buddha to the conscience-stricken Ananda after he had succumbed to the charms of a beautiful woman. Shakyamuni did not scold him for breaking his vows of chastity. Instead, he introduced him to new perspectives.

By then large crowds of people were turning out to hear Buddha's sermons, and the monks found it almost impossible to live in complete isolation from them. There were many women among the listeners, and to some monks, such as Ananda, they were a distraction. But he was not just tempted in the flesh; he also noticed that many married couples were truly devoted to each other. Their mutual love deeply moved the young monk, who saw something spiritual in their relationship. They seemed to develop beautiful qualities that even the holy monks sometimes lacked. How could that be?

One day he decided to challenge the Buddha on this matter. 'I think,' he said to his teacher, 'that such loving concern as they show for each other is half the holy life'.

'Not so, Ananda, not so!' came the reply. 'Beneficent friendship is the whole of the holy life' (*Samyutta Nikaya, Kosala Vaga*).

How the other monks must have raised their eyebrows when they heard that! They took it for granted that in leaving behind the entanglements of domestic life they had embarked on the narrow path to sainthood. Had they been doing something wrong or was this some new teaching?

This brings us to what Chih-i called the third period (or flavour) of Shakyamuni's teachings, the Expanded Teachings. In later times, when the Buddha's words were set down in writing, most of these new sermons were recorded in literary Sanskrit rather than in vernacular language, like Pali. They do not form a part of the Pali collection of sacred texts ('The Three Baskets'), but belong instead to a group called Mahayana scriptures, or *Vaipulya*, 'Expanded Teachings'.

Gradually Buddhism divided into two distinct types: the Lesser Vehicle (Hinayana), which accepted only the primitive teachings, and the Greater Vehicle (Mahayana), which accepted both the old and the Expanded Teachings. Today the former type predominates in southern Asia (Ceylon, Burma, Thailand), and the latter in northern Asia (Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan). For many centuries the two schools existed side by side in India, sometimes even being taught in the same monasteries or universities.

The two schools share many teachings in common, so much so that Chih-i considered that these teachings might sometimes have been taught at the same time but to different students. Mahayana, however, puts a particular emphasis on the laity rather than the monastic brotherhood and on a new definition of sainthood. In Mahayana Buddhism the goal is no longer to become an *Arhat* (one who obtains deliverance for himself), but a *Bodhisattva*, (one who obtains deliverance for others).[4]

Nirvana, too, is given a new meaning. It is now no longer defined negatively as the extinction of defilements. This is said to have been an expedient teaching 'for dull people . . . who were attached to birth and death, and who were troubled by many sufferings' (Lotus Sutra, Chap. 2). Instead it is defined positively as 'an inner explosion of light' (to use the definition of some modern Japanese scholars).

> There arises some new positive force which was not hitherto experienced. Nay, it may be said that this positive force is indeed the origin of the inner explosion, and due to this force the last remaining passions and lusts are extinguished. This may be shown clearly by the fact that the Buddha spent six years in the attempt to extinguish his passions only to end in failure, while he received the explosion leading to Enlightenment after a week's meditation under the Bodhi tree. This was due to the fact that he engaged himself during this time in especially developing this positive force. Furthermore, the Buddha's active life for 45 years following his enlightenment cannot be explained without recognizing this positive force. Again, from a theoretical standpoint, the Buddha made the getting away from old age, illness and death his ultimate object; but actually even when he reached enlightenment, i.e., when he attained Nirvana, he could not get away from these three curses of mankind. However, even

> though he couldn't get away from the above bondages, he always declared that he had already reached a state of non-death. By this we feel he meant that, besides having no longer any fear of old age, illness and death and being assured that he would not have to undergo further rebirths in the future, he had attained some inner force that was not affected by these three curses.
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> (Tsunoda 1955, 67–8)

The Japanese term for this period, *Hodo*, means 'equality', and points to the principle of the middle path or reality, which we will discuss in a later chapter. Breaking the term down, *Ho* signifies sentient beings to be taught, and *To* the various doctrines to be taught (JEBD, 108). There is something here for everyone.

To take a few examples, the *Shrimala Sutra* which belongs to this period, features Lady Shrimala, a daughter of King Prasenajit of Kosala and a contemporary of Shakyamuni. It presents Buddhism as understood by a woman — not a nun, but an educated laywoman. It stresses that the 'Buddha nature' is inherent in all sentient beings, not just monks or men or even humans.

The *Nirvana Sutra*, which is said to be the last sutra preached by the Buddha, makes the same point, also giving positive qualities to Nirvana: true selfhood, eternity, purity, and happiness.

The *Lankavatara Sutra* explains 'Buddha nature' in more detail with an elaborate discussion of the workings of the mind, especially the subconscious. The Buddha nature lies below the subconscious; it is universal. A similar discussion is found in the 'Sutra of the Revelation of the Profound and Secret Teaching' (*Gejimmitsu-kyo; Samdhinirmochana-sutra*), this time in a question-and-answer form similar to Plato's method of teaching. It is found, too, in a later but very popular writing, 'Awakening of Faith in Mahayana'.

Some of these sutras are even more explicit in their appeal to the laity rather than to monks. The 'Sutra of the Golden Light' (*Konkomyo-kyo; Suvarnaprabhasa-sutra*) is addressed particularly to reigning monarchs and people in authority. Their duty, it says, is to protect those who proclaim the true Dharma. The *Nirvana Sutra* contains similar passages.

The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, which features the adventures of a wealthy layman named Vimalakirti (Yuima in Japanese), is decidedly anti-monastic. Vimalakirti is critical of the monks, whom he considers narrow-minded and self-righteous. He loves nothing better than to get into a spirited debate with one of Shakyamuni's leading disciples, and then leave him sputtering in confusion. In Vimalakirti we see a sharp break between the disciples, who are following the Hinayana 'Way of the Elders', and many laymen, who tend to prefer the more broad-based Mahayana.

In the Lesser Vehicle, Hinayana, the duty of the laity is to practise

basic morality and support the monks. Lay Buddhists cannot attain enlightenment, because they are not devoting all their time and effort to the task. In the Great Vehicle, Mahayana, lay men and women play an active role. Vimalakirti criticizes the monks for being attached to their own special path. They will never find enlightenment — total liberation — that way, he tells them. They are so attached to their 'way of perfection' that they are incapable of making the sacrifices required of an ordinary householder. At a deeper level, they do not understand freedom from attachments at all. The *Vimalakirti-nirdesha*, especially in its Chinese translation by Kumarajiva, became one of the most widely read books in the Far East, second in popularity only to the Lotus Sutra.

Aiming to 'save' everyone, Mahayana left no stone unturned. There are two more types of sutras, which came late into prominence but may have existed from the beginning; they each have a special appeal of their own. The first is a set of three esoteric sutras for those who prefer the path of ritual, mystery, and magic. Esoteric Buddhism began in India, where it flourished for many centuries until it was gradually merged with Hindu Tantrism and/or was wiped out by the Moslem conquerors. One branch survives in the almost inaccessible mountains of Nepal and Tibet, where it is still the predominant form of Buddhism. Another branch moved to China, where it flourished briefly but was later suppressed. It passed over to Japan, and exists there to this day under the generic name of *Shingon* ('True Words' or 'Mantra'). Esotericism has secret teachings and practices which can be learned only through a series of initiations. It became very popular among Japanese courtiers, who enjoyed its elaborate and mysterious rituals.

Three basic sutras set forth its leading ideas: the *Mahavairochana Sutra*, the 'Diamond Crown Sutra', and the 'Sutra of the Accomplishment of Perfection'.[5]

Modern textual critics believe that the esoteric sutras were the last Buddhist texts to be put into writing. Certainly they were the last to arrive in China. Chih-i, who lived in the sixth century, has no place for them in his classification because he had never heard of them. His later followers put them in here, at the Third Period, but not without serious opposition from those who were attracted to esotericism. These people maintained that the texts were even older than the Buddha himself, were the source of his enlightenment, and then were hidden away for centuries until recovered by the esoteric masters.

Another set of Mahayana sutras had an even broader appeal. For those who considered themselves neither clever enough to imitate Vimalakirti, wise enough to understand esotericism, or even good enough to be simple believers, there was still hope. Three 'Pure Land' sutras stress that the Buddha is so compassionate that he saves living beings as naturally and spontaneously as the sun shines in the sky. Shakyamuni tells how another Buddha, Amida, has sworn that he will

not enter enlightenment unless all other beings can accompany him. Since he has, indeed, attained 'infinite light and infinite life' (the meaning of the name Amida), his task has been accomplished. All you have to do is rely on him wholeheartedly, and he will ensure that after this life you will be reborn in a Pure Land, where there are no hindrances to ultimate enlightenment. If you can make no progress in this life, you need not despair; your salvation is assured in the life to come. The three sutras which set forth these teachings are the *Eternal Life Sutra, Meditation on Eternal Life Sutra*, and *Amida Sutra.*[6]

With the Pure Land teachings, Buddhism seems to have gone as far as it could go in the direction of popularization. Having started as a narrow way for dedicated students, it has ended as a broad, easy path for anyone, wise or ignorant, male or female, saint or sinner. Beginning with scepticism and self-reliance, it has ended with a complete 'salvation by faith alone'. Aiming originally at deliverance in this life, it has ended with its focus on heaven and the life of the world to come. Is this really the same religion we started out with?

Chih-i says 'Yes, it is.' There are central themes which have been running through all these variations, and these will all be tied together in the Buddha's ultimate teachings, which are expounded in the 'Dharma Flower Sutra'. But first there remains one final preparatory teaching, the teaching of the Void or Emptiness.

Chih-i considers this the fourth of the Five Periods (or flavours), and calls it the 'Time of Wisdom'. Whereas the previous teachings were in sharp contrast to what had gone before, these are termed 'inclusive', for their discussions of non-substantiality and dependent co-origination are 'inclusive' of all things (Chappell, *T'ien T'ai Buddhism* 77). Again their purpose is to free people from attachments. Just as the Expanded Teachings were designed to free monks from their attachment to the narrow way of disciplinary rules, so the Wisdom Teachings aim to free the Mahayanists from attachment to any theories of their own. They preach the Void: non-attachment to anything.

What is the Void? No concept in Buddhism is more difficult to understand, and yet none is richer in levels of meaning. Volumes have been written about it. The Buddha is said to have devoted 22 years to explaining it. But in the final analysis, nothing can be said about it at all; its very essence is beyond definitions, beyond words.

Void does not mean 'nothingness', but devoid of special conditions — 'unconditioned' is the term used by Dr Junjiro Takakusu, editor of the 100-volume Japanese edition of the Buddhist scriptures (*Buddhist Philosophy*, 47). He finds the final solution to the problem of the Void in the writings of Chih-i (69), and we will return to him later. Meanwhile partial explanations are found throughout the Buddhist scriptures and especially in those known as Transcendental Wisdom.

Two concepts might help us here: relativity and the mathematical zero. Relativity is discussed in a paraphrase of Transcendental Wisdom in *The Teaching of Buddha*:

> There are causes for all human suffering, and there is a way by which they may be ended, because everything in the world is the result of a vast concurrence of causes and conditions, and everything disappears as these causes and conditions change and pass away. Rain falls, wind blows, plants bloom, leaves mature and blow away. These phenomena are all interrelated with causes and conditions, are brought about by them, and disappear as the causes and conditions change.
>
> One is born by the conditions of parentage. His body is nourished by food; his spirit is nourished by teaching and experience. Therefore, both flesh and spirit are related to conditions and are changed as conditions change.
>
> A net is made up by a series of knots, so everything in this world is connected by a series of knots. If anyone thinks that a mesh of the net is an independent, isolated thing, he is mistaken. It is called a net because it is made up of a series of connected meshes, and each mesh has its place and responsibilities in relation to other meshes.
>
> Blossoms come about because of a series of conditions that lead up to their blooming; leaves are blown away because a series of conditions lead up to it. Blossoms do not appear independently, nor does a leaf fall of itself. So everything has its coming forth and passing away; nothing can be independent without any change.
>
> (46–7)

This absolute relativity is called Void. In the words of Dr Takakusu again: 'To see the true nature of the true state of all things is not to find one in many or one before many, nor is it to distinguish unity from diversity or the static from the dynamic. *The true state is the state without any special condition*. It is, in fact, "the true reality without a reality", i.e., without any specific character or nature. It is very difficult for the human mind to understand this idea of a reality in which there is no "sub-stance" at all.' (45–6)

Because of interdependent causation, subject and object are void in themselves. Remove one, and the other goes with it. The same applies to action: there is an actor, an act, and an acted-upon. Each implies the other two; none exists by itself. Instead there is a dynamic and freely revolving circle. For the Void is not nothingness, it is potentially everything.

The mathematical zero is a Buddhist invention. The Sanskrit word *shunya* (void) became *shifr* in Arabic, *cifra* in Latin, and finally *cipher* in English. The ancient Greeks and Romans, preoccupied with 'being', never conceived of the cipher. The cipher is void, but what a vital role it plays in mathematics! It contains all possible numerical combinations; it is both the smallest and the largest.

Einstein's idea of space is similar to the Buddhist doctrine of Void. It used to be thought that space was 'nothingness', a vacuum. Therefore physicists invented a 'stuff', which they called ether, to fill space and carry light. Otherwise, they reasoned, how could light travel at all? But Einstein said that space is 'alive'; it acts and reacts; it is a field of potential energy. Matter, on the other hand, is nothing more than a concentration of energy in a very small space. There is no essential difference between matter and field. 'Matter is where concentration of energy is great, field where the concentration of energy is small' (Einstein and Infeld, *The Evolution of Physics*, 257). In the words of the Buddha, 'Form is void and void is form; whatever is form, that is void; whatever is void, that is form' (*Prajnaparamita-hridaya*).

It is a difficult concept. But today, nearly three thousand years later, it is accepted as basic by scientists the world over.

From a practical point of view (and it is always the practical point of view that matters in Buddhism), if field and matter are the same, so are Nirvana and this world of *samsara*, 'constant flow'. The *Lankavatara Sutra*, one of the favourite scriptures of the Great Vehicle, expresses it this way:

> Enlightenment has no definite form or nature by which it can manifest itself; so in enlightenment itself, there is nothing to be enlightened. Enlightenment exists solely because of delusion and ignorance; if they disappear, so will Enlightenment. And the opposite is true also: there is no Enlightenment apart from delusion and ignorance; no delusion and ignorance apart from Enlightenment. Therefore be on guard against thinking of enlightenment as a 'thing' to be grasped at, lest it, too, should become an obstruction. When the mind that was in darkness becomes enlightened, it passes away, and with its passing, the thing which we call Enlightenment passes also.
>
> As long as people desire Enlightenment and grasp after it, it means that delusion is still with them; therefore, they who are following the way to Enlightenment must not grasp at it, and if they reach Enlightenment they must not linger in it. When people attain Enlightenment in this sense, it means that everything is Enlightenment itself as it is; therefore, people should follow the path to Enlightenment until in their thoughts, worldly passions and Enlightenment become identical as they are.
>
> This concept of universal oneness — that things in their essential nature have no distinguishing marks — is called *Shunyata*. *Shunyata* means non-substantiality, the un-born, having no self-nature, no duality. It is because things in themselves have no form or characteristics that we can speak of them as neither being born nor being destroyed. There is

> nothing about the essential nature of things that can be described in terms of discrimination; that is why things are called non-substantial.
>
> As has been pointed out, all things appear and disappear because of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else. Wherever there is light, there is shadow; wherever there is length, there is shortness; wherever, there is white there is black. Just like these, as the self-nature of things cannot exist alone, they are called non-substantial.
>
> By the same reasoning, enlightenment cannot exist apart from ignorance, nor ignorance apart from enlightenment. Since things do not differ in their essential nature, there can be no duality. Buddha's teaching leads us to non-duality, from the discriminating concept of two conflicting points of view. It is a mistake for people to seek a thing supposed to be good and right, and to flee from another supposed to be bad and evil.
>
> If people insist that all things are empty and transitory, it is just as great a mistake as to insist that all things are real and do not change. If a person becomes attached to his ego-personality, it is a mistake because it cannot save him from suffering. If he believes that there is no ego, it is also a mistake and it would be useless for him to practice the Way of Truth. If people assert that everything is suffering, it is also a mistake; if they assert that everything is happiness, that is a mistake, too. Buddha teaches the Middle Way transcending these prejudiced concepts, where duality merges into oneness.
>
> (*Teaching* 65–7, 70–1)

It seems that the Buddha is repudiating everything that he has said thus far. In a way, he is; he is shattering our attachments to any ideas or dogmas that may have formed in our minds and have now become obstructions. He has said these things from the beginning, but now he is driving them home with a special emphasis. Even in the Deer Park teachings, we find words like these:

> The world, for the most part, holds either to a belief in being or to a belief in non-being. But for one who, in the light of perfect insight, considers how the world arises, belief in the non-being of the world passes away. And for one who, in the light of perfect insight, considers how the world ceases, belief in the being of the world passes away . . . That all is existent is one extreme; that all is non-existent is another extreme. The Thus-come (the Buddha), avoiding the two extremes, preaches his truth, which is the Middle Path.
>
> (*Samyutta Nikaya* 12–15)

The human mind has a tendency to veer off towards one of two extremes. Either it reduces everything to 'the One', calling it Truth, or Spirit, or God, or Over-Soul, or the Original Idea, or the Absolute, or something of the sort; or else it sees only isolated facts. The first way of thinking is called monism; the second is pluralism, existentialism, or materialism. Buddhist philosophy has not always escaped these two extremes, either. The schools of the Little Vehicle lean towards pluralism; those of the Great Vehicle sometimes slip into monism or pantheism.

Human conduct has also tended to go to the extremes. Either it is 'good' (perhaps 'goody-goody'), and therefore self-conscious and self-righteous, or it is 'bad', looking out for Number One at the expense of everybody else. 'Religious' people tend to be 'other-worldly'; 'this-worldly' people can be harmful to others. Most people try to adopt a compromise: they are moral as long as it is expedient; they will behave themselves in society as long as society gives them a fifty–fifty chance. But this is obviously just a more subtle form of 'looking out for Number One'. Number One is a good citizen as long as it is in his own interest.

Clearly when the Buddha speaks of the Middle Way, he is not talking about any kind of moral compromise; his system is strongly ethical:

> Those who are seeking the Way of Enlightenment must always bear in mind the necessity of constantly keeping pure in body, lips, and mind. To keep the body pure, one must not kill any living creature, steal, or act immorally. To keep the lips pure, one must not lie, abuse, deceive, or indulge in idle chatter. To keep the mind pure, one must remove all greed, anger, and false judgment.
>
> If the mind becomes impure, the following deeds will be impure; if the deeds are impure, there will be mental suffering; so it is of greatest importance that the mind be kept pure.
>
> (*Anguttara Nikaya* 3:117)

Morality springs spontaneously from a pure mind. To purify the mind by removing greed, aversion, and ignorance is the whole point of Buddhism. However, this is not easily done; it is difficult to keep on the Middle Path and not tip over into a 'holier-than-thou' attitude on the one side or a cynical, utilitarian 'ethic' on the other. So the disciple is constantly warned not to become attached to popular causes, no matter how worthy they may appear. He must find solutions in his own self, not in the ideas of others. He must free his mind from attachments to either the good or the evil, which, after all, are merely his own opinions about what is good and what is evil.

So far the Buddha has said a great deal about what the Middle Way is not, but he has not yet said what it is. We are still missing the final

capstone. Is it entirely beyond words? Many Buddhists believe so.

Around the year A.D. 150, a powerful dialectician named Nagarjuna systemized the Buddhas's teachings into a philosophy of negations. The Middle Way, he said, is beyond words. Life itself is beyond words; it is also beyond thought. As soon as one idea arises, an opposite idea can be brought forward to refute it.

Nevertheless, Nagarjuna said that there is, indeed, a capstone to Buddhism. There is an important missing element, which has constantly been implied but not yet stated openly. It is to be found, he said, in the Buddha's final teaching, called the *Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*, or Dharma Flower Sutra. Nagarjuna, true to his system of absolute negation, never said what 'it' is, but he did tell us where to look. Millions of people in India, China, Japan, and throughout the Orient have been following his advice ever since. Let us now do likewise.

Chapter 3

The Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma

No book in the East has so inspired its adherents and so puzzled outsiders as the *Saddharma-Pundarika Sutra*, 'The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma'. Believers in the Great Vehicle are almost unanimous in singing its praises. Although every sect has its own favourite scripture, all agree that the *Dharma Flower* (Lotus Sutra) is especially important. The Middle Way School of Nagarjuna (Madhyamika) and its Chinese and Japanese successors, the Three Treatises School, the Heavenly Terrace School of China (T'ien-Tai) and Japan (Tendai), and the Nichiren School are all based on the *Dharma Flower*. The Flower Garland School (Kegon) calls the *Dharma Flower* 'the final doctrine of the Great Vehicle' (Takakusu, *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* 115), while the Esoteric School (Shingon) ranks it near the top — eighth on a scale of ten.[7] Other schools, such as the Yuzunembutsu of Japan, synthesize the *Dharma Flower* with their own tenets. Volumes and volumes of commentaries have been written on it, including one by Prince Shotoku, 'the father of Japanese Buddhism'. The Chinese philosopher Chi-tsang (Ji-zang) wrote no fewer than seven books on the *Dharma Flower*. However, none are as authoritative as two works by Chih-i, 'Profound Meaning of the Dharma Flower' and 'Words and Phrases of the Dharma Flower', which were themselves the subjects of later commentaries.

The importance of this sutra to the Chinese and Japanese can be better appreciated if we abbreviate its title, not to the usual English form of *Lotus Sutra*, but by saying as they do, 'Dharma Flower Sutra' (*Hokekyo*). (The word 'lotus' does not appear in the title.) This puts it in a proper perspective. To its adherents, it is not just one more book attributed to the Buddha, a book called *The Lotus*. It is the flowering, the culmination, of the entire Buddha-dharma; it is the Dharma Flower.

Yet the average reader, having heard such extravagant praises, is apt to put the book down with a feeling of disappointment. First, until recently, there was no really satisfactory English translation. For many years the only complete English version was that by the Dutch Sanskrit scholar, H. Kern, done in 1884 for the *Sacred Books of the East* series.[8] Edward Conze, an outstanding modern translator, commented in the journal of the British Buddhist Association, *The Middle Way*, that the Kern version 'abounds in misunderstandings' (November 1962, 95). Copious footnotes compare the text with Greek and Hindu mythology.

In 1930 W.E. Soothill, an Englishman, published an abbreviated translation from the Chinese.[9] This is a revised version of an unpublished manuscript by the Japanese Nichiren Buddhist priest, Bunno Kato. Soothill had reservations about the value of the text, and explained that he had cut it short so that it would not be 'unavoidably cumbrous and inspirationally innocuous.' Dr Conze does not think too highly of this version, either. Both of them 'are now quite inadequate and frequently misleading on doctrinal matters.'[10] He published new translations of several chapters, and even rewrote some of his own previously published versions. Careful scholar that he was, he found difficulty in transferring 'the rarefied language of the original' into prosaic English.

With the new interest in this sutra, three good translations appeared in the 1970s. All of them were made not from the Sanskrit, but from Kumarajiva's popular Chinese version. Two of them were published in Japan and the third in the United States. In 1971 Rissho Kosei-kai, an organization we shall discuss later in this book, published an improved and complete version of the Kato/Soothill work under the title, *Myoho-Renge-Kyo: The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law*. In 1975 other translators revised this work and added to it the traditional 'opening' and 'closing' sutras: 'The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings' (*Muryogi-kyo*) and 'The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal-Virtue' (*Kanfugen-gyo*). The three together make up 'The Threefold Lotus Sutra'. In 1974 the Nichiren Buddhist Professor (later Bishop) Senchu Murano published *The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law* with an excellent glossary of Sanskrit and Chinese terms. It was revised in 1990 with the help of the present writer. Finally, Professor Leon Hurvitz, an internationally known expert in the sutra, presented a lively idiomatic translation entitled *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (1976). It, too, is translated from the Chinese, but makes detailed comparisons with extant Sanskrit documents.

Translation, however, is not the only problem. This is not an ordinary book, and the profundity of its message easily eludes the reader. Two centuries ago the Zen master Hakuin related how disappointed he was when he read the book for the first time; he found there nothing of any value at all. 'All my great hopes were smashed.' But later, after he had

experienced awakening, he 'perceived the perfect, true, and ultimate significance of the *Dharma Flower*.'

Another Zen story tells of a monk named Fa-ta, who knew the book so well that he could recite it from memory, but even he did not really understand it. Finally an enlightened master had to open his eyes to the inner meaning of the work.

If devout and learned Buddhist monks sometimes find that the book leaves them cold, modern Westerners cannot expect much better until they learn to 'read it between the lines', as Nichiren used to say. For it speaks to us in the language of ancient mythologies which no longer communicate with us directly. It takes effort on our part to reach the perspective of Joseph Campbell and see that 'myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation' (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3).

From a literary point of view the *Dharma Flower* is of very mixed quality. There are passages of majestic beauty, but there are others of tedious dullness. There is a great deal of repetition; after every few pages of prose (much of it repetitious in itself) come two or three pages of verse on the same subject. Strangely enough, the prose and poetry in the original are in different languages. The prose is in Sanskrit, the literary language of ancient India; the verse is in an Indian vernacular derived from Sanskrit, called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, or the *Gatha* dialect, since it is found in the *gathas* (verses). In their present form the verses are older than the prose. Kogen Mizuno, an authority on Buddhist literature, points out that ancient editors put the holy books into classical Sanskrit to make them appear more elegant, but they had trouble with the rhymes and rhythms of the verses, so they left them alone. Sanskrit is the older language, but the verses are the older writings (*Buddhist Sutras* 32–3).

This gives us another hint as to why our English translations are often so unsatisfying. The book is full of poetry. It reaches beyond the rational mind to something deeper within us — to the subconscious. It is not meant to be read silently; it is supposed to be chanted or recited to the beat of a drum.

Kumarajiva's Chinese version (A.D. 406), which was really the work of a team of Chinese scholars under his direction, captured the original spirit. Even the prose sections swing along to a hypnotic beat. To this day *Dharma Flower* devotees prefer his version to any other. D.T. Suzuki points out that:

> All the Mahayana sutras . . . are not meant to appeal to our reasoning faculties, that is, to our intellectual understanding, but to a different kind of understanding, which we may call intuition. When the *Prajnaparamita* [or the *Dharma Flower*] is recited in Sanskrit or Chinese or Tibetan, without trying to extract its

> logical meaning, but with a devotional turn of mind and with the determination to go through the masses of repetitions, the *Prajna*-eye (Wisdom-eye) grows gradually more and more penetrating. Finally it will see, through all the contradictions, obscurities, abstractions, and mystifications, something extraordinarily transparent, which reveals the 'other side' together with 'this side.' This is the awakening of the Prajna . . . Herein lies the secret of sutra recitation.
>
> (*Indian Mahayana Buddhism* 97)

This is what is meant by 'reading between the lines'. If the *Dharma Flower* is really the flowering of the Buddha-dharma, as its name implies, then it should account for the many contradictions found in other sutras. The Deer Park teachings criticized all philosophical systems and advocated strict monastic discipline. The Expanded Teachings criticized the Deer Park, claiming that its adherents were attached to their egocentric search for enlightenment. The Wisdom sutras demolished any delusions of attachment, even attachment to the Great Vehicle, and left us only Emptiness. Certainly from the viewpoint of the *Dharma Flower* a most thorough groundwork has been laid down. All that is unreal has been demolished. Can the Dharma now burst into bloom on a positive note?

Before answering this question, let us pause parenthetically as Shakyamuni himself is said to have done while he was preaching this sermon. The scene takes place on top of a mountain known as the Vulture Peak, or Eagle Peak, outside the city of Rajagriha. The whole area contains numerous stupas (monuments erected by early Buddhists), one of which is claimed to shelter part of the ashes of Shakyamuni. Other stupas mark places of significance during his lifetime. 'Right at the summit,' says S.F. de Silva, 'is the cave wherein the Blessed One often stayed. The yard where he preached, where he walked up and down, the cliff where Devadatta rolled a boulder to kill him, are all identifiable. Truly this is where in the words of Sir Edwin Arnold:

> Lo, thou who comest here, bare thy feet
> And bow thy head, for all this spacious earth
> Hath not a spot more dear and hallowed.[11]

The Lotus Sutra opens like a Wagnerian opera to a great prelude which E.A. Burtt calls 'one of the most dramatic and stupendous scenes in all religious literature' (*Teachings of Buddha*, 157). A serene light emits from the Buddha, who is seated in contemplation. In the radiant air is seen a great host of Bodhisattvas, deities, saints, humans, and non-humans. Heavenly blossoms rain upon the assembly. All are gripped with wonder, waiting in awe for what is about to happen.

But one important disciple is missing. He is Bimbisara, the king of Rajagriha and an old friend of the Buddha. For while this heavenly scene is taking place on the mountain top, a grim drama is unfolding in the city below.

The story of King Bimbisara is one of the most poignant in all religious literature. There is the ring of truth about it, for unlike most pious tales, this one does not have a happy ending.

In his youth, Bimbisara had been a typical oriental despot. He wanted a son and heir by his beloved wife Vaidehi, but when none was forthcoming he consulted a fortune-teller to see if he should take another wife. The fortune-teller, like most Indians, believed in reincarnation. He told the king that he would, indeed, have a son by Vaidehi, but not quite yet. The son's soul was then inhabiting the body of a certain aged hermit. When the hermit died, the son would be reborn as the long-awaited prince.

Impatient, Bimbisara decided he would speed things up by having the hermit put to death right away. The horrified fortune-teller then told the king that in this case his son would be a curse, because sooner or later he would avenge his cruel murder.

The king went ahead and ordered the murder anyway, but then he began having second thoughts. When in due course the child was born, Bimbisara ordered it cast out and exposed to the elements to die. Somehow the child survived; the scriptures do not tell us how. Perhaps he was saved by the unhappy mother. In any case he was rescued, brought back to the palace, and raised as the king's son and heir. Eventually, however, the boy learned the story of his childhood brush with death. His filial feelings turned to resentment and finally to hatred for his father.

When the Buddha visited the city for the first time, King Bimbisara was greatly impressed by his words. He converted to the Dharma, and thereafter did his best to live a pure life. Gradually he let go of his civic responsibilites as he devoted more and more time to religious contemplation and pious acts of charity. He was not aware that power was slipping from his hands into those of his son, Ajatasatru. The nobles and bureaucrats found themselves turning to the prince rather than to the king in important affairs of state. There was much muttering that the king should abdicate, join the Sangha, which he seemed so fond of, and leave the business of governing to his son.

At this point Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin and arch-rival, saw his opportunity. The king had spent a fortune supporting Shakyamuni and his hordes of followers. Some of these people were noble arhats, but many must have been idle loafers, who enjoyed living at public expense. It was time to eject the whole lot of them and establish a new state cult under the direction of the charismatic Devadatta.

The clever conspirator managed to gain the confidence of the ambitious prince. Some say that it was he who invented the whole story

about the fortune-teller and the murdered hermit. As 'proof', he pointed to a scar on Ajatasatru's finger. 'That scar,' he said, 'has been there since that awful day when your father had you cast out of the palace as a helpless babe.' He bent over and piously kissed the scar, swearing everlasting fidelity to the wronged prince. (Fujimoto *Triple Sutra* 2:18).

This was all that Ajatasatru wanted to hear. Already he wielded the state power in practice; now he would take it in name also, justified in avenging an ancient wrong, and supported by a respected religious leader. It might be wrong to kill his father, but not wrong to have him put out of the way. It was not difficult to convince the courtiers to join him. In a sudden *coup d'état*, he had his father seized and thrown into a dungeon, there to rot until he died of starvation.

Queen Vaidehi pleaded with her son, but to no avail. She did everything possible to keep her husband alive. First, she tried smuggling him food. When the guards prevented her, 'she purified her body by bathing and washing. She mixed ghee and honey with the flour of roasted wheat, and with these she painted her body. In the various pendant ornaments which she wore, she concealed the juice of grapes. These she gave to the king without being noticed (*Bussetsu Kanmuryoju-kyo*).

When Ajatasatru found out what his mother was doing, he was furious. He drew his sword and would have rushed out to kill her, but two of his ministers, hands on their sword hilts, barred his way.

'O great king,' said one of them, 'we ministers hear the Vedas say that since the beginning of the ages, as many as eighteen thousand princes have killed their own fathers in order to gain a throne. But never have we heard of one killing his own mother. If you do this, you will bring disgrace upon the blood of the Kshatriyas. We will not allow it.'

Their determination started Ajatasatru. 'Aren't you my faithful ministers?' he asked. 'Didn't you promise to support me in this matter?'

'We will support you,' they replied, 'only if you do not harm your mother.'

Ajatasatru dropped his sword and promised to do as they said, but he also gave strict orders that his mother was to be confined to her quarters and no longer permitted to visit the king in prison.

The poor queen was in despair. Her husband was wasting away to a painful death, and she could do no more. She sent a messenger to ask the Buddha if he would send Ananda and Maudgalyayana, two of his most distinguished disciples, to come and comfort her. The Buddha not only sent the two disciples, but came himself. Queen Vaidehi greeted him with a flood of tears.

'What evil have I done to deserve such a fate? I have tried to be a good wife and a good mother. Now my son has turned on his father and threatened to kill me as well. My husband, a good man who has long protected and served you, now wastes away in agony. You have taught us that everything happens because of a cause. What have we done to

cause this? For years now, we have tried to do nothing but good as you taught us. And look what has happened!

'If I earned my cruel son because of some evil deed I did in a past life, then you, too, Lord Buddha, must have sinned to have earned a cousin like Devadatta!

'There is no justice in this world! I am sick of it! I don't want to remain here any longer! Just tell me one thing, please. Is there another world where everything is as it ought to be, where a good cause will yield a good fruit, where there is no wickedness, no pain, no hunger, no beastliness?'

She knelt at his feet, sobbing helplessly.

Shakyamuni did not answer her hysterical questions about past lives. She was in no mood for rationalizations, and he had always said that such speculations were a waste of time. What mattered was not the past but the present and the future. Nor did he rebuke her for her pointed remark that he, too, must have done some evil to have deserved a cousin like Devadatta. (This matter would be taken up later in the *Dharma Flower.*)

Instead of preaching a sermon, he opened her eyes. Spiritual illumination often comes at moments of great stress. Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment after he had almost died of starvation and drowned in a river while bathing. Many centuries later Nichiren was to open his inner eye as the executioner raised a sword above his head to strike the life from his body. Now Bimbisara in his gloomy cell, and Vaidehi, weak and defeated at the Buddha's feet — one facing a slow death and the other facing despair — had been stretched back like bent bows ready to snap.

'Then,' says the *Meditation on Eternal Life Sutra*, 'the World-Honored One flashed forth a light from between his eyebrows. It was of golden hue, which extended to all the innumerable worlds of the ten quarters and which, returning, rested on top of the Buddha's head, transforming itself into a golden seat, looking like Mount Sumeru. There the pure and wonderful countries of the Buddhas of the ten quarters were seen. A country there was of seven gems; another all full of lotus flowers. One was like the palace of Maheshvara-deva, and another like a mirror of crystal. Here the countries of the ten quarters were all reflected. And all such innumerable Buddha-countries were resplendent and delightful to see. Vaidehi was made to see all this.'

King Bimbisara also saw this. 'Advancement in wisdom came to him spontaneously, and he attained the fruition of one who never returns to this earth.'

Shakyamuni later explained to the queen that 'when you perceive the Buddha, it is indeed that mind of yours that at once possesses those 32 signs of perfection and the eight minor marks of excellence. This mind makes the Buddha. This mind is the Buddha himself.'

Tan-luan (476–542), explaining the above passage, says that the

mind is like water. 'If it is clear, it will reflect true reality. It will at once perceive the Buddha and his Pure Land' ('Ojoronchu', *Shinshu Seiten* 125).

The scripture from which the above story is taken, known as 'Meditation on Eternal Life Sutra', together with other sutras dealing with the Pure Land, became the favourite texts of the Pure Land school of Buddhism. Its devotees attempted to attain the vision of Queen Vaidehi, especially at the hour of death. The school flourished in China and was taken to its logical limits in Japan during the thirteenth century by Honen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1262). They taught that such visualizations are superfluous. One need only call with faith upon the name of Amida, the Buddha of the Pure Land, and he will receive anyone into his paradise whether or not he has spiritual insight (Honen), or one can enter by faith alone, even without calling on the name (Shinran). The compassionate Buddha wishes to exclude no one.

According to the *Dharma Flower* devotees, however, these are one-sided interpretations that have strayed from the original intent of the 'Meditation on Eternal Life Sutra'. Several other writings mention that the enlightenment of Queen Vaidehi was an interlude during the teaching of the Lotus Sutra[12] Its grim tale of palace intrigue and murder serves as a gloomy contrast to the brilliance and luminous light of the *Dharma Flower*. Queen Vaidehi's spiritual awakening is a vision of the same radiance surrounding the Buddha on the Vulture Peak.

The *Dharma Flower* dazzles the imagination with its endless processes of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, demons, garudas, nagas, and other wonderful beings far removed from our everyday life. The tragic story of Queen Vaidehi is a necessary antidote to such unworldly splendour. It reminds us that the Pure Land of all the Buddhas can arise in our minds from the ashes of life's most crushing defeats. But the Buddha-land is not just 'over there' beyond the grave. It is right here. This was to be a central message of the greatest champion of the *Dharma Flower*, Nichiren of Japan.

Chapter 4

The Eternal Buddha

As the *Dharma Flower* opens, the Buddha emerges from deep concentration and turns to address Shariputra, who is reputed to be the wisest of his followers. 'The wisdom of the present Buddhas cannot be understood by the Shravakas (disciples, specifically those of the Lesser Vehicle) or the Pratyekabuddhas (those who attain enlightenment by themselves) because the present Buddhas attained the most profound Dharma by practising the teachings of the past Buddhas in their previous existences, and because they are expounding the Dharma in various ways according to the capacities of living beings.

'I also attained the Wonderful Dharma and became a Buddha by practising the teachings of the past Buddhas in my previous existence. Since I attained Buddhahood, I have been expounding the Dharma with various stories of previous lives, parables, and similes. The Wonderful Dharma is the secret lore of the Buddhas. It can be understood only by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are firm in faith. By my Wonderful Dharma, I mean the truth of the reality of all things in regard to their appearances as such, their natures as such, their embodiments as such, their powers as such, their activities as such, their primary causes as such, their environmental causes as such, their effects as such, their rewards and retributions as such, and the equality of these nine factors of theirs as such.'

He elucidates this point, and then goes on to say that although the Disciples, the Solitaries, and the altruistic Bodhisattvas seem to be following different paths, this is not really true. The Buddha taught them different methods only as expedients to help each one at his own level of understanding and ability.

I expounded the teaching of Nirvana to the dull people,

Who wished to hear the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle,
Who were attached to birth and death,
And who were troubled by many sufferings
Inflicted on them because they had not practiced
The profound and wonderful teachings
Under innumerable Buddhas

I expounded this expedient teaching in order to cause
them
To enter the way to the wisdom of the Buddha.
I never said to them:
'You can attain the enlightenment of the Buddha.'
I never said this
Because the time was not yet ripe for it.

Now is the time to say this.
I will expound the Great Vehicle definitely.
I expound various sutras of the nine elements
According to the capacities of living beings.
I expounded the different sutras
Because they were a basis for the Great Vehicle.
(Murano *Lotus Sutra* 32)

To illustrate, he tells a story of a wealthy father who returns home one day to find his house burning while all his children are playing thoughtlessly within. They are either not aware of the fire or not alarmed by it. In any case they are too involved in their games to consider leaving the house. The father wants them out as quickly as possible.

'Look!' he calls to them from outside. 'I have brought you some new toys to play with — beautiful carts. Come out quickly and choose the one you want!'

Joyfully the children pour out, eager to get first choice for the cart each wants for himself. However, once they are safely outside, the father presents each one with an identical cart, a Great Vehicle far more luxurious than any they could have imagined.

Had the father lied to the children when he promised each one a little cart of his own? No, he had used the carts as expedients to gain his end and save his children. In the same way the Buddha uses different teachings to attract his many children out of the burning house of this world. He offers them rewards which are within the range of their understanding. Most people are attracted to a religion for selfish reasons; they want a private vehicle which will carry them up to heaven. But there is no private vehicle. There is only one Great Vehicle which carries all together.

Where is this Great Vehicle to be found? It is here all the time, within one's self.

Another parable tells the story of a boy who ran away from home and grew up in a hostile world that utterly defeated him. He slipped lower and lower on the social scale until he was reduced to begging for a living. His father, meanwhile, had become wealthy and powerful. He lived in a palace in a different city and commanded a large staff of servants and employees. He had everything he wanted except what he wanted most of all, his lost son.

One day as the white-bearded and richly arrayed father sat in state outside his palace, he spied a miserable beggar cowering by the gate. Could it be . . .? Yes it was! It was his son! He told some retainers to bring the man in.

But the son was not ready for this. When he saw the approaching uniformed attendants, he turned and ran. To him uniforms meant only one thing — police! He could not dream that the wealthy merchant, who commanded such power, was his own father. By now he had almost forgotten that he had ever had a father or any home except the street.

The attendants chased after the son, captured him, and dragged him back, protesting and whimpering with terror. When finally they pushed him roughly into the presence of his father, the miserable son fainted. The father saw that his son had sunk so low that an immediate reconciliation would be impossible, even cruel. A good name cannot be granted; it must be earned. Unless the son has self-respect, his father's love could seem like poison to him.

'Let him go!' he ordered. 'I do not need this man.'

The attendants poured water on the son's head, shook him awake, and told him to leave. He scurried off, much to the amusement of the onlookers.

But the father did not give up so easily. Later he called two of his shabbiest hired men and told them to find the beggar who was there that day. 'Offer him a job clearing trash,' he told them. 'Pay him enough for food but not enough to spend on wine.'

The son accepted the offer. Three meals a day and a place to sleep offered more security than he had known for a long time.

One day the father was looking out the window when he saw his son working outside, 'gaunt, lean, and doleful, filthy and covered with dirt and dust'. The sight broke his heart. He removed his own fine robes and disguised himself as a foreman. In this guise, he was able to get close to the young man and start a conversation with him. 'You're a good worker, boy,' he told him. 'I'll recommend you for a promotion.'

Years passed. The son's self-respect grew gradually as he assumed higher and higher positions. Eventually he became the trusted manager of the entire business; he was known and respected everywhere. Only then was the father ready. He called together all his employees and announced that the manager was none other than his son, the rightful heir to all his fortune.

Thus the son, unlike the prodigal of the Bible, was brought into his inheritance only when he was ready to receive it. This required more than just love from the father; it took patience and a little guile as well. The son had to be led step by step into what was rightfully his since the beginning. So skilful was the father's preparation that the son was not aware that he had done anything to 'earn' his inheritance. 'Without any mind for, or effort on my part,' he says, 'these treasures now come to me of themselves.'

Another parable in the Sutra treats the matter from a different angle. A young man became drunk after an evening of carousing and passed out. A wealthy friend had to leave him there, but decided first to do him a favour. He took a valuable jewel and placed it in the drunken man's topknot. Surely, he reasoned, when his friend woke up, he would notice the jewel, use it to pay any expenses, and still have plenty left over for whatever he wanted.

But this did not happen. When the drunken man got up the next day, it never occurred to him that he was now wealthy. First he was thrown out of the inn for not paying his bill. Then things went from bad to worse. He wandered from place to place, doing odd jobs when he could and living from hand to mouth.

Years later, his wealthy friend ran into him and was shocked by his appearance. 'What happened to you?' he asked. 'How did you lose all your money?'

'What money? I never had any. You know that.'

'The money from the jewel I left in your topknot. I left it for you so that you could pay your expenses, invest the rest, and go into business for yourself.'

The poor man dug into his topknot and, sure enough, there was the priceless jewel! It had been there all along. He had been a rich man, carrying a fortune with him wherever he went, but he had never known it.

So it is, says the Buddha, with everyone. The priceless jewel, the Buddha nature, lies within us untapped. The only difference between the Buddha and us is that he knows this, has unravelled his topknot, and exposed the jewel of the Buddhahood.

Here lies an important difference between the *Dharma Flower* and many other sutras of the Great Vehicle. Mahayana sutras are apt to be critical — sometimes highly critical — of the 'narrow' way of the Hinayana disciples. Common mortals and even sinners can attain Buddhahood, but the arhats, who have attained Nirvana, cannot. Blinded by their own success, they have ceased to look further. The 'Sutra of the Great Assembly' says that they have 'fallen into the pit of Nirvana' from which they can neither free themselves nor be of any use to others. Having destroyed their earthly passions, they have destroyed the seeds of Buddhahood. Greed, anger, and ignorance can kindle the flame of Buddhahood; cold detachment and self-satisfaction cannot.

The *Dharma Flower*, on the other hand, is called the 'Round Teaching'. It completes the circle, gathering in the Hinayana disciples, the solitary sages (*Pratyekabuddhas*), and the Mahayana Bodhisattvas. They all follow their own rules to reach the goal, but the goal is the same and so is the destiny. Like different plants in a tropical jungle during a rain storm, all are nourished by the same cloud, the bountiful rain-cloud of the all-compassionate Buddha. There are not 'three vehicles', the Sutra repeats over and over again; there is only one, the Buddha Vehicle.

> Just as rain falls on all vegetation, so Buddha's compassion extends equally to all people. Just as different plants receive particular benefits from the same rain, so people of different natures and circumstances are blessed in different ways.
>
> (*Teaching* 23)

Chih-i divided the *Dharma Flower* into two sections of 14 chapters each.[13] The first half, which has been cited thus far, is devoted mostly to the theory of the universal Buddha-nature. Since it consists of the Buddha's teachings, it is called the Imprinted Gate (*Shakumon* in Japanese). In the second half, the Buddha reveals his own inner nature. It is called the Original Gate (*Hommon*). It is this second half, the Original Gate, which gives the Sutra its dynamic punch. Spanning the two halves like a bridge is the Ceremony in Space.

Suddenly there springs up from the ground and stands in the sky a glorious tower, or stupa, '500 yojanas in height and 250 yojanas in length and width', sparkling with jewels and decorated with flowers and banners. A voice rings out from within: 'Excellent, excellent! You, Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One, have expounded to this great multitude the Wonderful Dharma Flower Sutra, the Teaching of Equality, the Great Wisdom, the Dharma for Bodhisattvas, the Dharma protected by the Buddhas. So it is, so it is! What you have expounded, World-Honored Shakyamuni, is all true' (Chap. 11).

When he is asked about the meaning of this remarkable apparition and the voice, the Buddha explains that within the Treasure Tower is the perfect body of a Tathagata named Many Treasures (*Taho-nyorai*). He lived ages ago in a world 'far to the east' called Treasure-Purity. 'While he was still practising the Way of Bodhisattvas, he made a great vow, "If after I become a Buddha and pass away, anyone in any of the worlds of the ten quarters expounds the Dharma Flower Sutra, I will cause my stupa-mausoleum to spring up before him so that I can prove the truthfulness of the sutra and say 'excellent' in his praise, because I wish to hear that sutra directly from him."'

One of the listeners, a Bodhisattva named Great Eloquence, says that he would like to see that Buddha. Shakyamuni replies that this cannot be done until he has recalled 'all the Buddhas emanated from me who

are now expounding the Dharma in the worlds of the ten quarters.' He now does this. This world of ours (the *saha*-world, the 'world of endurance') is purified three times as the emanations of Shakyamuni, 'as innumerable as the sands of the River Ganges', assemble about the Treasure Tower.

Once they have all gathered, Shakyamuni rises up to the sky and with the fingers of his right hand opens the door of the Treasure Tower. 'The opening of the door made a sound as large as that of the removal of the bolt and lock of the gate of a great city. At that instant all the congregation sees Many Treasures Tathagata sitting with his perfect and undestroyed body on the lion-like seat in the stupa of treasures as if he had been sitting in dhyana-concentration.' Many Treasures then invites Shakyamuni to sit beside him.

The scene is so rich in symbolism that any explanation risks spoiling the effect. One interpretation is that we have here a concept which is basic to the Great Vehicle, the 'Three Bodies of the Buddha' (*Tri-kaya* in Sanskrit, *Sanjin* in Japanese). The first 'body' (Dharma-body) is the ultimate truth in itself. It is symbolized by the Treasure Tower, which contains the second 'body', the truth in an intelligible form, in this case the form of Many Treasures Buddha. It is called the Reward-body, but this form is invisible to us until it has been revealed by the Action-body of the Buddha, Shakyamuni. He does this only when he has assembled all partial truths — all his replicas — in one place.

The Three Bodies are seen 'in the sky' (in the mind), but in fact they spring from the earth, this physical–spiritual world of ours. Nichiren says that when the door of the tower is closed, it represents the Imprinted Gate, the theoretical teachings of the Buddha; and when it is open, it represents the Original Gate, the Buddha's self-revelation. Most important of all, he says, is to realize that the Treasure Tower is none other than the human body, the throne of all the Buddhas. 'You are the Treasure Tower, itself, and the Treasure Tower is you. No other knowledge is purposeful' (MW 1:30).

As in all good symbolism, various interpretations are possible. Chih-i says that Many Treasures Buddha represents objective truth, and Shakyamuni is the subjective wisdom which perceives it. In this case Many Treasures is the Dharma-body, Shakyamuni is the Wisdom-body, and the emanated Buddhas are the Manifest-body.

Directions, too, have symbolic significance in the *Dharma Flower*. The East, where the sun rises, is the temporal origin, the past. Many Treasures comes from 'far to the East'. The West is the temporal future; Amida Buddha has his Pure Land in the West. The nadir is death, emptiness, 'the beginning with no beginning'. Many Treasures, having lived in the East, now rises up from beneath the earth. The zenith is transcendent reality, resurrection, 'the end with no ending'. The two Buddhas rise to the sky. Nichiren says that they represent the two inseparable aspects of reality, death and life. Many Treasures sym-

bolizes the past, death; Shakyamuni is life. The two sit side by side within the Treasure Tower, demonstrating their inseparability.

When Shakyamuni preaches his sermons of the Imprinted Gate, he sits facing the East; he is addressing his temporal disciples. However, when he enters the Treasure Tower and joins Many Treasures there, he is now facing West. His teaching of the eight key chapters of the Original Gate is for future generations. This Original Teaching (*Honge*) requires the presence of the original disciples (*Honge no Bosatsu*), who arise from 'beneath the earth'. When he completes this teaching, he dismisses the original disciples, descends to the earth, faces eastward again, and preaches the final chapters (23–8) for his contemporaries.

The teachings of the Imprinted Gate conclude with three chapters on the proper way to disseminate the Sutra in the future. The first of these, Chapter 12, is the famous Devadatta Chapter. It pushes the doctrine of the one Buddha-nature in all beings to logical conclusions, and these conclusions are truly revolutionary.

In Buddhism there is no such thing as chance or coincidence. Everything takes place because of causes, and this includes our human relationships. Our friends are those whom we met under favourable circumstances; our enemies are those whom we encountered under unfavourable circumstances. But neither the circumstances nor the people involved came out of nowhere. All life, as the Flower Garland Sutra so vividly demonstrates, is a network of connections. We come into favourable contacts because of favourable connecting causes. This is especially true of the people with whom we are most intimately associated: our parents, brothers and sisters, spouse. We are drawn to such people because of powerful prior causes. Our relationships in the past may have been entirely different from what they are now, but they existed in one form or another.

The life force (the Buddha-nature) is one, but its forms are endless. These forms are linked to each other in the one Buddha-nature (i.e. they are all alive), and they affect each other for better or worse.

This brings us to the pointed question of Queen Vaidehi: What evil deed in the past did Shakyamuni do that he was born with such a wretched cousin as Devadatta? He ignored her question at the time (there were other more pressing matters at stake), but now he answers it. There was, indeed, a very close relationship in the past between Devadatta and himself.

Devadatta was once his teacher, and he was the faithful disciple who served his master loyally. Today the relationship is reversed: Shakyamuni, the more pure-hearted, is the teacher, and Devadatta is (or should be) the disciple. But Devadatta cannot accept this change in roles; he is unconsciously jealous and resentful. This resentment has ruined his once noble character. There is no fouler villain than a thwarted saint.

Devadatta, like anyone, must pay the price for his evil deeds. But now

Shakyamuni makes a startling announcement: Devadatta, even Devadatta, will someday become a Buddha. The good in his character may now be hidden beneath layers of jealousy, but it is still there. Buddha-nature is universal; it is the same whether in Devadatta or anyone else. He, too, carries the jewel in his topknot.

The second surprising conclusion to the doctrine of the universal Buddha-nature is not so startling to us today. However, it was a real shocker when it was first preached. Not only do evil men carry the Buddha-nature, but so do women!

The ancients generally looked upon women as spiritually inferior to men. Their function was to serve, not to think. Of course, there were lots of priestesses, witches, and mediums, who exercised considerable influence; but they were looked upon as operating at the lower levels of spirituality, more 'earth-bound' than men. They could be possessed by gods or demons, and speak for them as 'channels'. However, because they are 'closer to the earth' (the words *mater*, 'mother' and 'material' are related), they could not ascend to the realm of pure spirit. This was a male prerogative.

Shakyamuni demolishes all these prejudices, not with a sermon (he has already preached enough of these, and the conclusions should be obvious), but by an example. He does this in the story of the eight-year-old *Naga* princess.

It is not at all clear what is meant by the term *naga*. In Pali the word means 'a cobra, an elephant, or a noble person'. It is either a person with powerful animal-like qualities, or an animal with human qualities. Nagas, under the guise of cobras, are worshipped today in parts of India, but there are also people called Nagas residing in Burma and India. They may have been serpent-worshippers in the past, and have given their name to the sacred cobra. The Chinese did not know what a *naga* was, either, so they translated the term as 'dragon', which may give us a clue. But what is a dragon?

The Chinese dragon, unlike its western counterpart, who sits brooding in a cave where it guards its treasures, represents the vitality of life-giving waters. It comes up 'beating its belly and bellowing, "Haw ha ha haw!"' as Joseph Campbell says (*The Power of Myth* 150). 'Metaphorically, water is the unconscious, and the creature of the water is the life or energy of the unconscious' (1968, 146).

The eight-year-old Dragon Princess represents pure spontaneity. She arrives highly recommended by her sponsor, the Bodhisattva Manjusri, but gets a chilly reception from the other disciples. The scholarly Shariputra and another Bodhisattva, who is appropriately named Accumulated Wisdom, look down their noses at her and patiently explain the many reasons why she can never become a Buddha. For one thing, she is not even a man. Then too, Shakyamuni Buddha accumulated merits by practising austerities. 'Even the smallest part, even a part the size of a poppy-seed of this world — this world being

composed of one thousand million Sumeru-worlds — is not outside the places where the Bodhisattva made efforts to save all living beings at the cost of his life. It is only after doing all this that he attained Bodhi.' How could this presumptuous girl equal that?

Instead of arguing with them, the Dragon Princess turns to Shakyamuni and offers him a jewel 'worth one thousand million Sumeru-worlds'. The Buddha immediately accepts.

'Did the Buddha accept my gem quickly or not?' she asks them.

'Very quickly,' they answer.

'Now watch me become a Buddha even more quickly.' In a flash, she completes all the Bodhisattva practices and transforms herself into a Buddha.

Obviously, the jewel which she offered to Shakyamuni was her own life, which was worth just as much as his — 'one thousand million Sumeru-worlds'. Whether one accumulates wisdom and virtue slowly over the ages and so destroys ego-centricity, or whether one does it in one spontaneous act makes no difference. The price is the same: one's own life. The reward is the same: Buddhahood.

Here is the only case in the whole of Buddhist literature where any mortal becomes a Buddha. There is much discussion about the theoretical possibility; she is the only example; Needless to say, this unnamed Naga-princess became a heroine to the feminists of China and Japan.

As the Buddha prepares to reveal his own identity in the Original Gate, he is suddenly surrounded by a host of new Bodhisattvas, who (like the Treasure Tower) spring up 'from under the earth'. They are magnificent to behold, but are entirely unknown to the assembled multitude. Who are they?

There are four leaders to the Bodhisattvas from under the earth. All of them have the word 'action' in their names: Superior Action (Jogyo), Limitless Action (Muhengyo), Pure Action (Jyogyo), and Steadily Established Action (Anryugyo). Later commentators pointed out that these names are analogous to the Four Qualities of Nirvana given in the Nirvana Sutra: Superior Action is true self; Limitless Action is eternity; Pure Action is purity; Steadily Established Action is bliss.[14]

All these great Bodhisattvas have been the Buddha's disciples since endless time. How is such a thing possible? Shakyamuni explains it in the famous sixteenth chapter, 'The Duration of the Life ofthe Tathagata'. A popular manual, *The Teaching of Buddha*, paraphrases it this way (24–6):

> Common people believe that Buddha was born a prince and learned the way to Enlightenment as a mendicant; actually, Buddha has always existed in the world which is without beginning or end.
>
> As the Eternal Buddha, He has known all people and applied all methods of relief.

There is no falsity in the Eternal Dharma which Buddha taught, for He knows all things in the world as they are, and He teaches them to all people.

Indeed, it is very difficult to understand the world as it is, for, although it seems true, it is not, and, although it seems false, it is not. Ignorant people cannot know the truth concerning the world.

Buddha alone truly and fully knows the world as it is and He never says that it is true or false, or good or evil. He simply portrays the world as it is.

What Buddha does teach is this: 'That all people should cultivate roots of virtue according to their natures, their deeds, and their beliefs.' This teaching transcends all affirmation and negation in the world.

Buddha teaches not only through words, but also through His life. Although His life is endless, in order to awaken greedy people, He uses the expedient of death.

While a certain physician was away from home, his children accidentally took some poison. When the physician returned, he noticed their sickness and prepared an antidote. Some of the children who were not seriously poisoned accepted the medicine and were cured, but others were so seriously affected that they refused to take the medicine.

The physician, prompted by paternal love for his children, decided on an extreme method to press the cure upon them. He said to the children: 'I must go off on a long journey. I am old and may pass away any day. If I am with you I can care for you, but if I should pass away, you will become worse and worse. If you hear of my death, I implore you to take the antidote and be cured of this subtle poisoning.' Then he went on the long journey. After a time, he sent a messenger to his children to inform them of his death.

The children, receiving the message, were deeply affected by the thought of their father's death and by the realization that they would no longer have the benefit of his benevolent care. Recalling his parting request, in a feeling of sorrow and helplessness, they took the medicine and recovered.

People must not condemn the deception of this father–physician. Buddha is like that father. He, too, employs the fiction of life and death to save people who are entangled in the bondage of desires.

The chapter closes with the Buddha saying:

> I know who is practising the Way and who is not.
> Therefore, I expound various teachings

To all living beings,
According to their capacities.
I am always thinking:
'How shall I cause all living beings
To enter into the unsurpassed Way
And quickly become Buddhas, themselves?'

No condensation or translation can do justice to the great rolling cadences of the Chinese version. Endless time is equated with endless space. Here the Buddha states explicitly what hitherto he had implied negatively. Between the extremes of existence and non-existence, reality and falsity, eternity and annihilation lies the concrete entity of life itself.

The truth-order exists whether a Buddha announces it or not. However, unless at least one being realizes it and fathoms its meaning, the truth-order is incomplete. Truth is not a series of acts; it has an inside as well as an outside. Truth comprehends itself, otherwise nothing could comprehend anything. In the person of the Buddha, the cosmos fulfils itself in its own inner comprehension.

An individual is neither real nor unreal. On the one hand, he is not a permanent entity; on the other hand, he appears phenomenally. However, the Buddha is a real individual, *the* real individual. The truth-order is represented, embodied, and realized in his person as the Thus-Come-One (Tathagata). He is *the* person in communion with all others. By the same token, any individual is a Thus-Come-One if he realizes the universal truth-order of the cosmos, 'not only in his ideas,' says Anesaki, 'but in his life, and lives the life of the universal self' (1966, 144–5).

Then in answer to his rhetorical question, 'Who will spread this teaching in the future?' the Buddha rejects the proferred offers of his ethereal saints and Bodhisattvas. Instead, he suprises them by raising up 'innumerable Bodhisattvas from under the earth.' It is they, not superhuman beings, who will spread the Dharma. For the Wonderful Dharma cannot be simply 'taught'; it must be lived, it must be embodied. It is embodied already — in living men and women. It is to them that he entrusts the future.

The Lotus Sutra expounds unqualified universalism. It leaves out no one, men or women, saints or sinners, sages or the ignorant, humans or non-humans, believers or non-believers. But the key is not merely to accept this, to believe it, as was the case with the Imprinted Gate. The key with the Original Gate is to live it, to put it into practice. It is no longer just a doctrine; it is now a clarion call to action. This is why the new Bodhisattvas do not descend from the heavens; they rise up from the earth. This is why each has the word 'action' appended to his name.

This action can be summed up in the Four Great Vows of a Bodhisattva:

Sentient beings are innumerable; I vow to save them all.
Our evil desires are inexhaustible; I vow to quench them all.
The Buddha's teachings are immeasurable; I vow to study them all.
The Way of the Buddha is unexcelled; I vow to attain the Path Sublime.[15]

Chapter 5

The Lotus Blossoms

The Original Gate closes with instructions on how to put it into practice, just as the Imprinted Gate did. From the second half of Chapter 17 until the final 28th chapter, the *Dharma Flower* is devoted exclusively to practice, not theory. One Bodhisattva after another preaches, not with words but by example.

One of them is named Never-Despise or Never-Despising (*Jofukyo*).[16] He respects all people, bows when he meets anyone, and announces, 'you will all become Buddhas.'

The Sutra says, 'Some of the four kinds of devotees had impure minds.[17] They got angry, spoke ill of him, and abused him, saying, "Where did this ignorant bhikshu (monk) come from? He says that he does not despise us, and assures us that we shall be able to become Buddhas. We do not need such a false assurance of our future Buddhahood." Although he was abused like this for many years, he did not get angry. He always said to them, "You will be able to become Buddhas." When he said this, people would strike him with sticks, pieces of wood, tiles or stones. He would run away to a distance, and call out in a loud voice from afar, "I do not despise you. You will be able to become Buddhas"' (*Lotus* XX).

Eventually Never-Despising hears 'in the sky the twenty trillion *gathas* (verses) of the Dharma Flower Sutra', and then he is able to purify his senses and lead many people to Buddhahood. Clearly the *Dharma Flower* is here considered as more than just a book. The written Sutra does not have 20,000,000,000,000 verses or anywhere near that amount. The written Sutra is a symbol or manifestation of the universal Truth, which is everywhere ('in the sky'). It is not just the words of the Original Buddha — it is the Original Buddha himself, in visible form. As later Buddhists were to say, 'We can see him in the

letters of this Sutra. The letters are the Buddha, himself, in his manifestation' (*Kaikyoge*, Prelude to sutra reading, verse 3).

Perhaps even better known than Never-Despising is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (*Kanzeon* in Japanese; *Kuan Yin* in Chinese). The name means, 'World-Voice-Perceiver'. Avalokiteshvara was originally a man who could take the form of a woman — or of anyone, for that matter — to help suffering beings. As the personification of compassion, he/she came to be regarded as female, and was depicted in art as a loving mother. Her graceful form is familiar to many Westerners as the 'Goddess of mercy'. John Blofeld emphasises her feminine attributes in his *Bodhisattva of Compassion* and gives a complete translation of the popular verses in the *Dharma Flower* which describe her powers:

> To hear her name or see her form,
> Or fervently recite her name
> Delivers beings from every woe

So popular did this chapter become that it was printed and recited as a separate sutra, forming the basis for a Kanzeon cult. Even the scholarly Chih-i was devoted to Kuan Yin and considered this chapter to be one of the four most important in the Sutra. He is said to have recited it daily.[18]

However, a shift in location has taken place between these two chapters (20 and 25), and its significance was not lost on Nichiren. Shakyamuni descends from the Treasure Tower in the sky after describing the many merits earned by one who keeps the Sutra in the future, and receiving confirmation from all the assembled Buddhas. He charges the Bodhisattvas from the earth with the task of spreading the Sutra in the future. Then he dismisses Many Treasures Buddha and all the others, who return to their respective worlds.

Logically the Sutra should end here (Chap. 22), and probably it did originally. The final chapters, which extol various Bodhisattvas, bear no apparent connection to what has previously transpired. Each, like the Kanzeon Chapter, is complete in itself. All modern scholars agree that they are late additions to the text. They introduce elements which will develop eventually into separate sects: the popular cult of Kanzeon, who is invoked as the 'goddess of mercy' (Chap. 25); esotericism, with its use of magical *dharanis* (formulas) to invoke protective demons (Chaps. 26 and 28); and the cult of the Buddha Amitayus (Amida), who is invoked for a happy rebirth in a better world than this one (Chap. 24). The only logic to their appearance at this point in the book is that Bodhisattvas use any and all means to save suffering people, and therefore chapters on Bodhisattva-practices could be added indefinitely.

There is a danger here that the *Dharma Flower* is becoming so broad, so all-encompassing, that it is accepting seeds which will grow up to choke it. Those who venerate Kanzeon will look upon her as a goddess and not bother with the deeper meaning of the *Dharma Flower*. Those who go in for magical formulas will become immersed in esoterica. Those who long for a happy afterlife in the paradise of Amitayus (Amida) will forget the affirmation of Chapter 16, that the Buddha-land is right here.

All these aberrations did, indeed, take place. Roughly speaking, the Dharma Flower School has been represented by two branches: the broad branch of Chih-i and his T'ien-t'ai School (Japanese *Tendai*), which seeks to encompass everything, and the narrow branch of Nichiren, which places all religious teachings in an ascending hierarchical order: 1) the religions of Confucius and Lao Tzu (ethical and magical); 2) Indian non-Buddhist religions (philosophical and devotional); 3) Buddhist teachings before the *Dharma Flower*, which expound enlightenment for some; 4) the Imprinted Gate of the *Dharma Flower*, which expounds enlightenment for all; 5) the Original Gate, which gives it life (*Kaimoku Sho*). Each includes its predecessor, and should replace it in practice when its time comes.

If the *Dharma Flower* is important as the manifestation of an idea, it is also significant as a book, as a work of literature. It was not until four or five centuries after the death of Shakyamuni that his words and deeds were put into writing. Of course these words and deeds were known, but they were passed on by oral transmission, not in writing. Buddhist tradition tells how shortly after Shakyamuni's death, 500 of his leading disciples gathered near Rajagriha and recited his words. The sutras, as they exist today, full of repetitions, are obviously written versions of lessons which were originally taught and learned by rote. As these recited sutras were translated into various languages, differences between them became troublesome. This is one reason why there arose the need for a written text: there is a fixed quality to the written word that is lacking in the spoken word.

Beginning around 100 B.C. and continuing for the next three centuries, there was an outpouring of Buddhist literature as the various schools of transmission wrote down their own versions. Each claimed that its tradition was the first and most accurate. Nevertheless, later Buddhists were to say that the appearance of the written word marked the end of the Age of the True Norm (*Shoho*) and the beginning of the Age of the Formal Norm (*Zoho*). Written words and letters are not the truth; they symbolize the truth. The truth itself can be transmitted only from mind to mind.

It may have been not the monks but laymen who first wanted the teachings in writing. The oldest Buddhist inscriptions which have survived were carved on stone pillars by orders of the Emperor Asoka (3rd century B.C.). They were written in the various languages of the

countries in which they were meant to be read.[19]

King Vattagamani of Ceylon (29–17 B.C.) ordered that the sutras be recorded in the 'original' tongue, i.e. that by which the Dharma had been transmitted to his country. This was Pali, once a spoken tongue of western India but by then a dead language. The word *Pali* means 'holy scripture', and does not appear in the early sutras (Mizuno 1980, 29). Once put in writing, it became the *lingua franca* of Theravada Buddhism, 'the Way of the Elders' (the only surviving branch of Hinayana, the Lesser Vehicle), and is still read today in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, and wherever the Theravada is taught.

Theravada has the only complete canon of sacred Buddhist scriptures; it consists of 45 large volumes. This canon is called the Three Baskets (*Tipitaka* in Pali), because it is divided into three sections. One section consists of sutras (sermons), the second of monastic rules, and the third, which is not attributed to the Buddha, of theological and philosophical explanations.

In northern India, King Kanishka (first or second century A.D.) ordered the recension of the canon of the local Sarvastavadins (a Hinayana sect, now extinct) in Sanskrit, a corrupt version of which was still spoken in his kingdom.

Laymen also seem to have been responsible for the appearance of the Mahayana sutras. The *Dharma Flower* is one of the earliest of these, and it has a distinctly anti-clerical tone. 'Evil bhikshus will insult us, drive us far from the monasteries, and make fun of us, saying, "So you think you are buddhas!"' Early Mahayanists expected no help from the religious establishment. Laymen, who formed the bulk of its members, had no time to go to a monastery or sit in silent meditation, but they did have time to read books and chant important passages. They also enjoyed pilgrimages to the sacred towers (*stupas*) containing relics of the Buddha and other saints. Both of these practices are extolled in the *Lotus*, but to read, recite, or copy a sutra is ranked higher than merely bowing before sacred relics.

Gradually new monastic brotherhoods developed to promulgate the expanded teachings. They were still Hinayana in their rules of discipline but Mahayana in their theology. Pure Mahayana monasticism did not appear until it was introduced by Saicho of Japan (767–822). Paul Groner has given us a detailed study of Saicho's struggles to realize his aim.

The early Mahayana sutras were written in the local languages and then translated later into the more elegant Sanskrit. Ancient Sanskrit was the sacred language of the rival Brahmin priesthood; it enjoyed a social prestige which put the 'vulgar' Buddhist tongues at a disadvantage. Regional languages also evolved into social languages. Kogen Mizuno says, 'In plays one could identify a character's occupation and social status through the prescribed language he or she spoke. Kings, ministers, and Brahmans spoke Sanskrit, the most esteemed and highly

inflected language; queens, princesses, nuns, and courtesans spoke a graceful language called Shauraseni; the general populace, such as merchants and artisans, spoke Magadhi; and the lower classes spoke Paishachi. Even lyrics had their own pleasant-to-the-ear language, Maharashtri' (26). All of these were originally regional languages, not social. Since the Buddha spoke Magadhi, we can see why no sutras have come down to us in his own tongue, which came later to be associated with the middle class — hardly suitable for the words of the World-Honoured One!

The library of Mahayana works is even larger than the Hinayana canon. However, there is no Mahayana closed canon comparable to the Three Baskets. Instead there is a vast proliferation of sutras and commentaries, many of which are admittedly of late origin. The attempt of most of them is to get back behind the Buddha's words to his mind, to his intentions, to his great compassionate heart. The leading question is not, 'What did the Buddha say?' but 'What did he intend to do, and who was he, in the first place?'

This is why the doctrinal part of the Lotus Sutra, the Imprinted Gate (*Shakumon*), is ranked lower than the Original Gate (*Hommon*). The Imprinted Gate is an 'imprint' of the living Original Gate. It can be studied, learned, and understood; it can also be taught to others. Its subject is life, universal life, called the Buddha-nature. We can understand it and even approve of it while we are sitting by the fire and reading a book.

The second part, the Original Gate, is beyond rational comprehension. It goes beyond life through death and then to eternal life. It can be grasped only by those who 'die', those 'who wish to see me with all their hearts and at the cost of their lives'. It demands a conversion — complete destruction of the ego so that the Eternal Buddha becomes all in all. This cannot be done while sitting by a friendly crackling fire on the hearth, but only by plunging into 'the raging conflagration of destruction' (Chapter 16).

The Imprinted Gate paves the way by destroying the distinction between the self and 'others'. The other is nothing but the self of the one who is called the other. 'That his self and the other self are equal,' says Professor Shoson Miyamoto, 'was the teaching of "selflessness" (*muga, higa*), and the way, which put life into both the self and the other together, was the Middle Way of non-duality of self and other.'[20]

It is not necessary to be a Buddhist or even to read the *Lotus* to be able to attain to the Imprinted Gate. Many who have never read the book have shared its ideology. The American Universalist Clarence R. Skinner proclaims the *Lotus* doctrine in *A Religion for Greatness* (1945, 13):

> Beneath all curious customs and beliefs, deeper than ecclesiastical creeds, more vital than priestly rites, stands out one

> impressive fact — namely, man touches infinity; his home is in immensity; he lives, moves, and has his being in an eternity. This magnificent assertion is man's greatest affirmation. Nothing else surpasses it in sweep of the imagination or depth of understanding. It is a truth proclaimed by all that we know of modern science, and it stands the test of experience as the enduring reality.[21]

But all of this is incomplete until it is given life. The great sixteenth chapter of *Hommon*, the Original Gate, sets the Sutra on fire.

By the time Buddhism began to penetrate China (the official date is A.D. 64, when the Emperor Ming dreamed of a golden Buddha), Buddhist scholasticism in India and Central Asia was in full flower. The new religion arrived via the trade routes of Central Asia, and for the first couple of centuries it remained a foreign and somewhat exotic cult. The Chinese had a rich culture of their own, which gave primary importance to family obligations. They were suspicious of monasticism and celibacy, which seemed to threaten these deeply rooted values. It was not until A.D. 333 that native Chinese were given permission to enter the Monastic Brotherhood. From then on Buddhism in China quickly took on its own national characteristics. Many emperors supported Buddhism, and some of them even became Buddhists.

Chinese Buddhism did not always have clear sailing, however, and the old anti-Buddhist complaints kept cropping up, especially among government ministers. Sometimes these resulted in severe persecutions. The persecution which began in 845 was so violent that Chinese Buddhism never fully recovered. Nevertheless, Buddhism had sunk its roots deep into the Chinese soul, and it retained a strong popular following even after it had lost official favour.

No one did more to advance the cause of Buddhism in China than the brilliant scholar and translator Kumarajiva (344–413). Kogen Mizuno in his book, *Buddhist Sutras*, says:

> The sutras translated by Kumarajiva have had the greatest influence on Buddhism in China and Japan. It could be said that the essential meaning of Buddhism was introduced to China through the sutra translations of Kumarajiva, even though several hundred sutras had already been translated into Chinese before he began his work. By the latter part of the fourth century the true doctrines of Buddhism still had not been conveyed fully to the Chinese, either because lack of knowledge prevented their understanding completely those sutras that had been translated or because the true concepts of Buddhism had not been transmitted in the translations. The Chinese did not fully understand Buddhism until Kumarajiva had translated sutras, lectured, and written his commentaries. Thus Kumarajiva's work

> was extraordinarily important to Buddhism in both China and Japan. (57)

Kumarajiva was born in Kucha, a Central Asian city on the northern trade route between India and China. His father Kumarayana was an Indian Brahmin of high rank, who had abandoned court life for that of an itinerant preacher. His mother Jiva was a sister of the King of Kucha. When Kumarayana's travels took him to Kucha, he caused such a sensation that the princess demanded to have him for a husband. Their child was named after both his distinguished parents, Kumara for his father and Jiva for his mother.

Princess Jiva was a most remarkable woman. Under her husband's influence, she became more and more interested in Buddhism and eventually surpassed him in wisdom and practice. She wanted to become a nun, but her husband objected, at least until a second child was born. When Kumarajiva was seven, his father finally relented. The mother took her son, and both of them entered the Buddhist Order.

When Kumarajiva was nine or ten, he travelled with his mother to India, where they studied under a famous Hinayana teacher. When he was 12, they returned to Central Asia, this time to Kushan, where they continued their studies. Already the boy was known as a precocious scholar and debater. The two spent a year in Kashgar studying Abhidharma (Hinayana philosophy) and other sutras, and then returned to Kucha to study the Hindu Vedas. Finally they were introduced to Mahayana, and Kumarajiva began his career of copying, translating, and lecturing on Mahayana sutras. He became a fully ordained monk, at the age of 20. His mother, who had attained the level of enlightenment called *anagamin* (one who will never be reborn in this world), retired to India.

Kumarajiva's star was still rising. He became the most celebrated teacher in Central Asia, and his fame spread abroad as far as China. King Fu Chien (Fu Jian) of the former Ch'in kingdom resolved to bring him to his capital of Ch'ang-an. Around 382 he sent his general Lu Kuang (Lu Guang) with an army of 70,000 men to capture Kucha and bring back Kumarajiva. It was to be nearly 20 years, however, before Kumarajiva reached China.

General Lu Kuang stormed Kucha, killed the king, and captured the Buddhist sage. However, when he heard bad news from China, that the king had been overthrown and replaced by an inimical monarch, the general decided not to return home. Instead he returned only part of the way, carved out a petty kingdom of his own, and took his prize captive with him.

The general took perverse delight in humiliating his prisoner. He was not a Buddhist, and was not impressed by Kumarajiva, who was then about 40 years old. He insisted that the monk marry a princess of Kucha. When Kumarajiva refused, the general got him drunk and

locked him up in the same room with the princess. By dawn Kumarajiva was no longer either a teetotaler or a virgin.

Kumarajiva, always a scholar at heart, did not waste his time during his long sojourn in western China. He became fluent in the Chinese language, attracted many disciples, and even won the grudging admiration of the general. When the new king of Ch'in (called Later Ch'in), who was a Buddhist, begged the general to send Kumarajiva to China the general refused.

It took a second military invasion to get Kumarajiva into China at last. In 401 an army from China overthrew the general and brought his hostage safely to the capital of Ch'ang-an.

Here the famous teacher was treated with great respect. He was given the title of National Preceptor and put in charge of translating the sutras into Chinese. He was given every facility, including a team of linguists to assist him, and splendid quarters in the royal palace. Under such favourable circumstances he was able to turn out one translation after another, all of them unexcelled in their accuracy and elegant style. The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma (*Myoho Renge-kyo* in Sino-Japanese) was his masterpiece.

As Kumarajiva grew older, the king began to fear that his incomparable talent would be lost to the world after his death. The solution seemed to be for him to have an heir, who would carry on his work. He ordered that the sage be waited upon by ten comely maidens, hoping that at least one of them would become the mother of his child. Kumarajiva relented, but he was not proud of his luxurious life-style. He is said to have told his pupils, 'You must take only the lotus flower that grows out of the mire, and not touch the mire itself'.

Many Buddhist monks resented Kumarajiva's way of life, and a fellow Central Asian, Buddhabhadra, translator of the Flower Garland Sutra, criticized him openly. So popular was Kumarajiva, however, that it was the critic Buddhabhadra who was forced to leave the capital. Kumarajiva continued to live there in splendour until the day he died (Mizuno 57–62).

Kumarajiva was the greatest of the translators, but not the only one. Native Chinese scholars later dominated the field, and some of them undertook hazardous journeys to Central Asia or India in search of new texts.

So numerous did these texts become that the Chinese were bewildered by their different styles and doctrines. This is where Chih-i (Zhi-yi) came in. He was the great systematizer, who organized them into a coherent whole. Chih-i (538–97), called Chigi in Japanese, is also known as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai (Japanese *Tendai Daishi*) after the Heavenly Terrace Monastery (*T'ien-t'ai*) where he did most of his teaching.

His work was truly encyclopaedic. He studied all the sutras, both Hinayana and Mahayana, dated them by internal evidence, and

classified them by their teaching methods, the time when they were taught, their contents, and their doctrines. 'The Fourfold Methods of Conversion' are Sudden, Gradual, Secret (individual), and Variable (each listener understanding according to his own capacity). 'The Five Periods (or flavours)' are the Flower Garland, the Deer Park, Expanded (Mahayana), Wisdom, and Lotus-Nirvana. The contents are Combined, Sole, Contrasted, Inclusive, and Pure. 'The Fourfold Doctrines' are Tripitaka (Hinayana), Shared (Hinayana plus Mahayana), Distinctive (Mahayana only), and Complete.

The interlocking of these various components is complex but logical.[22] For example, the highly esteemed Flower Garland Sutra is deemed Sudden in that it is taught without any preparation. Its contents are Combined, i.e. it has the Distinctive and the Complete Doctrines, but it is not 'pure' because it does not contain the Deer Park teachings. Purity belongs to the *Lotus*, which alone teaches the Complete One Vehicle. The final Nirvana Sutra completes the *Lotus* by 'gathering up the remnant' and elaborating some of its points (Chappell 1983, 66).

Chih-i then lines up all the Buddhist systems and compares them to show that all roads lead to Buddhahood. We find statements such as this: 'The First Degree of Faith [in the Complete Doctrine] cuts off false views and reveals the Truth. It is equal to the First Attainment in the Tripitaka Doctrine; to the Stage of Those Who Have the Eight Endurances and the Stage of Insight in the Shared Doctrine; and to the First Abode of the Distinctive Doctrine. Having reached this stage, there is no retrogression' (153).

This is certainly dry reading, and helps explain why Chih-i is much praised and little read. Few readers know enough about the vocabulary used in the many systems to understand what he is talking about. Chih-i is a 'scholar's scholar'; he speaks to the specialist. Yet his aim was practical, not merely theorectical. In maintaining that all of Buddhism found its fulfilment in the Lotus Sutra, he wanted to show that by understanding that sutra, one could achieve Buddhahood in this very life. It was not necessary to pass through all the arduous stages of the various systems if one could go immediately to the final goal. This, he said, could be accomplished by means of correct meditation, which he called 'concentration and insight' or 'stopping and realizing' (*shikan* in Japanese): cutting off the extraneous and realizing insight into the world of reality.

When he founded his monastery at Mount Heavenly Terrace in 575, students flocked there from all over China. They saw in him not only the pillar of orthodoxy but also the daring proponent of something new. His was a new kind of Buddhism, a product of the native soil.

'Chih-i, the greatest Buddhist philosopher in China,' says Zen author D.T. Suzuki, 'was fully awake to the significance of *dhyana* (zen) as the means of attaining Enlightenment . . . His idea was to carry out intellectual and spiritual exercises in perfect harmony, and not

particularly to emphasize either one of the two . . . at the expense of the other' (*Zen Buddhism* 52).

It is to this 'perfect harmony' that we must now turn our attention.

Chapter 6

The Three Thousand Things

Chih-i (A.D. 538–97) did not consider himself the founder of a philosophical school but a successor to a long line of orthodox thinkers stretching back through several Chinese masters to Kumarajiva, on back to Nagarjuna in India, and finally to Shakyamuni himself. His direct Chinese lineage came from Hui-wen, a meditation master who lived earlier in the sixth century. Once when Hui-wen was reading a work by Nagarjuna (now available in its translation by Kumarajiva) he was suddenly struck by these lines:

> What is produced by causes,
> That, I say, is identical with Void.
> It is also identical with mere name.
> It is again the purport of the Middle Path.[23]

Shoko Watanabe, in his 'critical approach' to Japanese Buddhism, claims that Hui-wen misunderstood the meaning of the original Sanskrit text (*Japanese Buddhism* 148). However, that is beside the point. Hui-wen was not simply following the Indian masters, but opening up new vistas according to his own insight. He felt that at last he had discovered what the Buddha meant by the Middle Path. Eagerly he turned to the Wisdom Scriptures and their commentaries by Nagarjuna, and soon found other passages which seemed to confirm his thesis.

From this quiet beginning was to emerge a great philosophical system, the pinnacle of all Buddhist thought. It has had its ups and downs, sometimes gaining the highest approval and sometimes being eclipsed by its rival, the monistic Flower Garland School of Kegon. This school maintains that the phenomenal world is derived from the

noumenal world of the One Mind. It tends to be quietistic and individualistic. Tendai thought, as Hui-wen's system came to be called in Japan, rejects this genetic principle, saying that any emanation of the particular from the universal, of the phenomenal from the absolute, is an impossibility. The phenomenal world can only exist as being comprised in the absolute. Thus this system maintains dynamic tensions, insisting on the reality — the absolute value — of both the universal and the phenomenal. This makes it active and social. Today it is on the ascendancy once more.

The system was developed further by Hui-wen's successor, Hui-ssu (Hui-si, 514–77), and especially by the third patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai ('Heavenly Terrace') School, Chih-i. Saicho (Dengyo Daishi) introduced it to Japan in 805, and it soon came to dominate Japanese Buddhist thought. Nichiren accepted it as axiomatic, and it is his application of the system which is being expounded so vigorously around the world today.

The Perfectly Harmonious Threefold Truth, as the completed doctrine is called, means that the particular apart from the universal is unreal. the universal realizes its true nature in the particular, and the particular derives its meaning from the universal. The Middle Path unites these two aspects of reality. The universal apart from the particular is an abstraction. The particular apart from the universal is unreal (Soothill and Hodous, *Dictionary* 397). 'One is all and all is one' (Takakasu 134). The key lies in the middle term, 'is'.

Mystical philosophers, from Plato in the West to Shankara in the East, have tended to begin in dualism and end in monism. They begin by distinguishing between spirit and body, mind and matter, substance and accident, the One (principle) and the many (phenomena), good and evil, Nirvana and Samsara (the world of change), permanence (Law, Dharma) and change (facts, dharmas), God and the world. They usually end with mind-only (or its opposite, matter-only), spirit-only, substance-only, the One, Nirvana-only, or God becoming 'all in all'. (1 Cor. 15:28).

The Buddha neither began with dualism nor ended with monism, but his followers were not always able to resist the temptation to speak in these categories. Constantly reiterated statements that 'the world is neither real nor unreal, thus nor otherwise' (*Dharma Flower* XVI) are difficult to grasp. Mahayana Wisdom teachings tried to oppose the tendency towards monism with the formula 'Emptiness is Form and Form is Emptiness'. The reader, however, is left bewildered (which is exactly what the author intended), his mind swinging between the two apparent opposites. Nagarjuna, Madhyamika philosophy, and Zen stop at this point, insisting that the reader or practitioner cut the knot by himself (Cheng, *Empty Logic* 55 ff). Chih-i goes right ahead and cuts it for us.

It was Chih-i who brought Buddhist thought to its ultimate exposition. Reality, he said, is not two-fold but three-fold. Phenomena (*ke*)

are, indeed, constantly changing, precisely because they have no permanent substance. They are empty, void (*ku*), just as the sutras have said. Therefore, the 'true state' (*jisso*) is *both* empty *and* transiently real. It is the Middle (*chu*).

For example, a cherry blossom is a temporary phenomenon; it blooms, filling the world with fragrance, and then is scattered by the winds of time. Nevertheless, by nature it is always a cherry blossom; it is not a horse. Oriental philosophers had been turning away from the cherry blossom, seeing it only as a temporary manifestation of an unchanging absolute. They had divided the world into two parts, one of which was visible but unreal (because it is constantly changing), and the other invisible but real (because it is the eternal principle). Others, reversing the two elements, claimed that only the visible was real; the invisible principle was a figment of human imagination.

Now the Heavenly Terrace thinkers pointed out that without void there could be no temporariness (everything would be permanent, which obviously it is not); and without temporariness, there would be no Principle. Change, itself, is principle. Each reveals the other in the third element: the middle.

Chih-i's philosophy can be visualized in an image which he uses in his major work, 'Great Concentration and Insight' (*Maha Shikan*): two intersecting lines (+). The horizontal line represents ever-changing phenomena arising from prior causes in the past and moving off into the future. The vertical line is emptiness, the ungrounded ground of being. They intersect at the middle.

We can easily understand the transient world of causes and effects. We see it around us and within us all the time. By deep thought or meditation we can understand the Void, too, but it is difficult to grasp the Middle where they intersect. The Middle is both temporariness and emptiness; it is also neither temporariness nor emptiness. It is 'thusness'.

'This conception of the Middle Way,' explains Tendai authority Bruno Petzold, 'like the conception of Emptiness, we meet already in the philosophy of Nagarjuna. But here the Middle Way is merely negatively formulated as neither actual existence nor non-existence. In the Tendai philosophy we have a positive definition of the Middle Way (*chu do*), as something that harmonizes Existence (*ke*) and Non-Existence (*ku*). The *Chu Ron* (Madhyamika Sastra) or "Treatise on the Middle", by Nagarjuna, merely rejects the two extremes of "being" and "non-being". The Tendai philosophy puts them into complete harmony and calls that which neither exists nor non-exists *Shin Nyo* or *Bhuta-tathata*, ie., the highest reality' ('Tendai Buddhism as Modern World View', 296).

'The ultimate truth,' explains Dr Takakusu, '. . . is Thusness (*Tathata*), not thisness (*tattva*). Thusness means the true state of things in themselves, the phenomenal world being the state of things manifested

before us. The true state of things cannot be seen directly or immediately. We must see it in the phenomena which are ever changing and becoming. Thus the true state is dynamic. The phenomena themselves *are identical with* the true state of things' (137).

This philosophy of Chih-i is called *Jisso-ron* after the phrase in the Lotus Sutra, *Shoho jisso*, 'all things are the true state'. It is contrasted with the basic teaching of its rival school, the Flower Garland (*Kegon*), which is called *Engi-ron*: 'the doctrine of production by causation'. The latter is totalistic; the former is phenomenological.

Chih-i claimed that if one can fully grasp this dynamic three-fold nature of reality, one has attained enlightenment in this very life. But how is this to be done? How can we hold together in one thought the three truths? How can we avoid going off in one direction or another?

Chih-i thought that this could be done by right meditation. The student can realize void by stopping all discursive thinking while at the same time developing insight into temporariness. If he can keep a perfect balance between the two extremes, he realizes the Middle Path in his own life.

Still, this is easier said than done. It is unfortunate that Chih-i has left no works written in his own hand. All the books attributed to him are really lecture notes compiled by his students. In their present form they make rather dry reading and fail to reveal the vibrant personality of this man who attracted so many disciples. He was a one-to-one teacher. Meditation techniques are strictly personal; no one knew this better than he. The only treatise that may be his own writing is said to have been addressed to his brother, an army officer. It is called 'The Practice of Meditation for Beginners', and is an instruction manual complete with such details as where to live, what to eat, how to sit in meditation, how to prevent illness, how to avoid extraneous thoughts.[24]

Practising two types of meditation at once ('stopping' and 'realizing') is not easy. Edward Conze says in his *Buddhist Meditation* that 'there is even some tension between the two modes of approach, and in a given instant most people are forced to specialize in one' (17). In China most meditators prefer the method of no-thought ('stopping'), and this became the standard practice of the Meditation School of *Chan* (Zen). In India and southern Buddhist countries the way of insight (vipassana) is generally practised. Chih-i's 'three-in-one' method, however excellent in theory, is difficult for the majority of meditators to put into practice. Indeed, this very difficulty was to become the stimulus for new developments in Buddhism.

Nevertheless, Tendai adepts insist that it is the only legitimate way. According to Petzold:

> Meditation in the Tendai Sect is called *Shi kan* or Fixedness and Observation, and not *Zenna* or *Dhyana* as in the Zen Sect, and this difference in name denotes a difference in kind.

> In the Zen school meditation is purely intuitive. We simply look into our heart, hoping to find there the Buddha. This intuition excludes all logical operations; it is anti-intellectual and closely related to Yoga, which has caustically been characterized as 'navel-contemplating'. Of course, the navel, on which the Indian ascetic fixes his regard, is not identical with the heart, into which the disciple of the Zen sect is looking, and the cosmic view of the one is different from that of the other. Nevertheless, the meditation of the Zen school, which rejects all sutras and relies entirely on discipline (besides the four holy truths) has certainly a great resemblance to the self-hypnosis of the Yogin in India and seems directly derived from it.
>
> Quite different is the meditation or *Shi Kan* of the Tendai believer. He does not merely rely upon mystical intuition to find the Buddha in himself, but associates with it metaphysical speculation, and with the help of these 'two wheels' he tries to reach enlightenment. So the Tendai believer on the one hand does not pretend that the mind of the vulgar man, simply by intellectual analyzing and logical systematizing, can comprehend the highest truth, and on the other hand he rejects mere self-absorption. He combines both, holding that the one method which we can call the religious one, does not exclude the other which is evidently philosophical . . .. The Tendai school does not consider our momentary mind as an essentially inferior instrument or as a bar to true knowledge, but on the contrary relies upon this actual mind as an indispensable aid in gaining Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi or Unexcelled Perfect Enlightenment (298–99).
>
> The creative reason in the nature of things and the thinking reason in the human mind are one and the same . . .. If any knowledge of the Absolute is possible at all, it must be based on the knowledge of ourselves, i.e., on our consciousness, which reaches from the abyss of the unconscious to the summit of the human mind, and which in self-contemplation, with its searching glance, penetrates the labyrinth of human nature . . .. As the methods of meditation are more developed in Tendai than in Zen, the effect of meditation will accordingly be greater in the former than in the latter. One who practices Tendai meditation considers consequently, that his own cognition of the Absolute is deeper and more comprehensive than that of the Zen sect practitioner of meditation, in other words that the union with the Absolute . . . reached by *Shi Kan* is more intimate than that accomplished by Dharma Daishi's *Dhyana*.
>
> (300–1)

This concept of the ultimate reality in all passing phenomena has had

enormous influence on Chinese and Japanese art. Every tree, every blade of grass, has cosmic significance. The phenomenal *is* the absolute. A sparrow perched on a rain pipe is more than a bird that appears momentarily and then flies away forever. It is also *jisso*, the true state. It does not symbolize the true state — it manifests the true state.

Chih-i's doctrine of *santai* (the three kinds of truth) has another corollary, one which was brought out more clearly later on by Nichiren. It comes very close to monotheism. Of course, it is not the same. God (*theos*) is conceived as being outside the cosmic process; he creates it 'out of nothing' and can destroy it at will. The Buddha, on the other hand, is the self-realization and self-expression of the cosmos. Since there is only one cosmic process, one Law (Dharma), so there can be only one self-realization of the one truth — one Eternal Original Buddha (*Hombutsu*). There may be buddhas by the billions, but they are all emanations of the Original Buddha. His unexcelled perfect Enlightenment (*Anuttara samyak sambodhi*) transcends the cosmos.

'Emanations', on the other hand, do not mean identity or the loss of personality. 'In Buddhism,' says Dr Takakusu, 'a Buddha, however remote in age or however great in origin, will be individual, for the perfection of knowledge and wisdom is the perfection of personality, and that is a Buddha' (149).

Petzold calls this 'panentheism' (*pan en theo* — all in God) and distinct from pantheism (*pan theo* — all is God). 'God is immanent in the world, but at the same time transcends it — God not being the sum or totality of actual things (i.e., the Universe). That is the teaching of Tendai properly understood . . . It is represented in modern German philosophy by thinkers like Lotze, Fechner, Wundt, and Eucken, and — in classical philosophy at the beginning of the last century — by Schelling, who held that the Absolute is identical with the universe, but the universe is not identical with the Absolute, the world existing inside the Absolute without however being simply identical with it' (291).

Chih-i found these ideas expressed in the *Dharma Flower*, and from it he drew his terminology. From it, too, he worked out an expression of how all things interpenetrate within the Triple Truth. He called this 'the three thousand things in a single life-thought' (*Ichinen sanzen*). By naming 'three thousand things', he did not mean to enumerate all the possible physical and mental combinations. This, indeed, had been done by other thinkers, particularly those of the several Abhidharma schools, who had drawn up long lists of such categories as the '84 types of consciousness in 4 classes and on 4 planes', or similar arrangements.[25] Chih-i's reckoning of 'three thousand' is symbolic, being deduced mostly from indications in Kumarajiva's translation of the *Dharma Flower.*

Buddhist tradition had long held that there are six basic types of living beings, or 'six worlds of existence'. They are human beings, animals, heavenly beings, furious spirits called *asuras*, hungry spirits,

and beings in hell. Since the wheel of life rolls on endlessly, one can be reborn into any of these six worlds depending on one's thoughts and actions in this present life. In Buddhism nothing takes place by chance; everything has a prior cause. A greedy person becomes a hungry spirit; an animal-like being becomes an animal; a cruel person will suffer the cruelties of hell; one-pointed fanaticism leads to rebirth among the *asuras*; the average person is reborn as a human, rich or poor, handsome or ugly, healthy or sickly, depending on prior causes; a kindly or spiritually minded person will be reborn in one of the many heavens. In other words, each being creates his own destiny and manifests the world which he envisions in his innermost self. At the next stage he may rise higher or fall back to a lower realm. All life is in constant flux from moment to moment; there is nothing fixed or permanent about one's world of existence.[26]

Chi-i implicitly and Nichiren explicitly gave this scheme a psychological interpretation (Nichiren, *Kanjin Honzon Sho* 13). Chih-i added four more worlds to the six, making ten in all. These comprise the world of the Buddha's Disciples, of the solitary self-enlightened ones (*pratyekabuddhas*), of the altruistic Bodhisattvas, and of the perfectly enlightened Buddha. Nichiren taught that these worlds exist within all of us.

We can consider this classification in terms of motion. Life begins when the first tiny one-celled creature detaches itself from the primeval ooze and begins to float towards the light. It starts with self-mobility, but mobility of the most limited sort. This is the realm of Hell — minimum mobility. It is like being buried alive, unable to move freely.

The next step in the evolution of life is to the realm of Hunger. Primitive creatures are ruled by their appetites, but they are not entirely helpless like the denizens of Hell.

The realm of animality has even more mobility, sometimes to an extraordinary degree. But here fear plays an equally vital role, for the animal is both hunter and hunted.

A human being has more mobility than the animal. He is the hunter more often than the hunted. He can move about with relative impunity, especially in his mind. The more mobile he can become, the happier he believes himself to be. Early human history is the story of migrations and counter-migrations back and forth across the globe. It is also the story of restless minds attempting to push back the frontiers of ignorance. However, if we chain a man to a dungeon wall, he sinks back to animality, hunger, and hell.

Folk art depicts the *asuras*, denizens of the next world, as horsemen galloping wildly across the heavens. They are also said to reside in the billows which pound against the shore where the sea of the unconscious breaks into the physical world. Their unleashed frenzy can be terrifying; it can also be purifying. Spiritually the *asuras* are the critics and reformers, those who strike out boldly at what they consider

wrong. From this they derive their satisfaction and sense of self-esteem.

However, there is an even higher happiness, a state of unlimited mobility. We call this Heaven; here there are no limits imposed by space. Even righteous anger is dissolved in pure well-being and joy. When we think of heaven, we imagine it inhabited by winged beings who can go wherever they like.

However, according to Buddhism, even Heaven has its limits; whatever has a beginning must also have an end. So Chih-i, following the *Dharma Flower*, postulated three even higher worlds, free not only from the limitations of space but to a greater or lesser extent from time as well.

The first of these higher mental worlds is that of the disciple. In a world of learning, time and space melt away in the thrill of discovery. A true student can forget all about poverty or hunger as long as he can penetrate further into the unknown. To him this is a happiness that far outdistances the passive rapture of Heaven. No monk ever feels that he has given up anything of value as long as he is learning something he did not know before. However, even learning has limits, and a monk will want to return to the world of common pleasures if he feels that he is no longer making progress. For this reason Buddhist monastic vows can be broken. Learning cannot be forced; it must spring from an inner drive.

All studies are solitary and therefore celibate. The student can be devoted only to his object of learning. Any student is a temporary monk; a monk is a dedicated student. Celibacy plays an important role in Buddhism, but it is not the only way, at least in Mahayana. If ever a monk feels that his learning has reached its limits, he should abandon monasticism and live like other men.

This was the course taken by Shinran (1173-1262), a Tendai monk who decided that nothing could be gained by studies. The grace of the Buddha, he said, is received by absolute trust in him, and learning only postpones the arising of such faith. According to Shinran, faith is the Buddha-nature, while doubt (necessary in any learning process) arises from the disruptive ego (Bloom, *Shinran* 39, 41). Since there can be no learning without some prior doubt, Shinran abandoned his studies and monasticism, got married, and raised a family. He was the first Japanese Buddhist teacher officially to do so, setting a precedent among his followers that has continued down to modern times. Branches of the sect which he founded have been headed by his descendants ever since.

Martin Luther also gave up monasticism and married once he decided that salvation was received by faith alone. Kumarajiva, on the other hand, was never at ease with women until late in his life, when most of his learning was behind him. Chih-i, an eternal student, remained celibate all his life. Nichiren saw nothing wrong with marriage in itself, but preferred celibacy, being a life-long student. 'The Buddha's

thought is unfathomable,' he wrote. 'I, myself, have not yet realized it' (*Kembutsu Mirai Ki*).

Similar to learning is the next highest world, that of the solitary buddhas (*pratyekabuddhas*). This is the realm of self-realization. It might also be called the world of creativity, for it is inhabited especially by painters, dancers, writers, musicians, and other artists, who become completely absorbed in the task at hand. It can be realized by anyone who throws himself into some work and transforms it into a piece of art. At such times the ego is dissolved. Robert Bellah points out that during the Tokugawa Period in Japan (1600–1868), many Buddhists felt they could express Buddhism better by working at their profession than by retiring to a monastery (*Tokugawa Religion*, 119).

Like learning, self-realization involves celibacy. One cannot share one's self-realization with someone else; it is a solitary experience. There have been some who have held that self-realization need not be solitary. There is a 'left-handed path' that maintains that the same state of self-realization can be attained by two lovers in the sexual act. This is a basic idea of Tantrism. 'Without — in the true sense — the lustiness of sex,' says Alan Watts in *Nature, Man and Woman*, 'religion is joyless and abstract; without the self-abandonment of religion, sex is a mechanical masturbation' (204).

Most Buddhists, however, are suspicious of the 'left-handed path', and it never had a large following in China or Japan. Self-realization is normally achieved by oneself, alone.

Next we come to the noble world of the Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattva seeks only to help others. He has maximum mobility because he is not fettered by cares for his own life. Being without pride, he is also without fear. The *Flower Dharma* praises many Bodhisattvas, but its real heroes are the Bodhisattvas from the Earth — men and women of flesh and blood, not supernatural beings. It is they who are entrusted with the task of disseminating to future generations the liberating Sutra.

The tenth and ultimate world is that of Buddha. It has no limits of any kind, penetrating all time and space. Words cannot describe it; it must be experienced to be known. 'Come and see,' said the Buddha. '*Ehipasiko*!'

The Bodhisattvas save from without; the Buddhas save from within. The Sutra says, 'The Buddhas have appeared in this world to purify all beings by having them open the treasury of the Buddha-wisdom which they are unaware of possessing within themselves. The Buddhas have appeared in this world to show the Buddha-wisdom to them. The Buddhas have appeared in this world to have them understand what the Buddha-wisdom is. The Buddhas have appeared in this world to lead them into the path of the Buddha-wisdom.'[27]

Since Chih-i teaches one-in-all and all-in-one, the ten worlds are not merely future states after death. They exist, all ten of them, in our

everyday life. Each exists potentially in the other nine, so any one of them can emerge into being at any moment. I can be at work in an office, completely absorbed in what I am doing (the world of self-realization). An assistant blunders, I am annoyed (*asura* — anger). I scold him (animality). He looks hurt and confused, so I calm down (the normal human state) and try to help him (Bodhisattva). The boss enters. I stand up, wondering what to expect (animality again). He congratulates us for our good work. I am surprised and delighted (Heaven). And so it goes throughout the day. Sometimes I remain in one world for a relatively long time. At other times I pass abruptly from one world to another.

I can do this because none of the ten worlds is pure and whole in itself; they are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, each of them contains all the others. There is an element of pain (Hell) in even the most ecstatic pleasure (Heaven), and vice versa. There is Heaven in Hunger (anticipating the joys of satisfaction) as well as Hell (the gnawing pains). Even motives may be mixed. A thief may rob a petrol station (animality) in order to feed his children (Bodhisattva). Each of the ten worlds contains all the others, at least potentially. Since Shakyamuni Buddha was a mortal living in all the other nine worlds, Buddhahood must exist in our mortal bodies as well. Therefore Buddhahood, too, is everywhere, even in Hell.

Nichiren reaches an exciting conclusion from this. It is commonly said that Shakyamuni Buddha is our ruler, teacher, and parent. But he could be none of these things if he were not first an ordinary mortal. We are not 'created' by the Buddha. On the contrary, it is we ordinary mortals who create him. Everything necessary to become a Buddha lies within our own selves. The difference between him and us is qualitative: he is enlightened, we are not (M.W. 1:90–91). We become Buddhas not by eradicating our deeply rooted desires but by changing the quality of our lives.

Thus the ten worlds have now multiplied to one hundred. In our predominant state of the moment all the others are included. This is true of all living beings. In addition there are ten factors, which differ from one being to another. These are listed in the *Dharma Flower* as 1) appearance, 2) self-identification or nature, 3) embodiment, 4) potency, 5) function 6) inner cause or motive, 7) environmental cause, 8) effects, 9) rewards or retributions, and 10) the unity of these nine factors, their inseparability. Our 100 states are really $10 \times 10 \times 10$, or one thousand.

There are three more categories of basic importance; these are individual, social, and temporal/geographical. Individual differences were explained in the early Buddhist sutras. The ever-changing individual is made up of five 'bundles' (*skandhas*): material form, sense reactions (perception), mental ideas of what has been perceived (conception), volition, and consciousness. The first could be called

'physical' and the others 'spiritual', but all five depend on each other and interact.

Consciousness is the most complex category, and Buddhist thinkers subjected it to minute scrutiny centuries before the beginnings of modern psychology. Nine levels of consciousness are distinguished. The first six correspond to the six sense organs: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the conscious mind. The seventh is self-consciousness. Next comes the subconscious or 'store-consciousness' (*alaya-vijnana*). The subconscious stores memories of everything that has ever been perceived since beginningless time, buried in layer after layer. Modern psychotherapy seeks to delve down to this level. Finally, at the very basis, lies the pure consciousness of the Buddha (*amala-vijnana*).

Social differences, which make up the next category, are obvious. For example, it makes a tremendous difference to me whether I am born into a prosperous or a backward society, into a loving or a broken home.

Finally there are the differences of time and place. There is all the difference in the world between being in an automobile accident and observing it from the next car. A few seconds or a few inches can change my destiny.

For convenience, we can classify these differences into three groups, although in reality they are innumerable. Thus we have the symbolic counting of 10 worlds × 10 (their mutual possession) × 10 individual factors × 3 realms of existence, giving us the figure of three thousand. The three thousand simply stand for all possibilities. Since all is one and one is all, the three thousand possibilities exist in a single moment of thought. This is called the 'Three Thousand Things in One Mind' (*Ichinen Sanzen*), and it is the key to the practical side of Chih-i's philosophy. All possibilities for good or evil lie dormant within us. We do not have to train ourselves for aeons and aeons until we reach a higher state; that higher state is available right now. What we have to do is bring it out into the open.

Chih-i did not teach a kind of idealism, 'It's all in the mind'. This was the position of the rival Flower Garland (*Kegon*) and 'Consciousness Only' (*Yogachara*, Japanese *Hosso*) schools. He does not say that outer objects are only actual or potential contents of inner consciousness and have no real existence, but rather that both the individual mind and the surrounding world have objective existence and are involved in each other.

'I do not say: "One mind exists first and all things exist afterwards" — nor do I say: "All things exist first and one mind exists afterwards."' (*Maka Shikan*)

He rejects the subjective idealism of Asanga's *Yogacharya* school, which established the view that the world is only a reflex of the subjective mind. He also rejects the realism of the Sarvastivada school, which acknowledged the existence of matter and mind, but only as a

plurality of so many phenomenal dharmas independent of each other. He acknowledges the existence of both the mind and the universe, harmonizing them and attributing to each an absolute reality.

Petzold summed up Chih-i's 'pantheistic realism' or 'panentheism' this way:

1. There is no real antithesis between subject and object.
2. The universe, being identical with the mind, is rational; and the mind, being identical with the universe, is irrational.
3. The essence of the mind is eternal like the universe, as there is nothing that precedes the mind or that has produced the mind.
4. The human mind is not a passive receptacle or a mere reflex of nature but, like nature, is active and creative.

(289)

Before leaving Chih-i, one other teaching should be mentioned, which, though not original to him is important to his system. This is the doctrine of the 'Three Bodies of the Buddha" (*Trikaya/Sanjin*). The term 'body' is not to be understood as body opposed to spirit. Rather it is a manifestation — the three properties of the one Buddha. The first is the manifested body (*Ojin*), the Buddha revealing himself in this world as the historical Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni, however, is the living embodiment of absolute truth, the Dharma-body (*Hosshin*). These two 'bodies' are linked in the Reward-body (*Hoshin*), in which the Buddha enjoys the fruits of perfect enlightenment. From our point of view the Manifest-body is the Buddha visible; the Reward-body is the Buddha intelligible; the Dharma-body is the Buddha as he truly is.

Notice how this corresponds with the Triple Truth, which lies at the heart of Chih-i's system. The Dharma-body is the Absolute, Void — potentially anything. The Reward-body is the Middle. The Manifest-body is the man Shakyamuni, who is born, grows, attains enlightenment, teaches, and passes away. The three are the one Buddha.

Both Chih-i and Nichiren stress that we ourselves are the three bodies of Buddha. Nichiren says that our physical body, consisting of the same elements which make up the cosmos, is the Dharma-body; our mind is the Reward-body; our behaviour is the Manifest-body. The innate Buddha-nature lies within us just as the flower is in the seed. In the same way as the flower needs the warming rays of the sun to bring it forth from potentiality into bloom, so our Buddha-nature requires an outside force to draw it into awakening. That force is the *Dharma Flower.*

The final sutra which Shakyamuni preached is called the Nirvana Sutra. Naturally Shakyamuni's followers were particularly concerned to record his last words and deeds, and there are several versions of his final weeks, both in the Hinayana and in the Manayana traditions. As a general rule, the Hinayana sutras, which closely resemble each other,

concentrate on his final acts, while the Mahayana sutras, which introduce a great deal of new material, concentrate on his last teachings. Chih-i feels that these teachings are merely amplifications of what has been taught already in the *Dharma Flower*, clarifying various points.

One of these points is that the Buddha-nature is inherent in *all* beings; there are no such things as 'hopeless sinners' or 'eternal damnation'. This had already been discussed in the *Dharma Flower*. Another point is that Nirvana, which had previously been left undefined as 'beyond words', is now given positive qualities: permanence, bliss, personality, and purity. From being the supreme negation of life as we know it, it becomes the supreme affirmation of life in all its pristine glory.

When Chih-i died in 597 he had every reason to believe that his life's work had been an unqualified success. China was united under one emperor, a devout Buddhist, after nearly three centuries of division and warfare. The future of Chinese Buddhism seemed finally secure. Chih-i had contributed to the peace and stability of his country by uniting the many schools of the dynasty's religion into one coherent whole. He had raised Chinese scholarship to new levels, surpassing even the Indians. In demonstrating that all Buddhism was one, he had put back together what centuries of Indian and Chinese philosophers had fragmented. All that remained to be done by his successors was to copy down his lectures, set up schools around the country, and spread the word. His immediate successor, Chang-an (Zhang-an, 561–632), began to do just that.

However, drastic changes were on their way. A new dynasty, the T'ang swept into power in 618 and remained in power for three centuries (618–907). Since Buddhism in general and T'ien-t'ai Buddhism in particular had been so closely associated with the old regime, they now came under fire. Deprived of state support for its schools, T'ien-t'ai Buddhism went into a rapid decline. It might have died out completely had it not been that future scholars frequently rediscovered it and marvelled at its comprehensive grasp of Buddhist fundamentals. To this day it remains both the most scholarly and the most liberal school of the Great Vehicle.

Scholarly Buddhism, however, was forced by the T'ang Dynasty out of the capital and into isolated monasteries. It ceased to have any influence on public life, being replaced by Confucianism and neo-Confucianism, which firmly propped up the social order and culminated in the despotic emperors.[28] Buddhism became the refuge of the dispossessed, the outsiders. As such, it performed a useful function in Chinese life, but this was a secondary role, not the primary one that Chih-i had hoped for (Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* 106–7).

Under these circumstances the forms of Buddhism which survived best were anti-intellectual schools. Ch'an (Japanese, Zen) ridiculed 'dependence on words and letters', meaning any kind of scholarly study of the sutras. Chih-i had taught a two-sided meditation involving both

reason and intuition. Ch'an used intuition only. It aimed at an immediate awareness of reality in which subjective and objective are transcended. It could not be taught by books or even by teachers.

Ch'an (meditation, from Sanskrit *dhyana*) was for a small, highly disciplined minority. The masses preferred devotion to Kuan Yin to gain benefits in this life or to the Buddha of Infinite Life (Amitayus) to gain benefits in the next. Neither of these types of Buddhism needed government support or contributed anything to the support of the state. Their function was strictly individual.

Chih-i's great vision of a unified Buddhism never quite died out, however. One of his greatest successors was Miao-lo (Miao-luo, 711–82), who is called the Reviver of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism.[29] He systematized the works of Chih-i. In fact, he identified with them so closely that sometimes it is difficult to determine how much comes from his master and how much from himself. Nichiren frequently quotes from Miao-lo, who was indirectly responsible for introducing Chih-i's teachings to Japan. His pupil Tao-sui taught them to Saicho (Dengyo Daishi), who founded the Tendai School of Japan.

It was in Japan that Chih-i's unified Buddhism came close to becoming a reality, and it is there we must next turn our attention.

Chapter 7

Buddhism in Japan

Buddhism came to Japan from Korea in the sixth century. It arrived under very different circumstances than it had in China. There it had trickled in under the opprobium of a despised foreign culture; it had to convince a society already ancient and sure of its superiority. In Japan, on the other hand, Buddhism came as the vehicle of that same ancient civilization, now doubly venerable in the traditions of both India and China. The Japanese court was impressed from the start, and in spite of violent opposition from a few feudal families, adopted it enthusiastically.

The arrival of Buddhism in Japan could be compared with the introduction of Christianity into Russia in the tenth century. Both began with the conversion of the reigning monarch and his immediate retainers. Both monarchs hoped that the political, cultural, philosophical, and ethical values of the new religion would have a civilizing effect upon their rude and barbarian people. Neither monarch adopted the new religion out of the blue, but only after the groundwork had been laid down by the previous couple of generations. Both were influenced by older women — Grand Prince Vladimir by his grandmother Olga, and Prince Shotoku by his aunt Suiko. Both princes adopted their new faith with sincerity and understanding.

Each religion arrived already hoary with tradition, complete with sacred scriptures in a mysterious foreign tongue, liturgical art and implements, gorgeously arrayed clergy, and foreign scholars, able to instruct on the fine points. Neither country dared tamper with the received scriptures, merely giving their own pronunciation to the foreign words. (Old Slavonic, of course, was much closer to Russian than Chinese was to Japanese; the latter two do not even belong to the same language family.) In both cases a thorough understanding of the new

faith could be obtained only by an educated elite, who were trained by the foreign clergy.

There were differences, too. Grand Prince Vladimir had all the idols of the old faith thrown into the river. Prince Regent Shotoku was not disrespectful of the ancestral deities, but permitted them to go on living side by side with the new foreign gods. Vladimir received his religion direct from Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It was already a rigid orthodoxy that had shed all ancient heresies. Shotoku received his from small kingdoms in Korea, where there were various schools of thought. There was no one orthodox system. Instead, the 'six schools of Nara', as they came to be called, settled down side by side, sometimes in the same temples. Educated scholars were expected to be acquainted with all six of them.

Like Vladimir of Russia, Prince Shotoku is looked back to as the real father of his country, the ideal monarch who brought the land out of the darkness of paganism and into the light of civilization. However, Shotoku was more than just a patron of Buddhism. He became a student and then a teacher, writing commentaries and delivering lectures. Although he was not familiar with the works of Chih-i, he wrote seven commentaries, including four on the *Dharma Flower*. In 594 he proclaimed Buddhism the official state religion. There was bitter resentment from some feudal lords, but in the end the new faith prevailed.

From the very beginning there was a close connection between the shamanistic emperor, whose prayers could bring rain in times of drought and safety in times of storms, and the new faith, which was highly regarded for its magical powers.[30] By the end of the Nara period (794) church and state were thoroughly intertwined. Religion was a department of the state, and its purpose was to protect the state. The government decided who was to be ordained to the clergy and even which school of thought he was to study. The monks, as often as not, were aristocrats with political ambitions of their own.

It was partly to break the power of the Nara clergy that the capital was moved from Nara to Kyoto. The emperor wanted not only a purer form of Buddhism but also a more docile one. He sent two outstanding scholars to China to find out how things were done there. The two men met at the seaport but sailed on separate ships, studied under different masters, and returned with different types of Buddhism.

These were the days of the T'ang Dynasty in China. Buddhism had been dispossessed and was no longer a department of the state. Sometimes its very existence was in peril, but at least it was free, for the most part, to run its own house. Thus, instead of encountering a docile Buddhism in China, the two Japanese scholars found models which had been toughened by the fires of persecutions.

The first of the two visiting scholars was Saicho (767–822), who was later called Dengyo Daishi. He was a devout student of the *Dharma*

Flower and had already been introduced to some works of Chih-i. Instead of staying at the corrupt monasteries in Nara, he had withdrawn to the mountains to practise meditation. Paul Groner in his exhaustive study, *Saicho: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, points out that this virtually unprecedented step deprived him of any hope of advancement within the clerical bureaucracy. However, Saicho was not interested in such things. In the mountains he made his famous five vows:

1. So long as I have not attained the stage where my six faculties are pure, I will not venture out into the world.
2. So long as I have not realized the absolute, I will not acquire any special skills or arts (such as medicine, divination, and calligraphy).
3. So long as I have not kept all of the precepts purely, I will not participate in any lay donor's Buddhist meeting.
4. So long as I have not attained wisdom, I will not participate in any worldly affairs unless it be to benefit others.
5. May any merit from my practice in the past, present, or future be given not to me, but to all sentient beings so that they may attain supreme enlightenment.

(28–9).

When he arrived in China, he knew just where he wanted to go — to T'ien-t'ai, the Heavenly Terrace. There he diligently copied manuscripts by Chih-i, Miao-lo, and other T'ien-t'ai masters. Other forms of Buddhism had arisen in China since the days of Chih-i: esotericism, Zen, and Pure Land. Saicho wanted to find out all he could about them, too. He studied meditation under a Zen master and was initiated into a branch of esotericism. Finally he collected everything he could about Mahayana monastic rules. After only a year in China (804–5), he returned home laden with books, and then set up a study centre on Mount Hiei, not far from the new capital in Kyoto.

Saicho believed that scholarship must serve the nation, and that learning must be eclectic and open to new ideas or discoveries. The search for truth outweighs the obligations of sectarianism. A teacher must teach what he believes to be true even if such teachings are not found in his own sect. And if he finds his own sect, or even his own personal views, to be in error, he should come right out and say so. Partisanship has no place in real scholarship.

When the second envoy, Kukai, returned from China the following year, Saicho was delighted. He did not hesitate to turn to the younger man to see if there was anything more he could learn. He borrowed books from Kukai, sent pupils to learn from him, and kept a lively correspondence with him. Since Kukai had specialized in esotericism, Saicho even accepted initiation from him — an action which implied

that Kukai knew some things which he did not.

Gradually it became apparent, however, that the two men had chosen irreconcilable paths. Saicho had preferred the open way; to him all wisdom was good irrespective of its place of origin. Kukai had learned a secret line of transmission; it could be passed on only from master to pupil in strictest confidence. Sooner or later a pupil would have to choose which method he preferred, and some of Saicho's favourite students were so intrigued by the mysteries of esotericism that they abandoned their master and resorted to Kukai instead. These defections must have hurt Saicho, who was having trouble getting students to say at his chilly mountain temple, where they were subjected to a strenuous course of training lasting 12 years.

Both Saicho and Kukai had to have support from the Emperor in order to continue their work, for the court still controlled Buddhism with an iron hand. The Emperor was tired of the political intrigues coming out of the old Nara sects, and he was glad to welcome these new up-to-date sects, the Tendai of Saicho and the Shingon ('True Word') of Kukai.[31] He gave them a status equal to that of the old sects and refused to permit the Nara sects to build temples in the new capital.

For Kukai this was sufficient; all he needed was a place of his own where he could train his disciples and practise his esoteric rites. He asked for and received permission to build a temple on distant Mt. Koya. Then he was requested to come to the capital and supervise the construction of what was to be one of the two temples 'protecting the nation'. He did so, but only on condition that this temple not be eclectic, like those of Nara, but would teach and practise his esotericism exclusively.

'This was revolutionary,' comments Yoshito Hakeda. 'In the great temples of Nara students belonging to many sects were allowed to stay in the same temple and study together, and on Mt. Hiei [under Saicho], where all the monks belonged to the Tendai sect, there were students of both Exoteric and Esoteric practices. Kukai . . . had now succeeded in establishing his religion on a solid institutional basis by state authorization' (*Kukai* 55).

Kukai (or Kobo Daishi, as he was called posthumously) could accomplish so much partly because the time was ripe and partly because of his extraordinary personality. Saicho may have impressed people with his scholarship, but Kukai fascinated them. He was famed as a saint, miracle-worker, inventor of Japanese script, authority on Sanskrit and Chinese, painter, and master builder. He was believed to know everything and be able to do anything. To this day his followers believe that his body remains uncorrupted on Mt. Koya, awaiting the day when he will return to life.

Kukai's secret system of Buddhism can be traced back to India of the sixth or seventh century. At that time, Hinduism was emerging as the dominant religion of the country, replacing Buddhism. In the ferment

of new and old faiths, there emerged a new school — or most likely, re-emerged an old school, the ancient 'Great Mother' cult of the pre-Indo-European natives. Now considerably more sophisticated after centuries of contact with Buddhism and Hinduism, it assumed elements of both and claimed to transcend them both in profundity. Known as Tantra, it proclaimed itself 'too hot to handle' lightly, and suitable only for initiated adepts. Its published works are full of cryptic symbolism understandable to the insider but deliberately confusing to the outsider.[32]

It is believed that during the seventh century Tantra divided into two streams of transmission. One stream moved up to Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia, and down to Java. The Tibetan forms (there are four major branches) are the best known in the West. Since the Chinese conquest of Tibet in 1950 they have been brought to India, Europe, and America by Tibetan refugees, who are anxious to pass them on to worthy recipients.[33]

The other stream of transmission was carried to China by three Indian teachers during the August T'ang period (637–735). The last of the three, Amoghavajra, enjoyed much prestige at the imperial court, where he tutored three successive emperors. He transmitted his secret doctrines to the Chinese master, Hui-kuo, who in turn initiated Kukai. Hui-kuo had already been initiated into the system of the second Indian master, so he and his pupil Kukai could claim to have received the whole of esotericism.

It is curious that Hui-kuo should have decided to pass the secret transmission on to a foreigner rather than to another Chinese. Kukai says that he just 'happened' to meet the master Hui-kuo. As soon as Hui-kuo saw him, he smiled joyfully and said, 'I knew you would come! I have been waiting for such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look on you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came there was no one to whom I could transmit the teachings' (Hakeda, *Kukai* 31–2).

Saicho, too, was anxious to learn the secret teachings, and while he was in China, he received some sort of an initiation. It must have been an elementary introduction, however, for when he got back to Japan, he went to Kukai for two more initiations. However, Kukai would not confer the highest initiation upon him unless he would become his disciple. This Saicho could not do.

After Saicho's death, his pupil Ennin went to China to learn the secret doctrines for himself. By then conditions had changed, and Buddhism was once more being persecuted. Esoteric masters had gone into hiding; Ennin had difficulty finding anyone qualified to initiate him. After many adventures he managed to get the necessary initiations and smuggle esoteric texts and implements out of China to Japan. In this way Saicho's Tendai sect acquired an esoteric transmission of its own to compete with that of the rival Shingon sect of Kukai.[34]

While Kukai was enjoying phenomenal success introducing his colourful new style of Buddhism, Saicho was having a harder time. He, too, received permission to train candidates for the priesthood at his retreat on Mount Hiei, not far from the capital. But he wanted more than that. Basing his position on the *Dharma Flower* and Tendai philosophy, he wanted to unify all of Japanese Buddhism under the umbrella of pure Mahayana and free it from the state bureaucracy. However, he had to tread gently so as not to offend the state which was sponsoring him.

Saicho had to fight his battles on two fronts — three, if we include his unfortunate misunderstanding with Kukai (he gradually dropped out of this debate, however). On the one hand, he had to demonstrate the superiority of the 'pure' Mahayana of Tendai over the 'provisional' Mahayana of the six sects of Nara. At the same time he had to convince the state bureaucracy, which was closely allied to the Nara sects, to release its iron grip on the Buddhist clergy.

Saicho called the Nara sects 'provisional' for two reasons. First, they did not teach the *Dharma Flower* doctrine that all living beings participate in the universal Buddha-nature. Secondly, they ordained monks according to Hinayana, not Mahayana precepts. Since the Hinayana precepts were based on entirely different philosophical suppositions (knowing nothing of the universal Buddha-nature), this ordination, he maintained, was basically wrong.

He had challenged the religious establishment at the seat of its power: its selection and control of the clergy. His challenge was soon taken up by the greatest theologian of the old order, Tokuitsu of the Hosso school. Hosso, which by then had nearly eclipsed the other Nara schools in influence, had a venerable tradition going back to Nalanda University in India, where it had been called Yogacara, and boasted such eminent forefathers as the philosopher Vasubandhu and the translator Paramartha, who was second only to Kumarajiva for the quantity and quality of his works. Holding that reality was caused by mere ideation, it had made monumental contributions to Mahayana thought. In the learned Tokuitsu it had a worthy champion.

At issue was the question of the universal Buddha-nature. Tokuitsu maintained that unless one had the 'seeds' of Buddhahood in one's subconscious mind (the eighth consciousness), one could not possibly become a Buddha. Saicho (and esotericism and the Flower Garland School [*Kegon*] along with him) held that Buddhahood resides not in the subconscious, but in the 'pure consciousness' of the Buddha — the ninth consciousness. It is universal (*Ichishima*, 'Lotus Debates').

The debate, which lasted for years and was carried on by correspondence and documents submitted to the court for arbitration, stirred enormous interest. Paul Groner calls it 'one of the high points in the intellectual history of Japanese Buddhism' (93). At issue was the very nature of man. Both scholars quoted copious sources in defence

of their arguments, but Saicho, who knew more about Hosso than Tokuitsu did about Tendai, was able to turn Tokuitsu's sources against him. Although Tokuitsu never admitted defeat (the debate was still going on when Saicho died), it was clear that he had met his match. It was Saicho's Tendai school which would dominate Japanese Buddhism for the next four centuries, while the Hosso school slipped slowly into the background.

By winning his theoretical argument Saicho was able to win his practical argument, too. The Six Sects of Nara were only provisionally Mahayana. Real Mahayana recognized the universal Buddha-nature, and real Mahayana ordinations should be controlled by Mahayana clergy (not court bureaucrats) using Mahayana precepts. Unfortunately, he never knew that he had won his greatest and final victory. When he died on 4 June 822, the issue was still under consideration at court. The decision in his favour came one week later.

The most important consequence of Saicho's work was that in maintaining the universal Buddha-nature, he brought Buddhism out of the narrow aristocratic court circles and made it available to everyone. He wanted his school on Mt. Hiei to train scholars who would serve the nation, and that meant sending graduates out into the provinces. These graduates, according to Saicho's plan, were trained in all the philosophical systems of the Great Vehicle and in practical skills which could be put to good use in remote parts of the country. Tendai became the nation's leading school of Buddhist arts and sciences, while esotericism became the most popular practice.

Most of Saicho's successors on Mount Hiei considered the *Dharma Flower* philosophy and esoteric practice to be two sides of the same coin. They used esotericism to answer the old nagging question, 'How does one put the *Dharma Flower* into actual practice? We agree that it is the highest truth, but what are we supposed to *do* about it?' The answer seemed to be, 'Believe the *Dharma Flower*, but practise the esoteric rites of body (gestures), mouth (sacred mantras), and mind.'

These mystical rites appealed to commoners as much as they did to the court aristocrats, especially now that Saicho and Kukai had cleared the way for anyone to enter into them. There took place no revolution, no sudden democratization of what was still a highly intellectual and hieratic religion. But the theoretical groundwork had been laid, and when the old social order did finally break down around the end of the twelfth century, the stage was set for a new type of truly democratic reforms.

During the next period of Japanese Buddhism, called the Heian Period (794–1185), Tendai almost realized the dream of Chih-i of a unified Buddhism. Its only rival was esoteric Shingon, which continued to remain aloof. But once Tendai had acquired an esoteric transmission of its own, it seemed to have everything. It became the watershed of Japanese Buddhism. Nearly all the founders of the 'new Buddhism' that

was to follow began their careers by studying Tendai Buddhism at Mt. Hiei.

But Tendai had its Achilles' heel. It is often said that Tendai became so broad-minded and so all-inclusive that it simply disintegrated under its own weight. It lost its central dynamic. Nichiren, himself a Tendai monk, accused Mt. Hiei of having become so engrossed in esotericism and other extraneous practices that it forgot all about Chih-i and Saicho. This was probably true, but why did it happen?

Tendai was launched by Saicho with the motto, 'Buddhahood in this very body'. It criticized other sects for taking aeons and aeons to achieve Buddhahood. Tendai (and Shingon) taught the direct path, which promised results in this lifetime. Now where were those results? What was the meaning of 'to achieve Buddhahood'?

Tendai monks in Japan wrote letters to their T'ien-t'ai brethren in China, asking for clarification. The Chinese answered with more theories. Impatiently, the Japanese wrote back. They knew the theories; they wanted concrete methods. Failing to get what they wanted, they turned to esotericism.

Another new practice grew in popularity in the monasteries, a practice which could be undertaken by laymen, as well. This consisted of calling on the name of Amida Buddha, *Namu Amida-butsu*. Amida had promised that if mortals were too sinful to achieve enlightenment in this life, he would welcome them into his paradise after death. There enlightenment was assured. With most monks, *Nembutsu* (calling Buddha's name) was one practice among many. The Tendai Patriarch Ennin, the same man who travelled to China in search of initiation into esotericism, used to practise *Nembutsu*, himself. He even set it to music. But this was not his sole practice. He and others used it only to prepare for a happy death and rebirth in the next world. What was new after his times was that some monks began to make it their only practice. Finally the Tendai monk Honen (1133–1212) declared that any other practice but *Nembutsu* was totally useless. 'Discard, close, ignore and abandon' all the sutras, he said. For such a shocking proposition, he was expelled from the Tendai Brotherhood and exiled by the emperor. This just gave him the chance to preach to the common people, and his new Buddhism, called Pure Land (*Jodo*), began to spread rapidly.

The dilemma (or impatience) of Tendai monks at this time can be illustrated by the career of Shinran (1173–1262), who founded the True Pure Land Sect (*Jodo Shinshu*). As a young man he suffered agonies of religious doubt. In a dream, he had been told that he would die at the age of 30. He tried desperately to achieve enlightenment before his thirtieth birthday. By the time he was 29, he felt that he had failed; he was no closer to enlightenment then than he was the day he began. At this point someone advised him to visit Honen.

Honen told Shinran that the sun shines whether we want it to or not.

It is the sun's business to shine; it is for us to be shone upon. It is the Buddha's business to save; it is for us to be saved. When he heard these words, Shinran felt his inner doubts melt away. From that day on he abandoned any kind of self-effort, relying enitrely on the 'Other Power' of the compassionate Buddha. For him life meant not to shine, but to be shone upon (Yamamoto, *The Other Power* 19).

'As for me, Shinran, there is nothing left except to believe under the guidance of the teaching of the Venerable Master (Honen): "We are saved by Amida Buddha merely through reciting the Nembutsu alone." For myself, I do not know whether the Nembutsu be truly the cause of Rebirth in the Pure Land, or whether it be the karma to make us sink into the bottomless pit. Even if I am deceived by the Venerable Honen, I shall never regret reciting the Nembutsu and then falling into the bottomless pit. For if I could attain Buddhahood by any other practice and then fall into the pit, then I might feel regret at having been deceived. But since I am capable of no other practice whatsoever, the pit will surely be my dwelling, anyway . . .. This is my faith; but it is left entirely to your choice to accept the Nembutsu or reject it' (*Tannisho*, II).

Although Shinran always insisted on his fidelity to his teacher Honen, there were differences between the two that became more apparent in the second generation. Honen advocated one practice: chanting the Name of Amida (*nembutsu*). Shinran advocated no practice. He also chanted the name, but did it, he said, only out of gratitude and not because he expected any benefits from it. Salvation is the work of Buddha, not us. So today there are two main branches of Pure Land or *Nembutsu* Buddhism: The original sect of Honen, which is called 'Pure Land' (*Jodo*) and that of Shinran, which calls itself 'True Pure Land' (*Jodo Shin Shu* or simply *Shin*).

It is a characteristic of Pure Land teaching that it appeals more to people in their middle and late years than to young people. In Christianity religious conversion frequently comes during the emotion-packed years of adolescence, prodded by the first stirrings of a sense of guilt. But 'sin' and 'guilt' are not terms in the normal Buddhist vocabulary. Ignorance, not sin, is regarded as the primeval ill, and most young people feel it is their parents who are ignorant — certainly not themselves! In the East, if young people are attracted to religion at all, they usually prefer an active type, which gives them something to do and promises concrete results. Faith in the Pure Land is awakened by a sense of failure, which so often comes during middle-life.

It is true that Shinran was only 29 at the time of his conversion, but he believed that his life was nearing its end. Most of the famous Pure Land teachers were older men when they converted. Doshaku was 40, Donran was 50, Honen was 52. Even D.T. Suzuki, the famous Zen exponent, became more and more interested in the Pure Land during his later years. The older we get, the more aware we become of the

approaching end of our life and how little we have improved spiritually over the years. In despair, we turn to the 'Other Power' to take the load of responsibility off our backs.

Shinran defined his religion as non-practice and non-goodness. 'It is non-practice [for its devotee] because he does not practice it at his own discretion, and it is non-goodness because he does not create it at his own discretion. All is through Amida's power alone, not through our own power, which is vain' (*Tannisho* VIII).

Non-practice means non-practice of anything. Even elementary good deeds are of no avail. In fact, according to Shinran, it is easier for an evil man to enter the Pure Land than it is for one who does good and relies on his goodness. 'If even a good man attains Rebirth in the Pure Land, then how much easier should it be for an evildoer' (*Tannisho* III). All ordinary morality is inverted; all that matters is the unlimited compassion of the Buddha.

Of course, such a radical departure from traditional Buddhism led to unexpected results — sometimes bizarre, sometimes bloody. For a while the Shin Sect was dominated by an infallible clergy, 'reincarnations of Amida', who could decide who would go to the Pure Land and who would not.[35] An opposite tendency took place among some peasant followers, who believed that Amida's Universal Vow had broken down all social barriers. They took up arms against the feudal system, and for over a century held the samurai warriors at bay. They were finally crushed at Osaka in 1580 by the military dictator Oda Nobunaga.

The radical faith of Honen and Shinran had an important consequence which they could not have foreseen: their Buddhism, and eventually nearly all of Japanese Buddhism along with it, became concerned primarily with life after death, and in the popular mind came to be associated with funerals and memorial services.

They (Shinran in particular) had abolished the distinction between clergy and laity, a qualitative distinction which had existed from the beginning. In primitive Buddhism the laity had been expected to conform to the five basic moral precepts; the monks of the Sangha, on the other hand, accepted 250 precepts, including the vow of chastity. This made them qualitatively different from the laity and gave them a certain mystique. To 'accept the precepts' meant more than just agreeing to live an austere life; it implied the ability to do so.

In esotericism, too, even though laymen could participate in some of the mystic rites, there was a qualitative distinction between the initiated and the uninitiated. Now Shinran abolished all precepts. Only one thing mattered — faith. A layman could have the same saving faith as a priest; there was no basic difference between them. Shinran used to refer to himself as neither a monk nor a layman. He was not a monk because he married and raised a family; he was not a layman because he devoted all his life to religion.

Since the clergy no longer had any special status, how were they going to make a living? The solution was to charge for funerals and memorial services. To Shinran's way of thinking, there was no justification for memorial services of any kind. 'I, Shinran, have never even once invoked the Nembutsu in the feeling of filial piety for my parents' (*Tannisho* V). Any self-effort, even praying for one's parents, is useless. All depends on Amida's grace. Nevertheless, his followers developed a lengthy series of memorial services for the deceased — 21 of them extending up to the fiftieth year after death — and these became the primary source of income for the clergy.

Even though there was no longer a spiritual distinction between clergy and laity, there still remained a practical one. The clergy could read and write Chinese; this mean that they could read and recite the sacred texts and inscribe Buddhist names for the deceased. In Shin Buddhism this gave them a power greater than they had enjoyed before. If they named the deceased (or the living) before Amida, that soul would enter Paradise; if they deleted a name, that soul was lost. Such an extreme position was eventually rejected by the majority of Shin Buddhists, but it prevailed long enough to establish the importance of having the priests inscribe Buddhist names for the deceased and recite sutras in their memory.

Other sects began doing the same thing, and even the proud old centres of Tendai and Shingon had to depend on memorial donations once they lost the support of the nobility, who had been their protectors, after the pillage and destruction of their temples during the civil wars after the Heian Period. (Watanabe 1980, 98).

In Shin Buddhism (and in Nichiren, as we shall see), the term Sangha no longer means an exclusive brotherhood of monks, but the community of all believers, men, women, and children. A community, however, requires rules of morality, and Shin Buddhism eventually had to make its own. This was done by distinguishing between absolute truth (sole reliance on the grace of Amida) and Secular Truth ('to obey the laws of morality and to be loyal to one's country').[36] The reorganization of Shin Buddhism into a disciplined organization was largely the work of Shinran's greatest successor, Rennyo (1415–99), who tirelessly went from place to place gathering up the scattered flock and bringing them under the rule of his head temple in Kyoto. Although Shin Buddheism, like all branches of Japanese Buddhism, is divided into many sects, the one which can be traced back to Rennyo and Shinran is today the largest and best organized.

If Shinran's version of Buddhism is really the 'final solution', as its adherents claim, it arrives at its position only by side-stepping one of the most important teachings of the *Dharma Flower*, namely, that all living things contain the Buddha-nature. Shin Buddhism specifically repudiates it. According to Karl Philipp Eidmann, a leading American exponent of Shin Buddhism, 'The ordinary human being has no hope

of escape from anxiety, frustration, and suffering. Man's nature is made up of desires. He has no inner nature, no soul destined to attain freedom from suffering. Man has no power within himself to attain to Buddhahood. The only power within man is the power of his passions, his desires, his anxieties. He has no innate nature which will manifest itself as enlightenment at some future time' (*The Unimpeded Single Way*, 3).

It was this pessimistic side of Pure Land teachings which was to arouse Nichiren to his vigorous counter-attack.

A Footnote on Zen

So much has been written on Zen in the past 30 or 40 years that one more book or even one more chapter could not add much that is new. For a sect which insists it is 'not dependent on words or letters', Zen has put quite a few of them into print. In Zen it is said that 'those who know, don't speak; and those who speak, don't know'. This should be warning enough for us to maintain a 'noble silence'.

Zen, like esotericism, must be passed on individually from master to pupil. It is not a mass religion except in its externals. A book can describe what Zen looks like, but it cannot reveal what Zen is.

Zen has so charmed the West by its unique blend of piety and irreverence that we forget that not all Buddhists give it unqualified approval. In his introduction to Suzuki's *On Indian Mahayana Buddhism*, Edward Conze points out some of its dangers, especially for Westerners:

> Although Zen as an essentially non-discursive response to reality has never set out to formulate a philosophy of its own, it nevertheless everywhere presupposes and takes for granted the philosophy formulated by the Mahayana sutras . . . If [Suzuki] is to be blamed for anything, it is an insufficient awareness of the aridity of the desert into which he transplanted his lovely azalea tree. For what he unsuspectedly did was to feed an Eastern form of spirituality into a predominantly ex-Protestant environment which, having lost touch with spiritual tradition, gravitated inevitably toward a self-assertive nihilism.
>
> Zen was designed to operate within emptiness (Void). On its journey West it has been transferred into a vacuum. Let us recollect what Zen in the East took for granted as its antecedents, basis, and continuing background: a long and unbroken tradition of spiritual 'know-how'; firm and unquestioned metaphysical beliefs, and not just disbelief in everything; a superabundance of scriptures and images; a definite discipline supervised by authoritative persons; insistence on right livelihood and an austere life for all exponents of the Dharma; and a strong Sangha composed of thousands of mature

> and experienced monks housed in thousands of temples, who could keep deviations from Buddhist principles within narrow bounds.

What Zen wanted to do, Dr Conze points out, was to cut through the trappings and reveal the core, not replace the core.

> It is a fundamental error if these denunciations [of the trappings] are mistaken for a desire to altogether abolish traditional spiritual practices. Suzuki in faraway Japan could not possibly have foreseen it. Likewise, when he condemned the intellect as inhibiting our original spontaneity, Suzuki took it for granted that once the intellect is eliminated the Tao will take over. He was relatively unfamiliar with Western irrationalist philosophy, where the elimination of the intellect makes room for nothing more sublime than the uninhibited assertion of self-willed instincts, and where everything is left where it was before. When he spoke of spontaneity, he meant the spontaneity of sages, and not that of unreformed worldlings.
>
> (8–10)

Conze's criticism of Zen in the West today is similar to Nichiren's criticism of Zen in Japan 700 years ago. He, too, felt that by making fun of the sutras, Zen was opening the door to 'nothing more sublime than the uninhibited assertion of self-willed instincts'. He saw that the spiritual values extolled by Conze had, in fact, broken down and lost their authority. Under such circumstances, Zen was dangerous.

His warning, however, fell on deaf ears. The Kamakura warlords, anxious to assert their independence from the old order at Kyoto, were encouraging the rise of new sects, just as the emperors had done at the beginning of the Heian Period. The Great Buddha of Kamakura, perhaps the most famous piece of art in all Japan, was set up to outshine the Great Buddha of Nara and promote the veneration of Amida in defiance of the ecclesiastical authorities in the capital — the same authorities who had exiled Honen. Hojo Tokiyori of Kamakura, the real ruler of Japan, was fascinated by Zen. Its stern discipline appealed to rough Samurai warriors such as himself, and helped prepare them for death on the battlefield. The Pure Land of Amida had a similar appeal, advocating an easy practice of reciting the Sacred name for rebirth in paradise after death in combat. In 1253 Tokiyori sponsored a Chinese Zen master and built for him the first official Zen temple in Japan.[37] Thereafter Zen temples sprang up rapidly, and many older temples switched their allegiance to the new cult of the Samurais.

Just as the elaborated ceremonies and subtle metaphysics of Shingon and Tendai esotericism had satisfied the courtly aristocrats of the previous age, so the austere directness of Zen or the simple chanting

of Nembutsu satisfied the rough warriors and down-trodden peasants during the period of warlords and civil wars. When Nichiren called for a return to the old values, he was shouting against the winds of change. Few people heard him. His problem became, therefore, how to preserve the tried and true while adapting it to the changing times. His solution proved viable, not only for the thirteenth century, but for the even more rapidly changing twentieth century as well.

Chapter 8

The Son of a Fisherman

Nichiren was born on 16 February 1222 at Kominato, Tojo village, in the province of Awa (now part of Chiba Prefecture, east of modern Tokyo). Unlike the other great teachers we have discussed, he did not come from a wealthy or prominent family. Some say that his parents were from the Samurai class, but having lost everything in the civil wars of the period, had been reduced to poverty. If this is so, Nichiren never mentions it; perhaps some later historian wanted to raise his status a bit by giving him an aristocratic lineage. On the other hand, there are some vague references to rich relatives in Shimosa, who might have paid some of his bills during his student days.[38] Family relationships, however, were more of a hindrance than a help for him, for his family was held in contempt by the local lords of the area.

We know for certain that his father made his living by fishing, and no doubt the young Zen'nichimaro, as the boy was first called, had to work on his father's boat as soon as he was old enough to help. Today the Great Head Temple of Tanjo-ji stands by the seashore along the narrow strip of land between the Pacific Ocean and a row of hills which rises abruptly behind it, and marks the spot where the great prophet was born. But the actual house of his father was long ago washed away by tidal waves and buried beneath the sea. Boatmen point out the site to tourists, who peer through the transparent blue waters down to the rocky bottom, where lotus blossoms are said to have bloomed on the day Nichiren was born.

Nichiren was never ashamed of his humble and even despised origin. He used to refer to himself as a *sudra*, the Indian name for someone from the lowest social class. He called his area 'backward' but strategically located near the geographical centre of Japan. He loved his little village of fishermen's huts, and referred to it with nostalgia during

his later wanderings. He once called it 'the original abode of the Sun-goddess', for it was there that the sun first shone when it rose from the sea in the east. 'She is, indeed, the loving mother of the people of this country. There must be some remote and mysterious connection with my life, that I, Nichiren, was born in that province' (Anesaki *Nichiren the Buddhist Prophet* 9).

A fisherman needs the help of hard-working sons. This fisherman, however, saw an unusual talent in his fourth son, Zen'nichimaro, and sent him off to a nearby temple school at the age of 11. The temple was called Seicho-ji, the Temple of Clear Luminosity, or Kiyosumi-dera, after the mountain where it is located. It was small but venerable, dating back to 771. It belonged to the Tendai Sect, and like most Tendai temples of the time, specialized in esotericism and chanting the Nembutsu. The young Nichiren was thoroughly trained in these practices; later he would repudiate them both.

When he was 15 he took the vows of a Tendai monk, cutting his hair as Shakyamuni had done about 2000 years before, and taking a new name, Rencho ('Eternal Lotus'). Although in later years he was to see no special value in celibacy as such, he never broke his vow the way Shinran did. Neither did he abandon his studies in despair, even though at one time they almost ruined his health. He was not willing to cast himself into blind faith in Amida's Original Vow. 'Rely on the Dharma, and not on any person,' he said, quoting the Nirvana Sutra. He insisted on three proofs for anything: it must be logical, it must be scriptural, and above all, it must work (Christensen *St. Nichiren* 23–4).

'My wish has always been,' he said later, 'to sow the seeds for the attainment of Buddhahood, and to escape the fetters of births and deaths. For this purpose, I once practiced, according to the custom of most fellow-Buddhists, the method of repeating the name of Amida Buddha, and putting faith in his redeeming power. But since doubt had begun to arise in my mind as to the truth of that belief, I committed myself to the vow that I would study all the branches of Buddhism known in Japan and learn fully what their diverse teachings were' (Anesaki 13). Nichiren made this solemn vow before an image of Akasagarbha (Kokuzo), the Bodhisattva of Wisdom.

Not long after his ordination the fisherman's son moved from his small provincial temple to the bustling *de facto* capital, Kamakura, the seat of the military dictatorship. He remained there for five or six years, studying the new sects favoured by the dictators, Zen and Pure Land. While he was at Kamakura he must have seen the beginning of the construction of the Great Buddha. A wooden image, probably a mould for the projected copper image, was completed in 1243. Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light, who welcomed sinners into paradise, and the war-god Hachiman were the incongruous patrons of the new capital. Rencho found himself increasingly sceptical. What kind of Buddhism was this, anyway? Where was true Buddhism to be found?

To get his answers he left Kamakura and travelled to the heart of old Buddhism, the great Tendai monastic centre at Mt. Hiei. There he studied under the best teachers in the country.

Saicho, who had founded the school at Mt. Hiei, had insisted that the search for truth must be non-sectarian. At the apex of his system lay the Heavenly Terrace (Tendai) philosophy of Chih-i. However, centuries of accretions had enveloped it, especially in the forms of esotericism and Pure Land teachings. Rencho, not content with learning these doctrines second-hand, travelled to the great centres where they were taught, to Mii-dera for Tendai esotericism and Mt. Koya for Shingon. For the next ten years, he studied all these teachings, as well as those even earlier doctrines that were still taught at Nara. He is known to have visited these various centres, carrying out his vow 'to study all the branches of Buddhism known in Japan'.

To get back even earlier than the six sects of Nara, he travelled to centres that had been founded by Prince Shotoku, the first sponsor of Buddhism in Japan. He wanted to go back further yet, to China, but gave up this plan after an interview with the naturalized Chinese Zen master, Doryu, who told him that Buddhism in China had sunk to a sorry state. Nevertheless, he made it a point to master Confucianism and the Chinese classics, studying them under Saburo Daigaku of Kyoto. Daigaku became his life-long mentor on the fine points of Chinese grammar and calligraphy.

Rencho did not neglect the culture of his own country. He studied Waka poetry under Tame-ie of the Reizei School and later under the nun Abutsu-ni. A Shinto priest tutored him in the indigenous Japanese religion. When he finally completed his studies and was starting home, Rencho went out of his way to visit the Grand Ise Shrine, the spiritual centre of pre-Buddhist Japan.

Once when he was returning to Mt. Hiei after visiting a distant temple, he passed by the Yodo River, which flows into Osaka Bay. It struck him that Buddhism (and Shintoism, too) consists of many rivers, all of which flow into the one sea of the *Dharma Flower* (Kyoyu Fujii, *Nichiren Shonin Eden* 16–28).

In 1253 Rencho returned to his home temple to announce the results of his years of study and meditation. He had been away for 15 years, 10 of them at Mt. Hiei. He had vowed to become the wisest man in all Japan, and by the time he was 31 his academic accomplishments were truly impressive. He reported to Dozen, his original master, and then retired for a few days of solitude before preaching his first sermon.

On the morning of 28 April 1253, he arose before dawn and climbed a steep hill which overlooked the empty sea. There he waited. Finally, as the first rays of light spread over the horizon of the Pacific Ocean, he joined his hands together and solemnly intoned, 'I devote myself to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma — *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*!'[39]

By noon he was back at the temple, where a small crowd of local clergy and residents had gathered to hear the young student preach his first sermon. His exact words that day have not been recorded, but we do know that they scandalized the audience. He probably proclaimed unswerving devotion to the *Dharma Flower*, a return to the teachings of Saicho and Chih-i, and the rejection of the new cult of Amida.[40] Whatever he said, his audience did not like it. Master Dozen was shocked; Rencho had attacked the basic practice of the temple. Dozen withdrew to his quarters and wrote out a writ of interdiction. Rencho was expelled from the order. Forbidden to remain any longer at the temple, he walked forlornly down the mountain to the home of his parents.

Worse was yet to come. The local lord, Kagenobu, was loyal to the ruling Hojo clan and a fervent believer in Amida. He was outraged when he heard about the sermon, and ordered Rencho's arrest. But Rencho had already left the temple. Master Dozen, who still had affectionate feelings for his former pupil, ordered two monks to go quickly down to the village, warn the impetuous preacher of his danger, and lead him to a place of safety.

It was probably while he was at his parents' home that he changed his name from Rencho, which had been given to him at his home temple, to a name of his own invention, Nichiren. For a monk to reject the name given him by his order was to declare independence. He was now a monk without an order, a preacher without credentials. From now on his only authority would be the truth or falsehood of the Dharma he preached. In this capacity his made his first two converts — his own parents. Although they were upset by the misfortunes that had befallen their son, they still had faith in him. He gave his father the Buddhist name of Myonichi ('Wonderful Sun') and his mother Myoren ('Wonderful Lotus').

According to the Nichiren Order of America, he chose the name Nichiren for himself because it is truly universal. 'The Sun brightens the world while the Lotus blooms in every corner of the world. The Sun (*Nichi*) is the salvation of all mankind, and the Lotus represents the purification (*Ren*) for all mankind.'[41] Specifically, the name refers to two verses in the Lotus Sutra: 'Just as the light of the sun and moon expels all dimness and darkness, so this man, living and working in the world, drives out the darkness of all living beings,' and 'Be not influenced by environment. Lo, the Lotus blossoms, never to be soiled by the muddy waters whence it grows.'[42]

The two monks sent by Dozen led Nichiren to a small country temple beyond the jurisdiction of Lord Tojo Kagenobu. There conditions were more congenial, and Nichiren might have remained there peacefully for the rest of his life had he chosen to do so. But he felt that his duty was to save the country, and that meant moving into the lion's mouth, the capital city of Kamakura.

The political situation during the Kamakura Period (1192–1333) was complex and unsettled. Several emperors had come and gone in rapid succession. Real power belonged to the military Shogun, who made and replaced emperors at will. Then the Shogun's authority was usurped by the Regent (*Shikken*), who ruled from Kamakura. The regency was in the hands of the powerful Hojo clan, whose rule was sometimes interrupted by internecine quarrels among themselves.

The petty nobility in the provinces remained neutral for the most part, biding their time, and watching to see which way the political winds were blowing. As long as Nichiren remained among them, he was comparatively safe. Indeed, it was from their ranks that he began to make a few converts. But once he moved back to Kamakura, he was on his own.

Although he still considered himself a Tendai monk, Nichiren no longer had credentials. He was unable to lodge in any of the many temples in the city. Instead, he built himself a hut in the outskirts and became a street corner evangelist, urging passers-by to return to faith in the *Dharma Flower*. In time he was joined by a few disciples. His first convert from the ranks of the clergy was an older classmate from Mt. Hiei, Joben, who changed his name to Nissho. Nissho brought his brother and young nephew into the little group. The 12-year-old nephew was Nichiro, who was to play an important role in the development of Nichiren Buddhism.

It was a time of both prosperity and natural disasters for the capital of the warlords. Many new temples were being built, and the Great Buddha of Kamakura was finally completed in gilt copper. But from 1257 to 1260 both the city and the country suffered from disastrous earthquakes, droughts, severe rains, floods, and pestilence. Nichiren was deeply grieved by the sufferings of the common people, and wondered about the reasons for such misery.

Like most Buddhists, Nichiren believed that conditions in the outer world are reflections of conditions within the mind. A pure Buddha-mind creates a Pure Land; confused minds create the world we live in. According to the Flower Garland Sutra,

> Both delusion and Enlightenment originate within the mind, and every existence or phenomenon arises from the functions of the mind, just as different things appear from the sleeve of a magician. The activities of the mind have no limit, they form the surroundings of life. An impure mind surrounds itself with impure things and a pure mind surrounds itself with pure things; hence, surroundings have no more limits than the activities of the mind. Just as a picture is drawn by an artist, surroundings are created by the activities of the mind. While surroundings created by Buddha are pure and free from defilement, those created by ordinary men are not so. The mind conjures up

> multifarious forms just as a skilful painter creates pictures of various worlds. There is nothing in the world that is not mind-created. A Buddha is like our mind; sentient beings are just like Buddha. Therefore there is no difference among the mind, Buddhas and sentient beings in their capability of creating all things.
>
> (*Teaching* 34–5)

Nichiren believed that the calamities which had befallen the country were natural reflections of the greedy minds of the warlords of Kamakura, who proudly raised gigantic monuments to new deities while oppressing the people and murdering and exiling the rightful emperors. Like a prophet from the Old Testament, he decided to speak out.

In 1259 and 1260 he retired to a quiet temple in the country and composed his famous thesis, *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, 'Establish the Right Law and Save Our Country.' He went to great pains with this work, putting it into classical Chinese, and consulting his old Chinese professor on the fine points. In it he quoted from many sutras, not only the *Dharma Flower*, so as not to appear biased. He prepared two drafts, a long one full of references, and a shorter one in case the intended reader lacked the patience to wade through the first. Although it is by no means the best of Nichiren's writings, it is certainly his best known, for its presentation thrust him instantly from obscurity into the national spotlight.

In the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren blames the country's problems on the fact that people everywhere have abandoned the Original Buddha Shakyamuni in favour of Amida. 'Since Honen's *Senchakushu* ('The Sole Selection of the Nembutsu') was published, our Original Teacher (Shakyamuni) has been forgotten, and the Buddha of the Western World (Amida) has been honored instead . . . Only the four volumes of the three sutras (dealing with the Pure Land) are read and recited, and all the other sutras expounded through the five periods of the teachings (of Shakyamuni) have been abandoned. No one makes offerings to temples other than those enshrining Amida Buddha . . . Therefore, the (other) temples are dilapidated. Grass grows on the roofs, and weeds cover the gardens, but no one wishes to support or rebuild those temples. Therefore, no saintly priests live there; no guardian gods stay there . . . Many people have given up the perfect teachings and prefer the one-sided teaching. Will devils miss the chance to take advantage of their mistake?' (Dialogue IV)

The enervating Nembutsu teaching of Honen has turned people's eyes away from this world to the 'western paradise'. But it is our world which the Buddha came to save and where he eternally resides. 'You should convert yourself to the faith in the Good Law of the True Vehicle at once. Then the triple world will become a Buddha-world. How can

a Buddha-world decline? The worlds of the ten quarters will become a treasure-world. How can a treasure-world be destroyed? If our country does not decline, and is not destroyed, we shall be safe and peaceful. Believe my words, treasure them!' (39)

Nichiren presented his thesis to the private secretary of Hojo Tokiyori, the ex-regent. Although Tokiyori had officially retired to study Zen, he was still the most important man in the country. Nichiren hoped that his interest in Buddhism would cause him to at least read the thesis. He went home to await a reply. He waited in vain. No answer came.

Twelve days later, says an old story, Nichiren awoke at night to find a monkey tugging on his sleeve. Curious, he followed the monkey out of his hut and up a wooded path towards a cave in the hill. Suddenly he heard a great commotion behind him. Turning, he saw that a mob had surrounded his hut and set it on fire. He had narrowly escaped with his life.

Once more Nichiren was homeless and in danger of losing his life. Again he fled to the countryside, going to Wakamiya in Shimosa Province. There he was offered protection by a squire of some standing, Toki Jonin, who permitted him to lodge in his family temple.[43] Lord Toki, a devout man of means and education, was already a convinced convert. He was to prove an invaluable supporter, and his home became a place of refuge for the believers in times of persecution.

Nichiren remained with Toki Jonin for about six months. He delivered a 100-day lecture on the *Dharma Flower*, attracting a number of new converts. But he could not remain long in a place of security. He did not want to make converts and establish a new sect; he wanted to save the country. So back he went to Kamakura, where he was immediately arrested.

If Nichiren had criticized the Nembutsu a half-century before, he would have caused no commotion. Back in 1205 the Kofuku-ji temple of Nara had protested to the Emperor about the Nembutsu in stronger language than Nichiren had used, pointing out 'nine faults': 1) They call their group a 'sect' without imperial permission; 2) they slander the other Buddhists; 3) they do not venerate Shakyamuni Buddha; 4) they laugh at practices other than the Nembutsu; 5) they do not venerate the national gods; 6) they practise nothing but the Nembutsu; 7) they give up meditation and only utter the Nembutsu; 8) they do not observe the moral precepts; 9) they are misleading the nation of Japan (Hoshino, *Lotus Sutra and Nichiren* 4).

These strong criticisms had helped provoke the banishment of Honen and Shinran. Nichiren certainly did not think of himself as a radical because of having updated a well known public document. But the times and the place were different now. This was not Kyoto or Nara, a conservative centre of the old order, where scholarly discussions whiled away the idle hours. This was Kamakura, a 'boom town' with no

traditions of its own, the champion of a new order based on naked power. The rulers and the people were proud of their new 121-ton statue of Amida Buddha, their new temples, and their vigorous new sects: Zen, Pure Land (Nembutsu), Shingon-Ritsu, and Shingi ('new doctrine') Shingon.[44] Nobody loves the voice of a guilty conscience. Nichiren was calling for a return to traditional values, for the harmony which had existed between Emperor and Buddhism in the days of Saicho. No one wanted to hear about this any more. Such talk was disturbing and perhaps even dangerous for the military dictatorship. Nichiren must go.

He was arrested and condemned to exile on the Izu Peninsula. The peninsula was a handy place to get rid of trouble-makers. It was close enough to Kamakura that prisoners could be taken there in a matter of hours; it was isolated and wild enough that the exiles would soon waste away and die, unless they were helped by the few fishermen who lived along the shore. This was unlikely, because to aid an exiled criminal meant swift and severe punishment. A lord steward and his soldiers were stationed on the peninsula to enforce the law.

Nichiren was taken down to the beach and placed on a ship bound for the peninsula. Some of his disciples followed as far as they could. Young Nichiro (he was then sixteen) tried to hold back the boat, but a sailor beat him on the hands with an oar, breaking his right arm. The arm never healed completely, and Nichiro was partially crippled for the rest of his life. As the boat pulled out to sea, Nichiren called words of encouragement to his grief-stricken followers.

At about four in the afternoon the boat reached a reef called Mana-ita ('Butcher's Block') off the coast of Izu. Afraid to approach closer to shore because of the rising tide, the boatmen dropped off their prisoner on the lonely rock and headed for home. In low tide, a man could walk from the reef to the shore. But it was high tide, and the waters were rising about the rock and would soon submerge it. There Nichiren stood until he was spotted by a fisherman rowing home. With great difficulty, the fisherman manoeuvered his small craft close to the reef and took the exiled monk on board. Then he not only took him ashore, but he and his wife invited him to remain in their home.

Nichiren, however, knew that if he stayed with them, he could bring disaster upon his kindly rescuers. So he soon departed and took refuge in a cave which his hosts pointed out to him. Even there they did not forget him, however, and daily they would come secretly to bring him food.

Nichiren never forgot the kindness of this humble couple. He was not a person to forget a favour. A large portion of his letters which have survived are thank-you letters; he was grateful for any gift, even the smallest. For a gift such as this, his gratitude was boundless.

'On the twelfth of the fifth month,' he wrote to them later, 'I was marooned on a beach, the name of which was unknown to me. I suffered much, but you came to my rescue. What was the relationship

between you and me in our previous existence? Did you practice the teachings of the *Dharma Flower* in your previous life? You are a man, and a man can be courageous. But I was surprised that your wife was as brave as you in serving an exile. She gave me food, water, and any other necessities. You and your wife took faith in the *Dharma Flower* and made offerings to me for more than thirty days. The people of the village hated me more than the people of Kamakura. In and around the fifth month, there is less rice; but you served me lots of it. Are you two the reincarnations of my parents? Did my parents reappear at Kawana in the Province of Izu in the forms of you two?' (*Showa-teihon*, 229)

Nichiren's fortunes on the peninsula took a turn for the better when the lord steward became ill. His retainers, knowing that an extraordinary monk was in exile nearby, sent for him. Nichiren was able to cure the lord steward, who in gratitude allowed him to move into more comfortable quarters. He also gave him a small statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. Wherever he went after that, Nichiren took the image with him.

Nichiren was pardoned in early 1263 and allowed to return. While he was in exile, he had begun his practice of writing letters of thanks, admonitions, and instructions to his disciples. Today some 500 letters and other documents written by him are still extant, carefully preserved at various temples in Japan. By their sheer quantity, they make Nichiren the best documented religious founder in history. Many of these documents are written in his own hand. Others are authenticated copies.

The Showa Edition of the Complete Works of Nichiren (published in 1952) consists of 2,737 pages, of which 1,927 pages (72 per cent of the whole) contain authentic writings. The balance consists of fragments, memoranda and notes, a commentary on the *Dharma Flower*, and mandalas which he inscribed. Fifty-five forgeries are included in the collection plus two sets of 'oral teachings', which were widely accepted until recent studies exposed them as forgeries, too. These are the *Onko-kikigaki* and *Ongi-kuden* (Murano, *Nichiren's Writings* 1–2).

One document of dubious authenticity, *Sandai-hiho-sho* ('Treatise on the Three Great Secret Dharmas'), said by some to be Nichiren's 'final statement' and by others to be a blatant forgery, is a source of hot political controversy in contemporary Japan. It clearly advocates the establishment of a state religion.[45] There have also been the inevitable 'transfer documents', supposedly dictated by the saint on his deathbed, transferring sole and complete authority to Nikko, one of his disciples. Sceptics claim that these transfer documents were not 'discovered' until 1488 — two centuries later! (Murano, 'Sokagakkai' 6)

While he was in exile Nichiren had time to think through his position and evaluate himself. He still considered himself a loyal priest of the Tendai Sect, faithful to the tradition in which he had been ordained. He signed his letters, 'Nichiren, Follower of the Dengyo Daishi (Saicho)'. Bruno Petzold says:

> Nichiren incorporates into his own system the whole Tendai philosophy. He adopts the classification of the Five Periods and the Eight Teachings; he acknowledges the doctrines of the Perfectly Amalgamated Three Truths (i.e., the Synthesis of vacuity and phenomenal reality in the Middle) and the Identity of the One Mind and the Three Thousand (representing the totality of phenomena), and he upholds the practice of the Three Meditations in One Mind. He teaches the Oneness of the World. He proclaims that the whole universe in its essence is nothing but Buddha's own body, so that even trees and grasses do not only attain Buddhahood, but are direct manifestations of Buddha. Similarly, he maintains that the cosmos or the Tathagata is our own body and soul; that Buddhahood can be attained in our present life and in our present body; that the Buddha, the mind, and the living beings form One Unity. There is not a single important Tendai doctrine which is not a part of Nichiren's system.
>
> (*Nichiren* 50–1)

Nichiren, however, was transforming the Round Teaching of Tendai ('round' here means 'perfect') into a spearhead. All rivers flow to the *Dharma Flower*, to Tendai — true. But they flow in only one direction, from the less perfect to the perfect; the process cannot be reversed. This dynamic thrust in Nichiren is lacking in the Tendai of Saicho and Chih-i.

While he was in exile Nichiren wrote a brief but important essay that he called, 'The Teaching, the Capacity, the Time, and the Country' (*Kyoki Jikoku Sho*). He signed it 'Nichiren, a Shramana in Japan,' using the ancient Indian term for a wandering mendicant. In the essay he names the five principles of his teaching. 1) Doctrine (*kyo*): the true and final teachings of the Buddha are expounded in the *Dharma Flower*. This is the religious principle. 2) Teachings must be applicable to those it hopes to save. Shakyamuni knew how to vary his teaching according to the capacity (*ki*) of his students. This is the psychological principle. 3) Timing (*ji*) is vital. Shakyamuni did not preach the *Dharma Flower* until after 40 years of preparation. The Little Vehicle teachings were the best in their time (*Shobo*, the Age of the Living Dharma), because generations of Indian ascetics had prepared people for them. The Great Vehicle teachings were the best in their time (*Zobo*, the Age of the Copied Dharma), because the Little Vehicle had paved the way for deeper philosophical speculation. Today (*Mappo*, the Age of the Declining Dharma) only the all-embracing *Dharma Flower* can save. This is the historical principle.

Buddhism has declined in both India and China. 4) Only in Japan have all types of Buddhism been taught. It is from Japan that true Buddhism must be spread. This is the geographic or ethnic principle (*koku*, country). Combining the above four principles, he concludes

with the fifth. 5) It is wrong to turn backwards and attempt to revive prior teachings, such as Zen, Pure Land, and even academic Tendai, all of which originated in China during the previous age. Today only the *Dharma Flower* must be taught. This is the correct sequence (*jo*), the correlative principle.

Of course, most people are uneducated and unaware of this progressive development of Buddhism. It would be futile to expect them to begin by first mastering the 'Three Baskets' teachings, then the subtleties of Mahayana, and finally the *Dharma Flower*, which is called 'the most difficult to believe'. The Bodhisattva Never-Despise approached all people, regardless of their academic preparation, bowed before them, and proclaimed the *Dharma Flower*. At first they rejected him, but subsequent bitter experience caused them finally to awaken to the truth of what he was saying. This is the teaching method which must be adopted by Nichiren and his disciples.

It is better for a person to hear the *Dharma Flower* and oppose it than not to hear it at all. A negative relationship to the Sutra is better than no relationship. This is called the 'poison drum'. The 'drum of the Dharma' is nectar to those who receive it and poison to those who do not, causing them to fall into hell for slander. But eventually this negative relationship cannot help but become positiive. The Dharma Blossom is the truth, and the truth will finally prevail. The 'poison drum' is a curative poison.

Drums have become a characteristic feature of Nichiren Buddhism. They pound out the good tidings to the rhythm of *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, saving all who hear — directly if they believe, indirectly if they do not. All are welcomed into the One Vehicle.

The matter of timing, which was so vital to Nichiren, requires further explanation. His contemporaries did not always understand what he meant by it, and he had to come back to the subject again and again. Buddhists are accustomed to thinking in terms of Nirvana — the still centre which is unaffected by the swirling eddies of time. It is timeless. There is no cosmic beginning or end, no creation or last judgment. There are endless cycles of solar systems which come into being, flourish for a while, then decay into the void, from where new solar systems arise. The void, it will be recalled, is pure potential. Against such a vast background, linear time is insignificant.

However, the rules of growth, decay, and death apply to everything, including Buddhism. When it is new and fresh, Buddhism flourishes. Later it stagnates, becoming more formal than vital. Finally it declines and perishes. There were different opinions on how long this process takes, but it was widely held that the Former Age of growth lasted 1,000 years, the Middle Age of stability another 1,000 years, and the final Age of Decay dwindles away for 10,000 years.

A more elaborate scheme subdivided the three ages into five periods of 500 years each: 1) the period of enlightenment; 2) the period of

meditation; 3) the period of reading, reciting, and listening; 4) the period of building temples and stupas; 5) the period of conflicts among rival sects. (This is the beginning of the final Age of Decline.)

Nearly everyone believed that the final age had already begun. According to Honen and Shinran, this meant that enlightenment was now impossible to attain. The only appropriate practice for a Buddhist was to recite the Nembutsu and hope for enlightenment in some better world to come.

Nichiren, however, gave an optimistic interpretation to the three ages. So vast was Shakyamuni Buddha's compassion that he had left just the right medicine for the right times. During the Former Age people could attain enlightenment by following the Eight-fold Path. During the Middle Age they could attain it by understanding that the three thousand things exist in a single moment's thought, as revealed in the Imprinted Gate and elucidated by Chih-i. And for people of the Latter Age the Buddha left the Three Great Secret Dharmas hidden in the Chapter of Eternal Life in the *Dharma Flower*. The teachings for all three ages can be found in the *Dharma Flower*, which is one more reason why it is the 'round' or complete teaching. However, the final remedy becomes applicable only during the Final Age.[46]

In this way Nichiren's Buddhism is both old and new. It is old in that it maintains what has been taught before. It is new in its application, which is exclusively for us who live in the final Age of the Declining Dharma.

The *Dharma Flower Sutra* predicted that its unqualified universalism would be scorned by religious establishments, all of which believed that they had a monopoly on salvation. Anyone attempting to apply the *Dharma Flower* principles would inevitably incur censorship and even persecution. Nichiren said that he had identified himself so completely with the Sutra that he was living out these prophecies in his own body. As the living embodiment of the Sutra, he was able to discern and reveal its innermost secrets.

Nichiren's criticism of the sects was based on his sense of time. Teachings that had been applicable in prior Ages were useless in this Age of the Decline of the Dharma. It was too late to reintroduce strict monastic rules (the Ritsu Sect), mystic rites (esotericism), or silent meditation (Zen). These all belonged to the past, when the times were right for them. As for the Pure Land schools, which cast aside the teachings of Shakyamuni and hoped for rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida, there was nothing good he could say about them. They had betrayed the very foundations of Buddhism.

Nichiren's condemnation of all the sects has sometimes gained him a 'bad press'. Edward Conze says that 'he suffered from self-assertiveness and bad temper, and he manifested a degree of personal and tribal egotism which disqualify him as a Buddhist teacher' (*Buddhism* 206). Such a blanket condemnation of a very complex

personality is much too hasty. Nichiren saw himself as a man with a mission, a mission to save Buddhism and to save his country. This mission would probably cost him his life. He was willing to pay this price himself, but he hated seeing his friends run the same risks. His letters reveal how he worried and fretted over them like a mother hen with her chickens. He had a personal interest in each one of them in a manner quite unusual for a great religious leader. They were not just 'souls to be saved'. They were people, and he loved them in spite of all their shortcomings.

Nichiren's letters to his disciples are so personal that from them we can draw clear pictures of the recipients' personalities. Nichiren may have defied the world, but to his friends he was gentle and solicitous. He thundered against injustice, but wept with those who wept and laughed with those who laughed. He took nothing for granted, and would go out of his way to express gratitude for the smallest favour. He was grateful for everything which existed: for his country even when it persecuted him, for his parents who had nourished him, and for the Three Treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Appreciation lies at the very heart of his system. We are obligated to become Buddhas, each one of us, not for selfish gratification, but because that is the only way we can repay the infinite gifts we have received from all living beings.

Nichiren was aware that many people considered him 'self-assertive and bad-tempered'. 'But what am I supposed to do?' he asked. 'It is not that I am so great; it is the *Dharma Flower* which has all power. If I am proud, people will think me arrogant; if I am humble, they will despise the Sutra. The taller the pine tree, the longer the wisteria that hangs from it. That's the way it is with me. How lucky I am!' (*Shonin Chisanze Ji*)

He compared himself to a fly which can travel a hundred miles because it has hidden itself in a horse's tail. Another time he likened himself to a snake in the grass. Other beasts are more noble, but the lowly snake with its ear to the ground can predict a coming flood (MW 3:247).

Noah Brannen, a Christian missionary in Japan, has compared the Japanese prophet to Amos of the Old Testament. Amos, who has been called the first 'ethical prophet', maintained that social injustices and natural calamities prefigured the coming judgment of God, whose righteousness he symbolized by a plumb line.

> This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, 'What do you see, Amos?'
>
> 'A plumb line,' I replied.
>
> Then the Lord said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel. I will spare them no longer.
>
> (Amos 7:7–8)

For Nichiren the plumb line was the *Dharma Flower.* If his nation failed to adhere to this standard of measurement, calamities were inevitable.

Nichiren could also be compared to the Prophet Jeremiah, who found himself in the unenviable position of having to predict the devastation of his own country by foreign invaders. For his integrity, he was treated as a traitor, jailed, and subjected to numerous humiliations. Nichiren, like Jeremiah, saw his persecutions and the subsequent foreign invasion as proofs that he was on the right track.

Just as Amos was the first Hebrew prophet to see his small tribal religion in a world-wide perspective, so did Nichiren see Japanese Buddhism in universal proportions. Both men loved their countries, but both of them saw their countries as subject to cosmic law. Amos spoke of God's plumb line. Nichiren was later to depict cosmic law in a sacred mandala that he designed, in which the Chinese characters, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, descend down the centre of the chart as if suspended in infinite space, not unlike the plumb line of Amos.

When Nichiren returned from exile in 1263 he was more convinced than ever of his life's mission. He was not only a believer in the *Dharma Flower*; he was its personification, the 'doer' of the Sutra. He saw himself as another Bodhisattva Never-Despise (*Lotus* XX). 'None of those in Japan who hold to the sutra have yet manifested what is stated in the sutra (since everyone who really holds to it must encounter peril on that account); one person, Nichiren alone has read (put into practice the words), "We shall not care for bodily life, but only cherish the supreme Way." Then Nichiren is Japan's foremost doer of the *Dharma Flower*' (*Hokekyo no Gyoja*, *Showa-teihon* 327).

He knew it, but that was not good enough — the whole country must know it. Across the Sea of Japan there loomed a dreaded menace, worse than anything the country had ever had to face. The fierce Mongol hordes had conquered China and Korea. It was just a matter of time before they attacked Japan. The Age of Tumult and Strife had arrived, and his country was about to be sucked into the maelstrom. Only the Buddha Dharma could save it, and only he knew the Dharma for the Final Age. He had to make himself heard.

He began submitting more appeals to the government authorities.

Chapter 9

Days of Wrath

'The times, they are a-changin', sang Bob Dylan in the 1960s. The men and women of thirteenth century Japan were very much aware of the same thing; they thought that the world had entered into its final age of decay. All traditional standards were collapsing. Along with political changes came radical religious movements that shook Japanese Buddhism to its foundations. There were many saints who raised the banners of hope in the stormy seas of collapsing old values. Honen and Shinran preached reliance on the mercy of Amida Buddha. Eisai introduced the mind-boggling puzzles of Rinzai Zen. Dogen advocated the quiet sitting of Soto Zen. Ninsho Ryokan, who was probably the most celebrated at the time, wanted to return to the values of primitive Buddhism with its emphasis on strict monastic discipline and generous acts of charity.

All these spiritual leaders attracted devoted followers, as did the gurus who sprang up across Europe and America in the days of Bob Dylan. People who were disillusioned with the old ways turned to these new leaders for solutions to new problems. The old courtly aristocracy at Kyoto clung to the esotericism of Tendai and Shingon, but they had been shorn of political power. The new aristocracy came from the rough warrior class, the Samurai, and preferred the vigorous new faiths of Zen and Pure Land. The common people, as usual, followed their leaders, but now there was a distinct difference. The common people were being addressed directly and asked to participate in the new movements. This had never happened before.

The reformers of the Kamakura Era differed in their respective solutions to the problems of the day, but they agreed on much. For one thing, all of them believed that the Age of Decline of the Dharma (*Mappo*) had come, and that the old scholastic methods would not work

any more. What could be done? How could humanity be saved from inevitable decay when men and women were no longer capable of or even interested in spiritual combat? The reformers were realists who knew that it was impossible to roll back the wheel of history and reinstate happy conditions that may have existed in the past. Except for Nichiren, they did not want to change history but to adapt to it. They saw themselves as belonging to their own times and subject to its failings. They felt inferior to the great teachers of the past, but because of their love for the Buddha-Dharma and their compassion for suffering humanity, they were compelled to take action. 'I am far from Tendai (Chih-i) and Dengyo in wisdom,' said Nichiren, 'but I surpass them in compassion and patience.'[47]

The reformers were dissatisfied with the scholarship and theorizing of the previous age. They sought solutions not in the head but in the heart. If modern man was no longer capable of understanding the profundities of Buddhism, he was still capable of believing and acting. Honen was probably the first man in Buddhism to rank faith ahead of wisdom. Shinran said that man is so vile that he is not capable even of faith; if he does have faith, he must have received it as a free gift from the Buddha. Therefore, he concluded, faith is equivalent to enlightenment (Bloom 1965 Chap. IV). While the others did not go to this extreme, all of them looked upon faith, not wisdom, as the foundation.

Nichiren often said that previous generations had been more concerned with the first half of the *Dharma Flower* (the theoretical 'Imprinted Gate') than with the second half, the 'Original Gate'. It was not that previous commentators had not read the whole book — of course they had. But the trick was to read it 'backwards', beginning with the burning compassion of the Original Gate. Some men could understand the imprinted theories. All men could experience the blazing fire of the Original Buddha.

'All men' meant all women, too. The Kamakura reformers agreed on this. Nara Buddhism had been established by the state for the protection of the state. Heian Buddhism was also a department of the state, but had introduced the important teaching that everyone partakes of the Buddha-nature. The Kamakura reformers now took the final step, shifting the emphasis from the state to the individual. They spoke directly to the people.

Up until then a large percentage of the people — 50 per cent, in fact — had been relegated to an inferior position in Buddhism. These were the women. The central Buddhist institution, the Sangha, was monastic; there is no place for a woman in a monastery. They were not permitted to set foot in most of the great religious centres, which were, or course, monasteries.

Even the salient feminine qualities of love for home and family were 'fetters' to a monk, who was expected to free himself from them. The Sangha was an all-male society, and it justified itself with numerous

anti-female pronouncements. The sutras (up to the *Dharma Flower*) warned against women who are 'always fawning and perverse' and 'can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood' (Flower Garland Sutra). Vasubandhu, who believed that some people could never attain Buddhahood, numbered women among these. 'Woman is a servant of hell, excluded for all time from any hope of attaining Buddhahood. She may have the gentle outward appearance of a bodhisattva, but her inner heart is that of a demon' (*Yuishiki-ron*).

If monks needed 250 precepts to keep them on the narrow path, nuns needed twice as many — 500. In Southern Buddhism (Theravada, the only surviving school of Hinayana), the female Sangha was so overloaded with regulations that eventually it collapsed and disappeared. Only in the relatively liberal Mahayana did it survive, and then as an extraordinarily austere and puritanical organization. It is a wonder that any women at all were attracted to such a rugged life.[48]

Nevertheless, thousands were, and over the centuries women have made important contributions to Buddhism. In fact, Buddhism is unique among world religions in having a sacred book in its (Pali) canon, the *Therigatha*, composed entirely by women — 73, to be exact. In the Mahayana tradition there is the important sutra of Queen Shrimala, a book that was especially popular among the laity.

In the early days we hear of Baddha Kundalakesin, who could outdebate any man or woman who dared challenge her. She was finally beaten by the Shariputra, reputedly the wisest of all Shakyamuni's disciples, when he asked her, 'The One — what is it?' (When she could not reply, Shariputra told her, 'All beings subsist on food.'[49] However, there is a delightful Sanskrit story that even Shariputra met his match when he encountered a woman saint in heaven and asked her, 'Now that you have the ability, why don't you change yourself into a man?' Instead of answering him, she turned him into a woman and asked him if he felt any different (*Buddha-Dharma*, 324).

In modern times women have played important roles in the dissemination of Buddhism: Alexandra David-Neel, centenarian expert on Tibet; I.B. Horner, president of the Pali Text Society; Constant Lounsbery, founding-president of 'Les Amis du Bouddhisme'; Charlene Young, one of the first Americans ordained to the Buddhist priesthood (in the Nichiren Order); Kimi Kotani of Reiyukai; Myoko Naganuma of Rissho Kosei-kai; Kimiko Okano of Kodo Kyodan (a Tendai lay organization); other women have also been leaders of twentieth-century Buddhism.

During the golden age of the Heian Period, although women were barred from entry to most holy places, they were often active in studying, reading, reciting, and expounding the sutras. Lectures on the *Dharma Flower* were popular events, socially as well as intellectually, and women of the leisured classes often attended in great numbers. Because they could read, they studied; and because they studied, they

learned. It certainly did not escape their attention that the *Dharma Flower* features many women who will attain Buddhahood. In fact, in the entire canon of Buddhist scriptures, the *Dharma Flower* is the only book which gives a concrete example of a mortal actually becoming a Buddha — and that mortal is a woman, the Naga princess!

Thus, when Nichiren began preaching the supremacy of the *Dharma Flower*, he had an important, literate, and interested group of people who could respond instantly to his message — women. In reading his letters to women, one is struck by the fact that these are often his most thoughtful and detailed writings. Obviously these women asked tough questions which demanded — and got — serious answers.

Nichiren was adamant on the equality of the sexes; to him this was elementary. He was indignant that some men considered women 'unclean' because they menstruated.

> Many women in their prime became nuns during Shakyamuni's time and practiced the way of the Buddha, but they were never despised because of their menstrual periods. Menstruation is not a pollution that comes from without. It is simply a feminine characteristic, and a proof of the continuity of the human race. For example, human excrement comes from within the body, but as long as one is sanitary, it is no reason for abhorrence. Isn't the same true of menstruation? I have never heard of any strict taboos against menstruation in either India or China.[50]

Nichiren went beyond equality of the sexes. He did not simply see women as equal to men — he praised them as women. When other men criticized them as inconstant, he praised them for honesty. When men answered that women had no minds of their own, Nichiren retorted that 'women seem to be led; actually they lead.' In his usual manner, he treated them as people first and as representatives of their sex second. He was so impressed by the fortitude of one woman that he gave her the title 'saint' (*shonin*). This was no nun, either, but the abandoned mother of a small child — a 'woman of the world'.

Zen Master Dogen also spoke out sharply against discrimination against women. 'If you say that woman should be despised for religious reasons as man's partner in passion,' he snorted, 'then you must say the same for every man, that he too should be despised as woman's partner in passion.' However, after he retired from public life to a monastery in 1243, Dogen said no more on the subject. There was no room for women in his monastery, either (Oguri 1984, 9).

Honen had arrived on the scene a generation before Nichiren, and women had flocked to his teaching that men and women alike can be saved by chanting the Nembutsu. Nichiren complained that these women were 'counting other men's riches'. They should stick with the *Dharma Flower*. The Amida sutras specify that there are no women in

his western paradise; women are transformed into men first, and only then are admitted to the Pure Land.

Nichiren was on thin ice here, for the *Dharma Flower* says the same thing in Chapter 23, where the World of Happiness of Amitayus Buddha (Amida) is mentioned. In the incident of the Naga princess, she transforms herself into a man, but Nichiren insists that this is only an appearance. She is a Buddha already without any transformation. 'According to the *Dharma Flower*, one can become a Buddha immediately. There are two ways of attaining Buddhahood abruptly. In the discourses of the historical Buddha of the *Dharma Flower* (as this one), one can become a Buddha at once by transforming onself into a Buddha. In the discourses of the Eternal Buddha of the sutra, one can become a Buddha at once without any transformation' (*Myoichinyo-gohenji*).

This is a good example of how Nichiren reads the sutra 'between the lines', from the inside out. His starting point is always Chapter 16, which reveals that the Buddha's inner life is eternal and identical with our own inner life. The outer appearance is less important than the inner essence.

Since Kamakura Buddhism meant to benefit everyone and not just specialists, and particularly the weak and immoral people living in the Age of Degeneration, it looked for one basic practice which would somehow gather up all of Buddhist wisdom and power. There should be one touchstone, one key which opens all doors and can save the weak along with the strong, sinners as well as saints.

The idea of one key to the whole was not new. The *Dharma Flower* and other sutras frequently mentioned the importance of *dharani*, meaning literally that by which something is sustained or kept up. It is a word, a string of words, or simply sounds without any obvious meaning but said to contain many meanings. In Japanese, *dharani* is translated as *soji*, 'having all'. To 'obtain *dharani*' is to 'get the point'. To utter dharanis is similar to 'speaking in tongues' — releasing sounds from deep in the subconscious.

Shorter and more concise *dharanis* are called *mantras*. The use of *mantras* is basic to Esotericism. In fact, the name of Kukai's sect, *Shingon*, means *mantra*. Esotericism has a *mantra* for every occasion. The Kamakura reformers, however, sought a single *mantra*, one which would contain all the others.

Most of them found it in the Nembutsu, the name of the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. To repeat the Buddha's name was the 'easy practice' which anyone could undertake without recourse to the mysterious Sanskrit *dharanis* and *mantras*, many of which could only be learned by secret initiations. Nichiren, however, objected that this practice deviated from the mainstream of Buddhism. Shakyamuni had taught Queen Vaidehi and others that Amida Buddha had created a Pure Land 'in the West', where those who called on his name could

receive a happy rebirth after death in this world of sorrows. Nevertheless, the main thrust of his teachings was to renew our life in this world. His teachings culminate, not in the 'western paradise' but on the Vulture Peak, where he manifests his — and our — eternal life.

Just as the *Dharma Flower* is the quintessence of both universal truth and universal life, so its sacred title, *Myoho Renge Kyo*, is the quintessence of the sutra. All that remains is for us to identify ourselves with the Absolute. This is done by adding the first word, Namu, 'I devote myself to'. The *dharani* which contains all *dharanis*, the mantra which contains all mantras, is *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

Shakyamuni obtained enlightenment when he completely identified himself with the Absolute. We obtain enlightenment exactly the same way. *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* is the enlightenment of the Buddha. *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* is our own enlightenment, too. In *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* we identify with the Buddha. In *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* the Buddha identifies with us.

This identification is complete in every respect. Just as the Buddha is three bodies in one, so are we. 'The person who chants *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* is a Buddha. His body is the Dharma-body of the Buddha; his mind, the Reward-body of the Buddha; and his behavior, the Manifestation-body of the Buddha' (*Myoho-ama-gozen-gohenji*, *Showa-teihon*, 1535).

The sects, Nichiren says, from the old Nara sects on down to the recent Kamakura sects, seek identity with only part of the three-fold body of the Buddha. For example, to concentrate on the precepts taught by the historical Shakyamuni, as is done in the Little Vehicle, is to worship only the Manifestation-body. To go to the other extreme, worshipping only the eternal Principle (Dharma-body) as is done in esotericism, is to cut oneself off from the historical foundations. To worship only Amida is to concentrate on the Reward-body at the expense of the other two. The only correct object of worship is the three-in-one and one-in-three as expounded by Chih-i and Saicho. This is expressed in the *Dharma Flower* as the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni.

'All the sects except the Tendai Sect,' he wrote in 1272, 'worship wrong objects. The Kusha, Jojitsu, and Ritsu Sects (Hinayana) worship Buddha Shakyamuni, who is regarded as the person who eliminated illusions and attained enlightenment for the first time under the bodhi-tree. They are as wrong as a crown prince who thinks that he is the son of a subject. The Kegon (Flower Garland), Shingon, Sanron, and Hosso ('Consciousness-only') Sects are Mahayana. The Hosso and Sanron Sects worship Buddha Shakyamuni as defined in the provisional Mahayana. They are as wrong as a crown prince who thinks he is the son of a colonel. The Kegon and Shingon Sects despise Buddha Shakyamuni and worship Buddha Vairocana (personifying the Absolute). They are as wrong as a crown prince who deserts his father

and follows another king of unknown ancestry. The Pure Land Buddhists hold that Buddha Amitabha is their Buddha, and do not worship Buddha Shakyamuni. They do not know that Buddha Amitabha is one of the manifestations of Buddha Shakyamuni. The Zen Buddhists (who reject all traditions) are like a man of low birth who criticizes his parents when he gets some position in society. They despise the Buddhas and the sutras. All these sects worship wrong objects' (*Kaimoku-sho*, 182–4, slightly altered).

Only in the *Dharma Flower* does Shakyamuni reveal the universal Buddha-seed, which permeates all life, and the fulfilment of that seed. It is the king of sutras just as the Original Buddha Shakyamuni, the fulfilment of the seed, is the origin of all Buddhas.

Such talk coming from an unknown monk without credentials left him virtually without allies. Although he supported the Tendai Sect, it did not return the compliment. His own Tendai temple had disowned him, and Tendai as a whole was too engrossed in Nembutsu and esoteric practices to heed his call for a house cleaning. The captive imperial court at Kyoto might have supported him, too, as a nuisance to the Kamakura regents. But Nichiren was not one to permit his religion to be used for political purposes. It should be the other way around: the state must obey the Dharma. Those few persons who did rally to Nichiren came to him singly as individual converts. They included some Tendai monks, provincial nobles and Samurai, merchants, educated women, and eventually members of the lowest social classes — the dispossessed who had been ignored by the state cults.

Although Nichiren was critical of 'wrong Buddhism', he was tolerant of Shinto deities, ancestral spirits, and other local cults as long as they were regarded as secondary. If such deities existed at all, they did so as manifestations of the Wonderful Dharma. Here he differed from the other Kamakura reformers, each of whom insisted that his own system must be followed exclusively. Nichiren even encouraged his followers to study non-Buddhist authors and secular writers. He admired Confucius and certain Hindu philosophers (*Kaimokusho*). Like Saicho, he believed that the truth is the truth regardless of where it is found.[51] He cited with approval Chih-i's dictum that all worldly knowledge is itself Buddhism (MW 2:75). However, we should keep our eyes on the relationship between facts, and not get identified with any one as if it alone were the whole truth. It is the *Dharma Flower* which manifests this relationship (Anesaki 68).

'We cannot exchange letters without knowledge of books outside Buddhism or the books about other sects,' he advised his disciples. 'So you should study them' (*Sado-gosho*).

To him scientific and religious knowledge were one and the same thing. In one of his major essays, 'Opening the Eyes' (*Kaimokusho*), he pays tribute to the great thinkers of China and India, and then demonstrates how their wisdom is completed by Buddhism, and

Buddhism by the *Dharma Flower*. Thus the whole of enlightenment is contained in the title, *Myoho Renge Kyo*, just as — one might say — the whole of scientific methodology and discovery is contained in one word, 'science', and all the triumphs and tragedies, dreams and realities of the American experience are contained within the single word, 'America'. So the whole of the Buddha's original enlightenment is contained within the Sacred Title of his complete teaching.

Since all the ten worlds including Buddhahood contain each other, the sacred title, *Myoho Renge Kyo*, is more than the sum total of human ingenuity. It manifests all the dynamic creativity of the Buddha. It is both 'self-power' and 'other-power'. The *Dharma Flower* is only a graphic description of this inner-power. The power, itself, is expressed in its name, *Myoho Renge Kyo*. The circuit of self-power and other-power is completed when I identify myself with it personally by *Namu*, 'I devote myself to'.

Kishio Satomi elaborates this in his important work, *Japanese Civilization* (68–70):

> The title is the key to the contents . . . We cannot think of any contents without a title, just as nobody can think of Shakespeare without knowing his name. Nichiren, in this respect, took the Sacred Title as Buddha-Seed, in which all virtues are inherent . . . The Sacred Title is the essence of the Lotus Sutra . . . it means at the same time, the essence of life. Buddha's cosmic life is 'Myohorengekyo,' 'Wonderful, mysterious, perfect and right truth.' It is equivalent to the 'Real Suchness.' Everything of the universe is therein contained. Nichiren says:
>
> 'Therefore the manifestation of the cosmos is equivalent to the five words of Myo ho ren ge kyo.'
>
> The Sacred Title is therefore the principle of our lives or essence of our nature, and further this Sacred Title is the name of life which is analysed into ten worlds, and synthesized into One Buddha-centric Existence under the principle of the Mutual Participation (of the ten worlds). He writes in this respect as follows:
>
> 'Therefore if one can perceive that it is not a mere title of the Book, but our substance, because Buddha named our substance and nature as "Myohorengekyo", then our own selves are equivalent to the Lotus Sutra; and we know that we are the Buddhas whose Three aspects of character ("three bodies") are united into One; because Buddha manifested our true substance in the Lotus Sutra'

Nichiren Buddhists do not worship the Book, but the infinite life which

manifests in the Book. If other books or other teachers expound the living truth, they are also the 'Lotus Sutra'. Satomi quotes Nichiren as saying:

'If believers of the other Scriptures would only adore the truth of the Hokekyo (*Dharma Flower* or 'Lotus Sutra'), they would acquire the Principle of the Mutual Participation. Then all other Scriptures would be the Hokekyo, and vice versa. The Hokekyo does not deviate from all Pious-imposition-Scriptures nor vice versa. This is what is called the Mysterious Law (*Myoho*). As soon as this understanding is brought about, reading the Hinayana Scriptures is equivalent to reading the Mahayana Scriptures and the Hokekyo.'

Moreover, Nichiren says: 'You may judge everything in accordance with common sense unless it prevents the Path to Buddhahood' (59).

Willingness to learn from others and the adoption of local religious beliefs within the embrace of the *Dharma Flower* have sometimes led to strange bedfellows, and these have often provoked protests from the more discerning Nichiren believers. However, they have also given Nichiren's followers an ability to adapt to new situations. Nichiren Buddhists have been able to take advantage of changing historical conditions that sometimes paralyzed other groups. After 1868, when Buddhism was disestablished by the restored monarchy and replaced by national Shintoism, the Nichiren sects were the first to adapt and launch vigorous counter-measures. After the disasters of World War II, again it was the Nichiren groups that sprang into life and helped lead the Japanese people out of numbed despair.

Not long after Nichiren returned from exile, he received the alarming news that his mother lay close to death. (His father had died a few years before.) Although he had been forbidden under pain of death to return to his home territory, he immediately departed for Kominato. Since no one expected him to make so dangerous a journey, he was able to arrive undetected. He rushed home to find his mother in a coma, surrounded by weeping relatives. He began to pray fervently for her recovery.

To everyone's surprise, his mother did recover. Nichiren was overjoyed. The villagers, who had once looked upon him as a heretic, now decided that he was a saint and a miracle-worker. Many converted to him, including some Samurai warriors who swore to protect him from his old enemy, Tojo Kagenobu, the lord of the area. As for Kagenobu, he was outraged by such disloyalty, and watched for an opportunity to take his revenge.

Nichiren had taught his followers that they owed eternal gratitude to three groups of people: their parents, who gave them life; their teachers, who taught them the truth; and their rulers, who made their lives secure. He was happy that he had converted his parents and saved his mother's life. His rulers still firmly opposed him. However, since he was now so close, he decided to visit his old teacher Dozen, the abbot

of Kiyosumi. Perhaps he could even convince him to abandon esotericism and the Nembutsu for the original teachings of Tendai.

His visit was cordial but unsuccessful. The two men embraced and wept with emotion when they met again after so many years. Dozen was touched that his former pupil had risked his life to see him, but he was an old man set in his ways. It was too late for him to change his religious beliefs. Teacher and pupil parted as friends, but their roles could not be reversed. The pupil could not instruct the master.

Nevertheless, Nichiren always respected his first teacher. He understood why the old man could not change, and he did not press the matter. He felt he owed him too much. 'If a tree is deeply rooted,' he wrote later after Dozen's death, 'its branches and leaves will never wither. If a spring is inexhaustible, the river it feeds will never run dry. Without a supply of fuel, a fire will burn out. Without the right soil, plants can never grow. Thus Nichiren is comparable to a plant and my master to the soil. I, Nichiren, am indebted to my revered teacher Dozen-bo for the fact that I have become the exponent of the *Dharma Flower* and am now widely known, sometimes favourably, sometimes unfavourably' (*Keka Joju Gosho*, *Gosho* 900).

He promised that whatever good he was able to accomplish in this life he would dedicate to Dozen, who had made it possible. 'Rice plants bear flowers and grain; the seeds return to the soil. Thus the seeds sprout and grow again into flowers and grain. Any benefits which I, Nichiren, may enjoy from propagating the *Dharma Flower* will certainly return to the life of Dozen-bo. If a master has a good disciple, both of them will attain Buddhahood. But if a master has a bad disciple, the two of them will fall into hell, so it is said' (*ibid.*).

After a tearful farewell, Nichiren and a little party of companions left the old abbot for the home of a friendly Samurai, Kudo Yoshitaka. As darkness was falling they walked into a pine forest, and right into an ambush. Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by the soldiers of Lord Kagenobu. 'Shooting arrows flew like rain,' recalls Nichiren, 'and the sparks from clashing swords were like lightning.' Fortunately, Nichiren's host, Kudo Yoshitaka, had got wind of what was about to happen and came galloping full tilt to the rescue.

The three parties collided almost simultaneously, and the battle was brief but deadly. The assassins made straight for the prophet; his companions threw themselves in the way. Kudo Yoshitaka was pierced by arrows. An enemy warrior struck at Nichiren's head; the sword sliced across his forehead, toppling him from his horse. As Nichiren hit the ground, he broke his left hand. Around him, horses reared and plunged as the enemy tried to reach him and apply the final blow. Lord Kagenobu made straight for Nichiren, who had nothing to protect him except his prayer beads. Nichiren raised the beads in front of his face, and this sudden gesture caused Kagenobu's horse to rear. Kagenobu was thrown from the saddle and knocked unconscious. His retainers

dragged him away, and the assassins disappeared among the pine trees as suddenly as they had come. The attack had failed.

This totally unexpected assault left Nichiren stunned and disheartened. He had lost some of his dearest friends in a matter of minutes. Among them was a faithful disciple named Kyonin. Lord Kudo Yoshitaka, who was to have been his host that night, now lay dying. Others were wounded and in pain, and he himself was suffering from a bloody head-wound and a broken hand. (He would bear the scar across his forehead for the rest of his life.) The dying Yoshitaka begged Nichiren to look after his unborn child, and if he was a boy, to make him a disciple. Nichiren promised solemnly. He later adopted the boy as his own son, giving him the name Nichiryu (Christensen, 82).

After what had happened, Nichiren felt it would not be safe to return to Kamakura. Once more he went out into the provinces, always moving from place to place so that he would not bring troubles upon those who were kind enough to give him shelter and provisions. For four years he wandered, a homeless outcast. The world gradually forgot about him, but he did not forget the world.

If the thirteenth century was a time of drastic political and social change for Japan, it had been even more terrifying and disastrous for a large portion of the civilized world. The dreaded Mongols burst out of central Asia and swept both eastward and westward. Venerable empires toppled to the ground before them, and whole nations were laid waste. Other nations fled in panic, overrunning weaker neighbours who lay in their path of escape. The whole world shuddered in horror, wondering who would be the next victim.

The invincible Mongols swept on, bent on slaughter and conquest for the mere sport of it. They poured over the Great Wall of China to make a grazing ground for their horses. They reduced Russia to smoking ruins to create a no-man's-land that their enemies could not cross. They turned Persia into a cemetery, and devastated Iraq. They stormed Baghdad and made a mountain of skulls. They crushed the mighty Seljuk Turks and exhibited the Sultan in a cage. No one could stop them. They might have conquered the world had they not ended by squabbling among themselves.

In 1268 a Korean delegate arrived in Kamakura and demanded tribute from Japan for Kublai Khan, the Mongolian ruler of China and Korea. This was the usual Mongolian tactic of sowing seeds of terror in the hearts of potential victims before suddenly appearing across the borders. Hojo Masumara, the Regent, forwarded the letter to the Emperor in Kyoto. Shortly afterwards, the nervous Masumara was replaced as regent by another member of his family, Hojo Tokimune. The Mongolian plan seemed to be working. The Japanese government was in confusion.

Hearing the news, Nichiren immediately returned to Kamakura. He began sending letters to important officials of church and state,

pointing out that his prophecy made back in 1260 was now coming true, and requesting that a public debate be held to decide what was the true religion, by which Japan could survive the coming storm. He was sure that if he could gain a public hearing, he could easily prove that he stood for the same values which had sustained Japan for centuries. But he was a politician without a constituency, a commander without divisions. He was ignored.

Before the end of the year the Mongols sent a second delegation. This time it was headed not by a Korean but by a Mongol. His fierce aspect struck terror into the hearts of many (as it was meant to do), but Hoji Tokimune sent him away empty-handed. The story was repeated the next year. In 1270 the Mongols began to build up their forces in Korea, outfitting them for a sea-attack and making sure that the Japanese knew they were there. Early in 1271 a third Mongolian envoy came twice to Japan and warned that the mighty Kublai Khan was running out of patience; there would be no further warnings.

It was obvious that the zero-hour was near. Troops were mobilized and prepared to march to probable points of attack. All priests were ordered to pray for victory. The saintly Ryokan was appointed national high priest for the emergency. The idea of a public debate was never even considered. Ryokan had no use for Nichiren and refused to talk to him. Nichiren, for his part, said that even a good man can become deranged from too much *sake*; Ryokan was deranged from wrong doctrine (*Niike Gosho*).

That did it! The Minister of War, Hei-no-Yoritsuna, wanted the country united in one mind behind the fighting men. As a soldier, he knew how to deal with Nichiren — kill him.

Chapter 10

Death and Resurrection

The summer of 1271 did not bring foreign invaders to the shores of Japan, but it did bring drought. The spring rains were light, and the summer was dry. By September the farmers were desperate.

Since Ryokan would not meet him in open debate, Nichiren challenged him to pray for rain and demonstrate his spiritual powers. Of course, temples throughout the land had been praying for rain all summer, but Nichiren had pointedly avoided all rain-making ceremonies. Then he announced that he would pray for rain. Within a few days the clouds gathered and showers poured down upon the parched earth. As far as the Minister of War was concerned, the prayers of any of the country's temples might have brought the rains, and it was ridiculous for Nichiren to claim sole credit. But ignorant people had been impressed, and that could weaken the authority of the official high priest, Ryokan. It was time to get rid of Nichiren once and for all.

On 10 September 1271 Nichiren was summoned to the office of Hei no Saemon,[52] Minister of War and second in command to the Regent, to answer charges that he had insulted leaders of church and state. He admitted that he had criticized Ryokan, but denied accusations that he had said that Hojo Tokiyori and Hojo Shigetoki had both fallen into hell. Since he had broken no law, he was released. However, Hei no Saemon and other officials were not about to let the matter drop.

On the afternoon of 12 September Hei no Saemon personally led a large party of fully armoured warriors to arrest Nichiren. To overawe the upstart son of a fisherman he wore his full official regalia. Nichiren, when he saw the soldiers coming, said to his frightened students, 'This is what I have been expecting for a long time. How lucky for me that I have been able to devote my life to the Lotus Sutra! It has been like changing sand for gold or pebbles for gems.'

He gathered up his scrolls of the Lotus Sutra — his most precious possessions — and stepped out onto the veranda. The soldiers hesitated for a moment, but then, urged on by their officer, broke into the house and began smashing anything they could find. A civilian retainer named Shofu-bo, who had once been one of Nichiren's pupils, snatched a scroll which Nichiren had tucked into his belt and began to beat him on the head with it. 'I am only human,' Nichiren wrote later. 'My first instinct was to protect myself and grab back the scroll. Then I realized he was beating me with the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra, the same one which states that the devotee of the Sutra will be beaten and insulted.' The prophecy had come true!

The warriors took all the scrolls, unwound them, tore them up, stamped on them, or wrapped them around their bodies. Nichiren could contain himself no longer. 'What are you doing? Hei no Saemon must be mad! You are felling the pillar of Japan!' Surprised, the warriors stopped their vandalism long enough for the prophet to begin a lecture on the true faith. They listened for a while, half-amused, half-interested. Then Hei no Saemon grew impatient. He ordered Nichiren marched out and brought to trial. The verdict had already been decided: banishment to the Island of Sado. Meanwhile the prisoner was to be confined in the home of Homma Shigetsura, deputy constable of Sado.

Hei no Saemon was not satisfied. Ordered to escort the prisoner to the home of Homma, he decided to make a detour via the execution grounds. Late in the day he had Nichiren brought out and mounted on a saddleless horse. Hei no Saemon, anxious to get the execution over before the Regent found out about it, ordered the party to move out towards Tatsu-no-kuchi, the execution grounds outside the city.

When Nichiren heard the order, he knew that his last hour had come. He sent a boy to find one of his most faithful followers, a Samurai named Shijo Kingo. Shijo and his two brothers came running, catching up with the procession when it was well on its way. He was a man of rank, and although he could not countermand the orders of Hei no Saemon, he demanded the right to hold the bridle of Nichiren's horse. Shijo had left home in such a hurry that he had not even stopped to put on his shoes. He trotted alongside barefoot, sobbing like a child.

Nichiren never forgot the Samurai's devotion. 'Over and over I recall that you came and followed me when I was going to be beheaded,' he wrote to him later, 'and that you cried and wept, holding the bridle of my horse. How can I forget that as long as I live? If some day you should fall into hell because of your grievous sins, I will not follow the call of the Lord Shakyamuni even if he invites me to Buddhahood, but will surely join you in hell. If you and I are in hell, Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutra will certainly be there with us.'

When they passed in front of the temple of the war-god Hachiman, Nichiren asked permission to dismount. The guards allowed it, thinking that he wanted to pray. However, instead of praying, Nichiren aston-

ished everyone by loudly berating the god for not coming to his rescue. 'Bodhisattva Hachiman, are you really a god? Did not all of you gods swear to the Lord Shakyamuni that you would protect a devotee of the Lotus Sutra? What are you doing, then? If you don't hurry, I will soon be before the Lord in Paradise, and I will report you and all the other gods who failed to keep your promise. If you feel this will go hard on you, hurry up and do something!'

Some of the soldiers were a bit startled by this astonishing speech from one who was about to die. It is said that this is the only time in the history of Japan that anyone has dared publicly to berate a national god. Nevertheless, the procession mounted up and continued to Tatsu-no-kuchi. For the details of what happened next, we are dependent upon a document which was originally in Nichiren's own hand, but which has been so altered by later scribes that it is no longer entirely reliable. It reads as follows:

'At the place which Nichiren had expected to be the site of his execution, many boisterous warriors surrounded him. Shijo Kingo said in tears, "This is your last moment." Nichiren replied, "You don't understand. You should be delighted at this great good fortune [to be able to give one's life for the Sutra]. Don't break your promise." At that moment, a luminous ball as bright as the moon appeared in the direction of Enoshima, and rapidly crossed the sky from southeast to northwest. It was shortly before dawn on the night of the twelfth. It had been too dark to see anyone's face, but the radiant ball made it as bright as a moonlit night so that Nichiren was able to see all the faces there. The executioner fell on his face, his eyes blinded. Some of the warriors, terrified and panic-stricken, ran off a hundred yards; others crouched down on the backs of their horses. At this Nichiren cried, "Here! Why do you shrink from this vile prisoner? Come nearer! Come closer!" However, no one would approach. "What if it dawns? Hurry up and execute me! It will be shameful to behead me after the sun has risen." Nichiren urged them to fulfill their purpose immediately, but there was no answer at all' (*Shuju Ofurumai Gosho*).

This 'luminous ball' has puzzled historians for centuries. Some have said that there was a bolt of lightning which shattered the executioner's sword (De Bary, 1969, 347). Recently Dr Hideo Hirose, a professor at Tokyo University and director of the Tokyo Astronomical Laboratory, reported in the *Seikyo Times* that it was a meteor caused by the passing of Encke's Comet, appearing at 4: a.m. at an elevation of 34° and positioned at an angle from south to west of 79° (September 1985, 56.).

For a long time the guards did not seem to know what to do next. Finally they sent a messenger back to Kamakura for instructions. On the way he met another messenger hastening out from the Regent, who had finally learned what was happening and wanted his original instructions carried out. Nichiren was to be exiled, not executed. The two messengers exchanged dispatches and returned.

Nichiren was kept under house arrest for nearly a month. He was not abused any more, but treated respectfully by the guards. He enjoyed talking to them, and even succeeded in converting some of them to the *Dharma Flower.* Meanwhile the authorities hesitated. They were not sure any more what to do with him. If he really was a great prophet, it would be dangerous to punish him, but if he was causing dissensions in these perilous times, he should be removed as far away as possible. Reflecting the leaders' lack of decision, the city grew restless. The crime rate went up, and there were cases of arson. Nichiren's followers were blamed. Finally the government acted. Nichiren was removed to the distant island of Sado, and his leading disciples were incarcerated.

To Nichiren his miraculous escape from death at Tatsu-no-kuchi was the turning point in his life; it solidified his connection to the *Dharma Flower.* A week after the event he wrote to his faithful Samurai friend, 'Every place where Nichiren meets persecution is the Buddha land. Of all the places in this world, it is at Tatsu-no-kuchi . . . where Nichiren's life dwells. Because he gave his life there for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, Tatsu-no-kuchi may well be called the Buddha land' (MW 1:14).

Now he knew that he had a special role in life. No longer did he call himself, 'a follower of Dengyo Daishi (Saicho)'. Neither Saicho nor Chih-i had offered up his very life for the *Dharma Flower* — only he had done so. He was their equal, probably their superior (*Myomitsu Shonin Goshosoku*). It was clear that he stood in some very special relationship with the Sutra. 'Since I am a common mortal, it is beyond my power to know my previous existences. Apparently I am now the doer of the *Dharma Flower*, and in the future I will be able to reach the seat of enlightenment. Judging the past from this, I must have been present at the ceremony in space (described in the Sutra). There can be no disconnection between the three existences (of the past, present, and future)' (*Shoho Jisso Sho*).

Who was he, then? Nichiren searched the scriptures for the answer. Already he had noticed the similarity between his life and that of Never-Despising Bodhisattva (*Jofukyo*). The latter had been ridiculed and persecuted, and had responded to his tormentors by bowing to them and saying, 'I do not despise you because you will all be able to become Buddhas.' This only drew more scorn down upon him, but he persisted until finally he was able to convert great multitudes. 'The twenty-four (Chinese) characters of his message and the five of mine (*Myo ho ren ge kyo*), are different in word but the same in spirit' (*Kembutsu Mirai Ki*). He said that he would be the Never-Despising Bodhisattva of this Age of Degeneration (*Dan'notsubo Gohenji*).

The parallel was not exact, however, since Never-Despising had lived during a stagnant Age of Imitation Dharma, which was not the same as the present Age of Degeneration. The gentle method of bowing may have worked in such times; today more vigorous methods were necessary. But the Buddha, Nichiren reasoned, had foreseen such

differences. When he was about to reveal the heart of his teaching — the very heart of his being — in the Original Gate, he had summoned forth a vast multitude of bodhisattvas who were completely unknown to his other disciples. They were the bodhisattvas 'from under the Earth'. It was to them that he assigned the mission of spreading the message of eternal life for future ages. These were not men of theory, but men of action. Their leaders were called the Four Great Bodhisattvas of action, and he, Nichiren, must have been one of them — maybe even their leader.

In Nichiren's mind, a vast cosmic plan was unfolding. The Buddha was truly wonderful! He had prepared everything in advance so that all living beings could obtain Buddhahood. Long ago in the distant past, he had appeared as Buddha under different names, such as Never-Despising, and sown the seeds of Buddhahood in people's minds. These people were reborn during the days of Shakyamuni, heard the Dharma from him, and attained enlightenment. The seeds, which had been sown in the distant past, were brought to fruition under the glorious sun of Shakyamuni. Meanwhile others heard him for the first time during his half-century of preaching in India. They then received the seed into their hearts, too. During the second thousand years of Buddhism, they were reborn on earth, and their Buddha-seeds came to fruition under the guidance of great bodhisattvas reincarnated as Chih-i, Dengyo Daishi (Saicho), and others. The Buddha, in his infinite compassion, had always used the right method according to the capacities of the people of each age.

But what about the men and women in the present degenerate age? They had never had the seed sown in their hearts in the past, so there was nothing that could be brought to fruition. Or was there? Indeed, there was! They were the very ones who had been summoned 'from under the earth' — from the infinite past. They had received the Buddha-seed 'from the beginning'. Their seed would be brought to fruition under the guidance of the Four Great Bodhisattvas headed by Jogyo, Superior-Practice. That great bodhisattva was none other than Nichiren himself.

The sun was not setting, like everyone thought. It was the moon that was setting — the reflected light of the moon of the old teachings from India and China, which had completed their role. The sun was now rising in the form of the Original Buddha, *Hombutsu*, who was displaying his light within the lives of his Original Disciples (*Honge*). It was rising in the East over Japan; it would extend its light westward until it brightened the entire world. (*Kangyo Hachiman Sho*).

Nichiren came to these optimistic conclusions at a time when his life should have been at its nadir, not its zenith. He had been sentenced to death, spared at the last minute, and then sent far away into exile, where it seemed he would die forgotten. Yet there he was, talking cheerfully about rising over all the world like the sun in the east.

Japanese society has always been group-centred. The individual is under tremendous pressure to conform to the standards of the group — his family, his class, his village, his guild. To be cut off from the group, to be disinherited and set adrift, is a terrible punishment.[53] Only one thing could be worse yet — to be cut off from *all* groups, to be sent into exile. Nichiren had suffered this fate once before, but then he had been sent not too far away. Now he was exiled to the ends of the country, to a lonely wind-swept isle that had become the tomb of more than one enemy of the Hojos.

Sado is a pleasant enough place in the summer, but during the winter icy blasts roar across the Sea of Japan from Siberia and send temperatures plunging. Nichiren had the misfortune to arrive at the beginning of winter. His only shelter was an abandoned hut. His only food was what he could scrounge — which was not very much. 'During the nearly two months since my arrival on this island of Sado,' he wrote in December 1271, 'icy winds have been blowing constantly, and though the snow sometimes stops for a while, the sunlight is never seen. My body is penetrated by the cold' (Anesaki, 62–3).

One man decided to put Nichiren out of his misery. There was an old Samurai named Abutsu-bo, who was living on the island, himself an exile from some long forgotten political intrigue.[54] He decided that it was his moral duty to put the 'devil priest' to death. Honour required, however, that he face his opponent first. Armed with a sword in its scabbard, he confronted Nichiren, but once he was face to face with the man he wanted to kill, he could find no excuse to draw his sword. The conversation grew less gruff and more friendly. After a while Abutsu became so engrossed in their discussion that he took off his sword and sat down; it was the beginning of a life-long friendship. At the end of the day Abutsu went home and told his wife about the extraordinary man he had met.

The next day husband and wife came together. This time they brought provisions, for Abutsu had noticed that the priest had almost nothing to eat. They visited him almost every day after that, frequently coming by night so as not to be noticed by the islanders. Once more Nichiren had found friends in his exile. Just as the fisherman and his wife had looked after him on the Izu Peninsula, so now Abutsu and his wife Sen'nichi-ama did the same. Nichiren came to consider them among his dearest friends. In later years Abutsu would three times make the long journey to Mt. Minobu to see Nichiren. When he died, his son made the trip for him, bringing his ashes to be buried there near those of the master.

When winter had passed, Nichiren began to receive visitors who came trudging up from Kamakura. Among them was the young mother mentioned earlier, who brought her daughter with her. Some of his disciples came to minister to him. One of them was Niko, who was later called Sado Ajari ('Sado Teacher'). Nichiro also came, having escaped

prison by a ruse. But when Nichiren heard of the ruse, he ordered the disciple to return so as not to cause others to suffer in his place.

Nichiren was in exile on Sado from 1271 to 1274. During these years he had much time on his hands, and this gave him the opportunity to systematize the main points of his teachings. First of all, as we have seen, he came to a clear understanding of his own identity: he was the exponent of the Lotus Sutra for the Age of Degeneration.

Nichiren saw himself in the role of the leader of the Bodhisattvas from the Earth, Superior-Practice (*Jogyo*). Was he really the reincarnation of the Great Bodhisattva? Although he long wondered about this, he hesitated to give himself such an august title. Generally he described himself as an envoy of Jogyo. 'Although I am not Jogyo, I think I understand what he should do. I have been propagating the Right Dharma of the Buddha for the past twenty some years. I believe that Jogyo Bodhisattva told me to do this' (*Nii-ama-gozen-gohenji*).

In only one document does he specifically identify himself with Bodhisattva Jogyo (Sanskrit, Vishista-caritra), and that is a late work of disputed authenticity, the *Sandai-hiho-sho.*[55] Nevertheless, the parallels between him and Jogyo are too obvious to overlook. Both Jogyo and Nichiren represent the superior man of action — fire in the lotus.

Shortly after his arrival on Sado, Nichiren began writing what was to be his longest work — a 75-page essay entitled, 'Open Your Eyes' (*Kaimokusho*). Because of the adverse circumstances under which he was living and writing, it took him about three months to complete the work. The composition shows indications of frequent interruptions, but he had to get it down on paper. The main topic was his own identity; he had to explain to his followers (and to himself as well) how it could be that he, the practitioner of the Sutra, should be so despised and rejected. Why had all the powers of heaven and earth deserted him? The Buddha had promised to protect a devotee of the Lotus Sutra. Why had not legions of angels been dispatched to his rescue? Since that dramatic night at the execution grounds there had been no favourable signs from heaven — only icy winds that penetrated his miserable hut day and night.

Nichiren seemed to fear that he would not survive that first terrible winter in exile. The essay bears signs of being a last will and testament. It was addressed to those faithful few who had stood by him, some of whom were then languishing in prisons. He sent it to Shijo Kingo, the brave Samurai who had accompanied him to the execution grounds.

'A man called Nichiren was beheaded at midnight on the 12th of the ninth month last year. This is being written by the soul of that man, who is now in the snow of the Province of Sado. This writing will be sent to my disciples who are still following me. Those who read this may be frightened because this seems dreadful although it is not dreadful at all. This essay is a mirror reflecting the future of Japan prophesied by Shakyamuni Buddha, Many-Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the

worlds of the ten directions. It should be regarded as my testament.'

He begins with a long discourse on the history of the development of religious thought, which leads to its culmination in the 'Three Thousand Things in One Moment's Thought', as elucidated by Chih-i. Although other philosophers may have had the same insight, credit must be given where credit is due — to Chih-i, who first explained the theory, and to the Lotus Sutra, where it was revealed.

The fulfilment of the Lotus Sutra in the modern age calls for the appearance of Superior-Practice, Jogyo. Is he here yet? Yes, it seems that he is. There is one man who is realizing in his flesh all the persecutions which the Sutra says its devotee must be prepared to endure. That man is Nichiren.

Nichiren must suffer in the flesh to expiate for sins in past lives. Even in this life, he began his career as a practitioner of the Nembutsu, and for this he must pay the price. The more he is persecuted now, the quicker he will expiate his sins and attain Buddhahood.

In a letter sent the next month to his most prominent disciple, Toki Jonin, he elaborated on this point, saying that he was born under all sorts of handicaps: poverty, a heretical family, a hostile ruler, an unattractive physical appearance, and so forth. Such inherited disadvantages must have been merited because of prior sins. In expiating them for himself, he expiates them for others as well. Anesaki explains:

> An existence of any kind is never an individual matter, but always the result of a common karma, shared by all born in the same realm of existence. Hence the expiation made by any one individual is, in fact, made for the sake of all his fellow-beings. Both the persecutors and the persecuted share the common karma accumulated in the past, and therefore share also in the future destiny, the attainment of Buddhahood. Nichiren's repression of others' malice and vice is at the same time his own expiation and self-subjugation. How, then, should his followers not share his merit in extinguishing the accumulated sins, and preparing for the realization of the primeval Buddha-nature? 'Therefore,' Nichiren exhorts his disciples, 'believe in me, and emulate my spirit and work, in the firm faith that the Master is the savior and leader! Work together, united in the same faith! Then, the expiation of sins will be achieved for ourselves and for all our fellow-beings, because we all share in the common karma.'
>
> (75)

His iron determination and irrepressible optimism carried him through that first freezing winter on Sado. In the spring his fortunes took a turn for the better. The government, still a bit worried that he might be a true prophet after all, sent instructions that he should be well treated

and installed in adequate quarters. He was moved to a place called Ichi-no-Sawa, where the local ruler took a great liking to him, even permitting his wife and son to become converts. As a government official, however, he dared not take this step himself.

Under these improved circumstances Nichiren was now able to put his deepest thoughts down on paper. During 1273, the second year of his exile, he produced some of his finest writings including his masterpiece, *Kanjin Honzon Sho.* It is shorter than 'Open Your Eyes', but less rambling and better organized. The former, written under great stress, had been concerned primarily with his own identity. The latter is a reasoned explanation of his principal teachings.

The word *kanjin* is a term used by Chih-i. It means 'observation of the mind', or the ability to see that the 3000 things exist in our minds. The second term, *honzon*, is difficult to translate. In traditional Buddhism, it refers to the principal idol in a temple — that which is worshipped. *Hon* means 'root' or 'origin'; *son* or *zon* is 'honoured' or 'worthy of respect'. (We see it in the common epithet for the Buddha, 'World-honoured One', *Seson*.)

With Nichiren the term *honzon* takes on a very specific meaning; the usual translation as 'object of worship' seems inadequate. Petzold gives a very literal translation, 'fundamental venerable'. Earlier translators such as Satomi and Anesaki call it 'Supreme Being', and that seems close to what Nichiren had in mind. He used the term in its literal sense: sacred (*son*) source (*hon*). It is not just an object — a thing — but that from which all being originates, that which essentially *is* and which alone is worthy of our devotion. Nichiren generally distinguishes between his understanding of *honzon* and the more limited usual view by adding an honorific, *go*: *gohonzon*. Therefore the title of the essay, *Kanjin Honzon Sho*, could be rendered, 'The Sacred Source Revealed by Observation of the Mind'.

Again he begins his essay with a discussion of Chih-i's doctrine of the 'Three Thousand Things in a Moment's Thought'. This time he stresses that since all things involve each other, so too is the Buddha involved in all things. Shakyamuni was born as an ordinary mortal, and then became the Buddha, showing that he already had Buddhahood within. There must be a seed before there can be a flower. We mortals contain the same seed.

Professor Kanko Mochizuki of Rissho University summarizes this portion of Nichiren's argument in an essay, 'The Kanjin Honzon Sho':

> Nichiren says that this truth is expressed by the Japanese title of the sutra, *Myoho Renge Kyo.* The word *renge* represents the law of causality. *Ren* has two meanings: a lotus-plant and a lotus-fruit. Nichiren takes the latter meaning of the word to make it a symbol of the effect as the contrast to *ge* or flower, which he regards as symbol of cause. And the fact that some lotus flowers

> bloom while other lotus flowers already bear fruit is utilized to show that cause and effect involve each other. The Buddha was a man; a man will be a Buddha. This is the law of causality expressed by *renge*. This *renge* or law of causality is excellent; therefore it is called *Myoho* or the Excellent Law. Thus, to Nichiren, *Myoho Renge Kyo* is not only the name of the sutra, but also the name of the truth expounded in the sutra. Because the title of the sutra expresses by itself the truth that the Buddha and men are the same in their essence, we shall be able to attain to Buddhahood by chanting the Sacred Title. Nichiren recommends this chanting as the most important practice, rejecting the complicated ways of meditation of the T'ien-t'ai Sect as unfit for the people living in the Age of Degeneration.
>
> (*The Nichiren Sect*, 11)

In a later writing Nichiren elaborates on this important principle. '*Myo* ("wonderful") represents death, and *Ho* ("Dharma, Law") life. Life and death are the two phases passed through by the entities of the Ten Worlds, the entities of all sentient beings which embody the law of cause and effect (*renge*) . . . Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. Therefore, to chant Myoho-renge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate law of life and death' (MW 1:22).

Having explained *kanjin*, the method for attaining Buddhahood, Nichiren moves on to what it is that the correct practice reveals, *honzon*, the Sacred Source. It is to be found, he says, not in some imaginary 'western paradise', but right here in our own world and within our own selves. All those distant pure lands or heavenly realms were conceived in the minds of historical beings. When they died, their mental creations passed away with them. We cannot expect to enter their heavens any more than we can enter into their minds. We must find the Pure Land within our own lives.

'The *Saha*-world (this world) of the Original Buddha is the eternal pure land, free from the three calamities and the four *kalpas* (periods of growth stability, decay, and oblivion). In this eternal world, the Buddha never disappeared in the past, nor is he to appear in the future. All living beings under him are one with him because they have the wisdom of the Buddha in their minds.'

Our world of constant flux is revealed in the *Dharma Flower* to be the eternal world of the Original Buddha. Chih-i explained this with his Three Truths: the reality of phenomena (*ke*), Void (*ku*), and the Middle (*chu*). The world as we experience it is phenomenal (*ke*). It is also non-substantial and negated by emptiness (*ku*). Chapter XVI of the Lotus Sutra reveals that the negation is so complete that it negates itself. This

is the Middle — 'true suchness' — the 'Pure Land of the Vulture Peak', or as it is generally called in Nichiren Buddhism, the 'Pure Land of Tranquil Light'.

For us mortals, *honzon* in the sense of an object of worship appears at the moment Shakyamuni transmits his sacred truth to us, the Bodhisattvas from the earth. 'The true object of worship (*honzon*) should be the Buddha at the moment of this transmission. The scene of the transmission is described in the following way: 'In the sky above the Eternal Saha-world is seen the Treasure tower, which is nothing but the representation of the Five Words (*myo ho ren ge kyo*). In this stupa sits the Original Buddha Shakyamuni on the right and Many Treasures on the left. The Four Great Bodhisattvas attend on Shakyamuni; Manjusri, Maitreya, Bhaisajyaraja (Yaku-o, Medicine King), and Samantabhadra (Fugen, Universal Sage) are seen in the lower heaven; all the other major and minor Bodhisattvas, be they disciples of the Buddha Shakyamuni of Manifestation or of the Buddhas of other worlds, are seated in the lowest heaven, just as a multitude of subjects prostrate themselves before their king; and all the Buddhas of the worlds in the ten directions take their positions on the ground, showing that they and their lands are but epiphanies of the Eternal Buddha and His land. The scene as such is mentioned nowhere else, only in the eight chapters [of the *Dharma Flower*, from the 15th to the 22nd inclusive]' (*Kanjin Honzon Sho*, 32–3).

We have here three main points of Nichiren's system: the true cause, the true effect, and the true land. The true cause is the Sacred Title. The true effect is Buddhahood. The true land is here, this *Saha*-world, where we meet the Sacred Source. In a slightly altered form, they are called the Three Great Secret Dharmas: The Sacred Title of the Original Gate (*Hommon no daimoku*), the Sacred Source of the Original Gate (*Hommon no honzon*), and the Precepts platform of the original gate (*Hommon no kaidan*).

In this essay, as well as in others written in the same period, Nichiren spoke mostly about the first two Great Secret Dharmas, and scarcely alluded to the third. Only years later, when it was obvious that his teachings were being rejected not only by heretical sects but by his own Tendai Sect as well, did he narrow the idea of the True Land to a *kaidan*, which would replace the official *kaidan* at Mount Hiei. Saicho had established the latter as a place where monks might receive the precepts of Mahayana. Since Nichiren taught only one precept, the Sacred Title, his *kaidan* would be for everyone who would accept it, be they men or women, clergy or laity. Basically the *Hommon no Kaidan* is any place where a believer keeps the Sutra, as is stated in Chapter XXI. Any such place is sacred, but that does not rule out the possibility of erecting an actual *kaidan* for all humanity at some time in the future.

Nichiren now completed his exposition of the Sacred Source by

sketching it in the form of a mandala. He did this on 8 July 1273, after writing *Kanjin Honzon Sho* and some other works on the same subject.

A mandala is a graphic design used to help a meditator focus his attention on the oneness that underlies all existence. There are many different types of mandalas, and they are much used in esotericism. Normally a mandala is a balanced design of circles, squares, and other geometric forms which focus finally on a circular centre. If it is illustrated, it shows Buddhas and Bodhisattvas seated in an orderly arrangement.

José and Miriam Argüelles describe and illustrate numerous mandalas in their book of the same name (12–13).

> The universality of the Mandala is in its one constant, *the principle of the center.* The center is the beginning of the Mandala as it is the beginning and origin of all form and of all processes, including the extensions of form into time . . . [It is] symbolic of the eternal potential. From the same inexhaustible source all seeds grow and develop, all cells realize their function . . . This can be realized because the center principle manifests itself through man in the same way as it does through a flower or a star; in it we may discover our cosmic commonality — or cosmic community'.

They go on to say that a mandala has three basic properties: a centre, symmetry, and cardinal points. 'The first principle is constant; the latter two vary according to the nature of the particular Mandala' (13).

Nichiren was well acquainted with this type of mandala, for he had studied many of them. His own, however, is entirely different. It has the three properties of a centre, symmetry, and cardinal points, but they are not immediately obvious. It contains no circles or squares, only Chinese characters written in his bold hand. His Great Mandala (*Daimandara* or *Omandara*) is not designed to help the meditator focus on the still quiet centre, the Void. Instead it is an embodiment of the principle of the Three Thousand Things in a Single Moment's Thought. It bursts with life.

Nichiren is known to have inscribed over 130 mandalas, most of which are still extant. (One was discovered at Nagoya as recently as 1985.) No two are exactly alike, but all express the same theme. The earliest complete one, drawn in 1273 while he was in exile on Sado, was on a piece of silk, 2 ft 6 in wide and 5 ft 6 in long. Down the centre in large letters are written the Chinese characters, NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO. At the top to the right and left in smaller characters are inscribed Namu Shakyamuni Buddha, Namu Many-Treasures Buddha, and Namu — each of the Four Great Bodhisattvas from under the Earth. At the four corners are the names of the four guardian deities, marking the four cardinal points mentioned by Argüelles. On the two sides are

Sanskrit letters standing for the temple guardians: Acala, the sound 'a', representing the material, and Raga, the sound 'hum', the mind, at least in their benign aspect (Getty 1988, 170). As demons, Acala is desire and Raga determined aggression (Campbell, *Myths, Dreams and Religion* 156–7). The rest of the mandala consists of names of other beings, divine, human, and sub-human, representing all the 'ten worlds'.

Unlike most mandalas, wherein all beings radiate from a common centre and thus manifest their oneness, Nichiren's arrangement shows an ascending hierarchy of life. The higher beings are at the top; lower beings take their places further down in order of rank like attendants at the court of a king. Through the centre, giving meaning to all, is the Tower of Seven Gems, the Sacred Title in seven characters. It is embodied in the one who chants it and especially in Nichiren himself.

'Reading the letters of Nichiren,' says calligrapher John Carpenter, 'one is captivated by the fiery, indomitable nature of the man who revolutionized Japanese Buddhism by making it a vehicle for social reform. One is struck by the handwriting, which strongly conveys the personality of this impatient genius. Nichiren recommended that the Lotus Sutra be "read with the whole body," and one can suppose, too, that in those tempestuous letters he wrote with his whole body.'[56]

In enlightenment, the knower and reality merge as one. 'The Great Mandala,' says an official handbook of the Nichiren Sect, 'represents the enlightenment of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni and the very heart of the Buddha, and therefore it is a graphic representation of Shakyamuni Buddha's spirit, itself' (*Shingyo Hikkei*, 5). It is the Sacred Source of the Original Gate (*Hommon-no-Honzon*).

Most Buddhists venerate the Buddha in the form of a statue. Nichiren himself took with him everywhere a small image of Shakyamuni, which had been given to him by the provincial governor whose health he restored on the Izu Peninsula. A statue which is aesthetically pleasing to one person, however, may be repulsive to another. Japanese Buddhists will make the Buddha look Japanese; an Indian will make him look Indian. The very earliest representations, made under the influence of Greek art, made him appear like a Greek god. One artist will make him fat; another will make him thin. Particularly difficult for the artist to represent are the '32 physical marks' symbolizing the Buddha's superiority. They include a protuberance on the top of the head (signifying wisdom), the 'third eye' (omniscience), elongated earlobes, elongated arms, and other features, which may end up looking grotesque on the figure of an otherwise normal human being.

In the Great Mandala, on the other hand, the devotee identifies himself with what he sees written before him. Even if he cannot read all the Chinese characters, he, too, is *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. All the ten worlds exist in him, too.

According to Shimizu Ryozan (1865–1928), a prominent Nichiren theologian, there are three mandalas, each with its own 'secret

platform' (*mitsudan*), or place where we meet it. The Ceremony in Space, which is described in the middle portion of the Lotus Sutra, is a mandala (a sacred symbol) of the meeting between the Buddha and all beings. In the presence of the Buddha, they are all transfigured, revealing their true nature. Shimizu calls this, 'The Great Mandala Secret Platform of the Great Meeting in Space of the Original Gate' (*Hommon koku dai-e no daimandara mitsudan*).

For the sake of us sinful and spiritually blind beings of the Age of Degeneration, Nichiren now makes a pen and ink mandala, which reveals the former 'as accurately as the print matches the woodblock' from which it derives (*Nichinyo Gozen Gohenji*). Shimizu calls this pen-and-ink mandala 'The Great Mandala Secret Platform for the Age of Degeneration' (*Mappo oji no daimandara mitsudan*). Nichiren, after many preparatory attempts, drew it for the first time on 8 July 1273. He could depict it only after he had first perfectly conceived it in *Kanjin Honzon Sho.*

These two mandalas, the visible and tangible one created by Nichiren, and the symbolic one of the Ceremony in Space are both manifestations of an even more fundamental reality, 'The Great Mandala Secret Platform of Original Existence of Non-beginning (*Mushi honnu no daimandara mitsudan*), which is originally complete and existing originally by itself. It cannot be seen because its form is "non-form"' (Petzold, *Nichiren* 61–2).

Each mandala has its own *kaidan*, place of reception of the precepts, or *mitsudan*, secret place of reception. The most fundamental is invisible and inconceivable to the mind and visible spiritually; it is 'in space'. 'This manifests the superior and wonderful material forms,' says Petzold citing Shimizu, 'by opening the "form of non-form" of the first Mandala, whereby all complete meetings are made to exist completely. That is, the whole universe and all beings and things contained in it now become manifested' (62). The third, which is visible to the eye, manifests the other two. It is where physical beings meet the one Buddha in his manifestation.

When the assembled multitude at the Ceremony in Space saw the great Treasure Tower, its door was closed. The Buddha then opened the door revealing Many-Treasures Buddha within — that is, the Buddha-nature within ourselves. The Buddha now gives us the key to open our Treasure Tower. It is *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, the Sacred Formula (*Odaimoku*). The Sacred Formula is not given in the *Dharma Flower* Sutra. It is the Sutra; it is the Sutra's quintessence.

The Sacred Formula, however, is not merely subjective, applying to oneself alone; it is also objective. It is the content of the enlightenment of the Buddha. It is universal, applying to everyone and everything. It is also the heart of the Sacred Source who reveals himself as the Original Gate (*Hommon no honzon*). The Sacred Formula is the subject; the Great Mandala-Gohonzon is the object.

According to Satomi, Nichiren has solved 'the religious problem' by overcoming the distinction between subjective and objective religions. Buddhism, as a rule, is subjective; it looks inward, to the self. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are objective; they look outward, to God. Subjective religions, which developed among the Aryan races from ancient Hindu sages to modern German philosophers, lean toward pantheism, finding God everywhere and nowhere. Objective religions, which originated among the Semitic races, are monotheistic, seeing God as the 'absolutely other'. Nichiren, says Satomi, is both; he calls this, 'One Buddha-centric Pantheism' (87).

> Confucius or Christ or Mohammed or any sages are nothing but one of the distributive bodies of this One and Only Buddha. Nichiren recognized the One Buddha as the sole and highest existence, who revealed himself as Eternal Buddha in Chapter XVI of the Lotus Sutra, but at the same time he acknowledged the divine nature as intrinsically inherent in all beings, according to the principle of Mutual Participation of the ten worlds. He holds with monotheism in the former sense and holds with pantheism in the latter sense. But as he says in his letter to a lady, *Nichinyo*, he took up the position of One Buddha-centric Pantheism as his ultimate decision. We can see here one of the reasons for determining what the condition of the future religion will be.

This Great Mandala, say Nichiren's followers today, is the banner under which all the people of the world will unite in the twenty-first century.