

The Life of Nichiren Daishonin

Seven chapters from the book *The Life of Nichiren Daishonin* are included in the Entrance-level curriculum.

The following chapter follows Nichiren Daishonin as the young Rencho on his journey to discover the truth about Buddhism.

Chapter 2 (pp. 11–18): Proclamation of True Buddhism

AFTER leaving Seicho-ji, Rencho went to Kamakura, seat of the shogunate government. Since Kamakura was the center of political power, it attracted priests from Kyoto, and Buddhist temples had been built there in quick succession. The Jodo, Zen and Ritsu sects were most prevalent, while Tendai, Shingon and Kegon were hardly in evidence. It was here that Rencho began his studies to determine exactly which sects taught what and how each related to his own enlightenment.

He spent several years in Kamakura, reading through the sutras kept in the scripture library of the Hachiman shrine at Tsurugaoka. He briefly returned to Seicho-ji in 1242, at the age of twenty-one, and wrote a treatise entitled “On Attaining Buddhahood through the Entity of Precepts.” Then in order to study further the doctrines and sutras of various sects, he traveled to Kyoto and Nara, the centers of Buddhism in Japan. Just northeast of Kyoto, the Tendai sect had founded its head temple Enryaku-ji at Mount Hiei. Thus Mount Hiei had become the most distinguished center of Mahayana Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra. Rencho studied at Mount Hiei under a priest named Nansho-bo Shumpan, who was acclaimed as a scholar of Buddhism by his colleagues at Mount Hiei. In “On Refuting Ryokan and Other Priests,” Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “... and then I studied at Mount Hiei, Onjo-ji temple, Mount Koya and in other temples in the Kyoto and countryside regions.” So he obviously did not confine his activities to Mount Hiei but searched also among the documents at other temples. Onjo-ji temple, also known as Mii-dera and located by Lake Biwa at the foot of Mount Hiei, belonged to the Tendai sect. Mount Koya was the center of study and practice of the Shingon sect, which had been founded by Kobo (also known as Kukai).¹ By “the Kyoto region” he probably meant To-ji, another famous temple of the Shingon sect, and other temples which were located in the old capital. By “the countryside region” he probably meant the Osaka area, where there was a temple called Shitenno-ji that had been founded by Prince Shotoku² in 587. In addition, it is likely, given the references in his later writings, that he studied Chinese history and Confucianism, as Japan’s government in those days was deliberately modeled after China’s and classical Chinese was the language used for most government documents.

Beginning with the treatise he wrote during his brief stay at Seicho-ji, the young scholar penned many writings³ during his years of intensive Buddhist study. These writings reveal his realizations about each of the sects he examined. As his studies progressed, he became increasingly critical in particular of the Shingon

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sect, along with the Zen, Judo, Ritsu and other sects.

WHEN Rencho was certain that the Lotus Sutra was the only teaching which contained the truth he had previously awakened to in front of Bodhisattva Kokuzo, he returned to Mount Kiyosumi. His colleagues and teachers were happy to see him and anxious to hear of life in the old capital, which many of them had never seen. It is said that on his return, he went to a room in the temple to seclude himself for a week. If so, it would not have caused concern; religious retreats were common in those days. Little did anyone realize that young Rencho was preparing for the proclamation of the correct teaching in the Latter Day of the Law.

Early on the morning of April 28, 1253, the thirty-two-year-old priest climbed to the top of a hill at Kasagamori, which commanded a clear view of the Pacific Ocean. There, as the sun rose, he greeted it with humankind's first invocation of the supreme Law. In a clear and resounding voice he chanted, "Nam-myoho-rence-kyo." Before heaven and earth, with the sun as his witness, he had proclaimed the correct practice of Buddhism for people in the modern era.

Myoho-rence-kyo is the title of the Lotus Sutra as it had been translated into Chinese by the monk Kumarajiva (344-413). But to young Rencho it was more than a title; it was the essence of the Lotus Sutra, the revelation of the supreme Law itself. It is better, perhaps, to let Nichiren Daishonin himself explain this. In a writing dated just two years after his climb to the hilltop to invoke the supreme Law and entitled "On Attaining Buddhahood," he wrote:

While deluded, one is called a common mortal, but once enlightened, he is called a Buddha. Even a tarnished mirror will shine like a jewel if it is polished. A mind which presently is clouded by illusions originating from the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but once it is polished it will become clear, reflecting the enlightenment of immutable truth. Arouse deep faith and polish your mirror night and day. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

What then does *myo* signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our lives from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend or words express. When you look into your own mind at any moment, you perceive neither color nor form to verify that it exists. Yet you still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur to you. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor nonexistence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the reality of all things. *Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and *ho* to its manifestations.

Renge, the lotus flower, symbolizes the wonder of this Law. Once you realize that your own life is the Mystic Law, you will realize that so are the lives of all others. That realization is the mystic *kyo*, or sutra. It is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our minds, from which spring both good and evil, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. If you

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have deep faith in this truth and chant Myoho-rence-kyo, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime...(The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, pp. 4-5)

NAM, he later explained, means to make the heritage of the supreme Law one's own by fusing with it; literally meaning devotion, *nam* in this case denotes devotion to the Mystic Law of *Myoho-rence-kyo*. In other words, the practice of the Latter Day is to devote oneself to the supreme Law of life through chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Now that Rencho had made his proclamation to the heaven and earth, he left the hilltop to return to Seicho-ji temple where he would have an audience of humans, many of them priests and students at the temple, others from the nearby villages. Already, it had been fourteen years since he had left for Kamakura and the Kyoto-Nara area. In all, it had been twenty years since he had entered Seicho-ji for the first time.

At noon before his audience in the main hall of the Shobutsu-bo, or priests' lodging, of Seicho-ji temple, Rencho made his proclamation. In addition, he denounced the four other major sects of the day—Nembutsu, Zen, Shingon and Ritsu. Through his studies, Rencho understood that these sects were based on the partial truths contained in the provisional sutras and not the complete truth Shakyamuni had expounded in the Lotus Sutra. The Nembutsu sect attacked the Lotus Sutra as too profound to be grasped by people in the Latter Day of the Law, and urged them to recite the name of Amida Buddha in order to be reborn in the Western Paradise. However, in that Nembutsu slandered the Lotus Sutra, Rencho asserted that it led not to paradise but hell. The Zen sect claimed that enlightenment was transmitted apart from the sutras. In denying the sutras in general and the Lotus in particular, Rencho said, Zen was in effect denying Buddhism itself; hence he termed it "the work of devils." Shingon not only ranked its teachings above the Lotus Sutra but revered the Buddha Dainichi or Mahavairochana, not Shakyamuni who actually taught Buddhism in this world. The esoteric rituals of Shingon were employed to protect the nation, but because the sect itself was based on a misconception, Rencho said, it would on the contrary work to bring about the nation's downfall. Ritsu adhered to the Hinayana rules of discipline which were valid only in the Former Day of the Law. Ritsu had supporters among top government officials; Rencho saw the confusion it generated about Buddhism as an influence which disrupted the nation spiritually and was therefore treasonous.

In addition to refuting the existing sects of Buddhism, he announced that he would change his name to Nichiren, "Sun Lotus." The Goshō "Letter to Jakunichi-bo" states, "Giving myself the name Nichiren signifies that I attained enlightenment by myself" (MW-1, 236). Taking on the name Nichiren represents his conviction that he was the original Buddha. In "Easy Delivery of a Fortune Child," the Daishonin also says, "Is there anything brighter than the sun and the moon? Is there anything purer than the lotus flower? The Lotus Sutra is the sun and the moon and the lotus flower. Therefore, it is called Myoho-rence-kyo (the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Mystic Law). Nichiren is also like the sun and the moon and also like the lotus flower" (MW-4, 87). Taking the name Nichiren

indicates that Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha who sheds light upon the impure and evil Latter Day of the Law and causes blossoms of happiness to unfold amid the torment of society, just as the sun and moon illuminate all people and the beautiful lotus blooms from an impure and muddy swamp.

His audience was not pleased. Not only had they never heard of Nam-myohorenge-kyo, which he had said was the ultimate entity of Buddhahood and the direct path to enlightenment, but he had offended their long-cherished beliefs in other sects. Especially displeased was Tojo Kagenobu, the steward of Tojo Village in Awa Province and a passionate believer in the Nembutsu. He managed to hide his anger in the presence of the priests and villagers, but he ordered his men to ambush and do away with this man whom he considered to be an impostor and a dangerous heretic.

Though an ardent believer in Nembutsu, Dozen-bo took pity on his former disciple and instructed Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, senior disciples, to show him a hidden trail to safety. It was dusk as Nichiren Daishonin entered the pathway. Thus the sun, which had been rising as the founder of true Buddhism chanted the supreme invocation and had been high in the sky as he delivered his sermon, now began to set as he hurried through the woods.



During the ensuing years the Daishonin encountered many life-threatening persecutions including his first exile for which he was later pardoned. The greatest of these persecutions was an attempt to execute him on the beach at Tatsunokuchi one night in 1271. As the executioner was about to behead him, a meteor lit up the sky terrifying government soldiers. The next two chapters explain events immediately after the attempted execution.

Chapters 7 (pp. 56–59): Revelation of True Identity

THE near execution at Tatsunokuchi amounted to a rebirth for Nichiren Daishonin. He later said in “The Opening of the Eyes” that “this person named Nichiren was beheaded” (MW-2, 177). As his post-Tatsunokuchi writings testify, the man who emerged after his brush with the executioner’s sword was decidedly transformed. This is not to say that the Daishonin underwent a change of heart but that the time had come for him to reveal his true identity.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China had interpreted the Lotus Sutra by dividing it into two parts. The first fourteen of the twenty-eight chapters he called *shakumon* or the theoretical teaching, and the second fourteen *hommon* or the essential teaching. The Japanese word *hon* (*hom* is a phonetic change of *hon*) means substance and *shaku* means shadow. Thus the theoretical teaching is like a shadow of the essential, or substantial, teaching. The same comparison can be used with Nichiren Daishonin. Before the event at Tatsunokuchi, he carried out the role of Bodhisattva Jogyo,⁴ the votary whose appearance in an age after Shakyamuni’s death was predicted in the Lotus Sutra. He thus spent all his time

spreading the teachings of the sutra and propagating the faith in it. After the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he revealed himself as the Buddha from time without beginning who is one with the supreme Law of Nammyoho-rence-kyo. In other words, his former role was but a reflection of the true mission to which he had been born.

T'ien-t'ai had drawn the same distinction between the Shakyamuni depicted in the first fourteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra and the Shakyamuni in its second fourteen chapters. In the first half, T'ient'ai had said, Shakyamuni was merely a person who had attained enlightenment in India. In the second half, he was a Buddha who had attained his enlightenment in the unimaginably distant past and whose Buddhahood continued from that point to exist for all eternity.

This process of a Buddha casting off his transient provisional nature and revealing his true nature has come to be known in Buddhism as *hosshaku kempon* (literally, to cast off the transient and reveal the true). Nichiren Daishonin's *hosshaku kempon* came at Tatsunokuchi. That is why he could say that a man named Nichiren died at Tatsunokuchi. The individual who emerged after the execution attempt was the Buddha of time without beginning. In his earliest writings after the Tatsunokuchi persecution, Nichiren Daishonin began referring, albeit in an abstract manner, to the real nature of his existence. This was particularly evident in "The True Object of Worship," in which he identified himself as the original Buddha coexistent with the eternal Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

The contemporary Western mind often recoils at the mention of anything that could be construed as suggesting the existence of a superior being. In equating Nichiren Daishonin with the original Buddha since time without beginning, there is always the possibility that the mind will react in just this way. What the reader should bear in mind is that Nichiren Daishonin consistently stated throughout his writings that "the true Buddha is a common mortal, a common mortal the true Buddha." In other words, in each being there dwells the Buddha nature. However, if people are to attain Buddhahood, someone must show them how to manifest that nature. It was Nichiren Daishonin's unique mission, so to speak, to reveal the way for all people to manifest their latent Buddhahood. In him, the state of Buddhahood was fully manifested to open the way to enlightenment for all, while in others, the state of Buddhahood must be established and perfected through constant practice. In other words, Nichiren Daishonin opened the way for the attainment of enlightenment by all humanity. Nichiren Daishonin was born into this world to lead a spiritual revolution that would irrevocably transform human beings and their surroundings. As he once wrote, when a person sits in worship of the true entity of life, the common mortal faces the original Buddha. In the process, he becomes a Buddha, too.

Chapter 8 (pp. 60–82): The Sado Exile

THE execution attempt frustrated, the forces of Hei no Saemon had no choice but to follow the original plan of taking Nichiren Daishonin to Homma Shigetsura's residence. The Daishonin stayed at the residence in Echi, Sagami Province, for almost

a month, awaiting word of his fate from the government.

In the meantime, Hojo Tokimune encountered some sort of trouble, the details of which have been lost to history, but in consulting a fortune-teller he was told that it was connected with the attempted execution. He ordered the Daishonin to be freed, but events quickly militated against his decision. A wave of arson and murder swept the city, and the Daishonin's followers were blamed. The government then ordered that the plan for exile be set in motion. So, on October 10, Nichiren Daishonin was escorted by Homma's warriors northward. When the group reached the coast of the Sea of Japan, they were forced to stop for several days at a little haven called Teradomari. Snow covered the ground and the sea was in tumult. No crossing was possible.

In journeying to Teradomari, the Daishonin, as he recounted, had passed over "mountains beyond mountains"; now before him lay "waves upon waves" of the raging sea, a sea which he had never before seen. Beyond that lay Sado Island, cold and forbidding, waiting to swallow him in an exile from which none of his enemies ever expected him to return.

The faithful Nikko Shonin and several acolytes remained at his side, and lay believers kept sending messengers to inquire about his safety. The community of believers was more than a little shaken by the events, and the Daishonin sent a succession of letters to reassure them. In "Lessening One's Karmic Retribution," written while he was still at Homma's residence, he said that hardships are like a crucible in which a person can purge himself of his accumulated karma and bring forth the state of Buddhahood shining like a diamond. In "Letter from Teradomari," sent to Toki Jonin on October 22, he said that the persecutions he was facing were in perfect accord with the Lotus Sutra's prophecy that the votary would be banished "again and again." As some of his followers had been imprisoned on false charges during the wave of terror in Kamakura, he asked in the letter for Jonin to send back word of their fate.

In the "Letter from Sado," written five months later, he enjoined his disciples not to lose faith in the face of difficulties, whether they be his or theirs. He told them that the only route to Buddhahood is through offering one's life—the most precious treasure to the Lotus Sutra. By this, he meant for his disciples not to be frightened by persecutions but to propagate true Buddhism confidently, no matter what might happen.

WHEN sea travel became possible, the Daishonin was escorted to Sado Island by boat. He and his captors landed there on October 28, and on November 1 he was taken to a place called Tsukahara. There he was assigned a hut in a graveyard as his abode. This broken-down former shrine where the original Buddha was to live for the next several months, was named Sammai-do. On November 23, the Daishonin sent another letter, entitled "Aspiration for the Buddha Land," to Toki Jonin. Probably he entrusted its delivery to some of his acolytes who had accompanied him from Kamakura. In it he commented: "I am sending back some of the young priests. You can ask them what this province is like and about the circumstances under which I live. It is impossible to describe these matters in writing" (MW-5, 132).

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In this letter, the Daishonin also made a proclamation about his identity:

The advent of the Great Law is already before our very eyes. In the twenty-two hundred years and more since the Buddha's passing, in all of India, China, Japan and the entire world, [as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai states:] "Vasubandhu and Nagarjuna⁵ clearly perceived the truth in their hearts, but they did not teach it. Instead, they preached the provisional Mahayana teachings, which were suited to their times." T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo gave a general indication of it but left its propagation for the future. Now this secret Law, the one great reason for which all Buddhas make their advent, will be spread for the first time in this country. And is not Nichiren the very person who propagates it? (MW-5, 130)

Even with their foe in exile, the leaders of the other sects were not content. Anything short of his demise was, for them, unthinkable. Early in 1272, scores of priests converged on the island from their home provinces across the sea in the area now composed of Niigata, Nagano and Yamagata prefectures. They consulted with Homma Shigetsura about the matter, but he dashed their hopes for a quick end to their enemy by telling them: "An official letter has arrived from the government directing that the priest shall not be executed. This is no ordinary contemptible criminal and if anything happens to him, I will be guilty of grave dereliction. Instead of killing him, why don't you confront him in religious debate?"

The debate took place On January 16 and 17, 1272, and it pitted the Daishonin against several hundred priests of the other sects. He recounted the debate later when he wrote "On the Buddha's Behavior." According to this account, he first had to quell disorder—shouting and shoving among the participants—before the debate could begin. The priests proceeded to cite the doctrines of their various sects Nembutsu, Zen, Shingon and Ritsu. The Daishonin replied in turn, confirming the meaning of what each had said, and then asked questions. Very quickly he was able to expose their contradictory assertions and scriptural incompatibilities. The priests were speechless, no match for the Daishonin's penetrating understanding of the sutras. Several of their followers professed belief in the Daishonin's teaching on the spot.

THESE were not the only followers Nichiren Daishonin was to win during his exile on Sado. There would be many more and even the year before he had succeeded in converting a believer in Amida Buddha who had come to Sammai-do to confront him. The man's name was Abutsu-bo, ardent in his belief. Once the Daishonin had managed to engage him in dialogue, however, Abutsu-bo had become convinced of the truth of Nammyoho-renge-kyo and immediately became the Daishonin's follower. He then went home and converted his wife, Sennichi-ama. These two believers in Amida Buddha became the Daishonin's providers and protectors while he was on Sado Island, much as Funamori Yasaburo and his wife had been during the Izu Exile [the first exile]. The Daishonin later addressed many letters of thanks to

them.

Ko Nyudo and his wife also converted to the Daishonin's teachings while he was in exile on Sado, making offerings to him and providing him with various kinds of assistance. He lived in Ko, the capital of the province of Sado.

Sairen-bo, a priest of the Tendai sect who for some reason had been exiled to Sado Island, was also one of the Daishonin's converts. Sairen-bo had several unresolved questions about Buddhism, and he addressed them to Nichiren Daishonin. The reply came in the form of a letter, known today as "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life," dated February 11, 1272.

In this, the Daishonin said that the Law which Bodhisattva Jogyo inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at the Ceremony in the Air⁶ is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is the life of the original Buddha since time without beginning. In a broader sense, he taught that Nammyoho-renge-kyo is the entity of all people's lives, and that by believing in the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-rengekyo, one "inherits" the wisdom to realize that his own life is the Mystic Law. In other words, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, one manifests the Buddha nature within oneself.

Short as it was, this writing carried an extremely profound message since it revealed the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the heart of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It was the kind of thesis that the Daishonin was able to write only after he had a learned disciple such as Sairen-bo to receive it.

ON February 20, shortly after writing "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life," Nichiren Daishonin sent another thesis to Sairen-bo, entitled "Enlightenment of Plants," which discussed the potentiality of Buddhahood in insentient beings. Sairen-bo also received "The True Entity of Life" and "The Entity of the Mystic Law," both written in 1273. After his exile, he founded Honkoku-ji temple near Mount Minobu in the province of Kai.

In February 1272 the Daishonin also completed "The Opening of the Eyes," of which he later said: "I wanted to record the wonder I had experienced, in case I should be beheaded" (MW-1, 189). This was in reference to the mortal danger he faced. For, so long as rival priests conspired against him, the Daishonin had to live with the threat of death. After the debate, the priests, more angered than ever, had petitioned Hojo Nobutoki of the Kamakura government to help them stem the tide of defection from their sects. Nobutoki then issued a proclamation without the regent's knowledge, which decreed: "Those who become Nichiren's disciples from among the Sado inhabitants should be either banished or imprisoned. The Daishonin later wrote of this edict: "Some people were thrown into prison because they were said to have walked past my hut..." (Ibid., p. 192).

Shortly before the edict was issued, however, the Hojo clan was rocked by internal intrigue. Hojo Tokisuke, an elder half brother of the regent, conspired to seize power, but his plot was uncovered. Nagoe Tokiaki and Nagoe Noritoki, who were regarded as his coconspirators, were put to death on February 11. Four days later, Hojo Tokisuke was killed. The rebellion had been stopped before it had a chance to get started, but even the prospect of rebellion was enough to

send shock waves around the country.

All this worked in the Daishonin's favor. Since he had predicted internal strife twelve years earlier in the "Rissho Ankoku Ron," and since he had told Homma Shigetsura only a month before it broke out that it was imminent, the Daishonin was suddenly taken more seriously by both Homma and the government. When Homma learned that the Daishonin's prediction had come true, he is said to have discarded his belief in the Pure Land teachings. As a consequence, the Daishonin was transferred in April from the hut at Tsukahara to an ordinary residence at Ichinosawa.

During the Sado Exile, the Daishonin was able, through his writings, to lay virtually the complete theoretical foundation of his teachings. "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" had been the first major thesis, and in "The Opening of the Eyes," completed only a few days after "Heritage," he identified himself as the original Buddha, a vital first step in the process of clarifying the true object of worship. This would soon be followed by other important treatises. The Sado Exile thus provided Nichiren Daishonin with the opportunity to establish the philosophical groundwork of his Buddhism.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin said that there are three people one should revere above all else—the sovereign, the teacher and the parent. The sovereign is the one who guarantees the security of human beings by wielding social power, the teacher the one who imparts knowledge and helps people develop their wisdom, and the parent the one who gives birth to flesh and blood and nurtures life. There are many ways of looking at the concept of sovereign, teacher and parent, but what the Daishonin intended was the scriptural conception of the Buddha who embodies all three attributes, i.e., the Buddha who protects, guides and compassionately nurtures all people through the medium of the supreme Law. In the end, the treatise stated that in the Latter Day the person who encompasses these three qualities is none other than Nichiren Daishonin.

IN this way, the Daishonin defined the true object of worship in terms of the Person, i.e., in terms of the Buddha who eternally guides, protects and nurtures all people in their striving for Buddhahood. "The True Object of Worship," written in April 1273, one year later, clarified the object in terms of the Law which enables people to reach enlightenment. These two writings established the theoretical framework for the inscription of the object of worship.

After "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin wrote a short letter to his followers, the previously mentioned "Letter from Sado." As well as encouraging his followers, whose faith had been shaken by the Tatsunokuchi and Sado persecutions, this letter also served to restate the conclusion of "The Opening of the Eyes." The Daishonin wrote: "Nichiren is the pillar, sun, moon, mirror and eyes of the ruling clan of Kanto.... Nichiren is father and mother to the ruling clan..." (MW-1, 36). ("Pillar" refers to the virtue of sovereign; "sun, moon, mirror and eyes" to the virtue of teacher; and "father and mother" to the virtue of parent. And Kanto here is used to denote the Kamakura government.)

“Letter from Sado” was dated March 20. In April, Shijo Kingo journeyed from Kamakura to visit the Daishonin. In a letter entitled “The Causal Law of Life,” the Daishonin praised the sincerity of Kingo’s wife, who had sent her husband on the long trip. In May, a lady with her small child came from Kamakura, and the Daishonin was so moved by the effort she expended in making the journey that he gave her the Buddhist name Nichimyo Shonin (Sage Nichimyo). The title was apt, for the lady and her daughter continued to persevere in Buddhist practice long after the Daishonin’s death.

Meanwhile, the number of people on Sado professing faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism continued to increase, and Abutsu-bo and his wife became the mainstays of this community of believers. At the house in which the Daishonin lived in Ichinosawa, the landlord’s wife became a believer, and the landlord himself developed a favorable attitude, though he did not take up the faith. At nearby Nakaoki, a leading disciple appeared by the name of Nakaoki Nyudo.

NICHIREN Daishonin now set about refuting the Shingon sect, a task which he had undertaken before, but this time his goal was to pave the way for “The True Object of Worship.” He considered this refutation essential because the Shingon sect had preceded him in inscribing a mandala as an object of worship.

In a letter he gave to Shijo Kingo in May 1272, the Daishonin expounded the principle that earthly desires lead to enlightenment—that is, the mundane cravings of the individual, when tempered by faith in the True Law, become the fuel for enlightenment. In the same month, he addressed a writing entitled “The Errors of the Shingon and Other Sects” to Toki Jonin, and in July he wrote “The Refutation of the Shingon Sect.”

“The True Object of Worship” was issued on April 25, 1273. The original title of the work reads, in Japanese, *Kanjin no honzon sho*, which literally means “writing on the object of worship for observing one’s mind.” The Daishonin began the text by quoting from T’ient’ai’s *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight) a passage which explains the principle of *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single moment of life).⁷ He then explained that *kanjin* means to observe one’s mind (mind here being used more broadly to mean life) and thus realize that one is the entity of *ichinen sanzen*. This process of recognizing one’s essential nature, he said, is the principle of attaining Buddhahood. He then revealed that the reality described by *ichinen sanzen* is nothing other than Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and declared that, for the first time in the history of Buddhism, he was going to inscribe the object of worship of Nammyoho-rence-kyo. Thus he explained the Gohonzon as the object of faith for attaining Buddhahood.

A passage from “The True Object of Worship” reads: “... Shakyamuni’s practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the single phrase, Myoho-rence-kyo. If we believe in that phrase, we shall naturally be granted the same benefits as he was” (MW-1, 64).

In this way, the Daishonin explained that believing in and embracing the object of worship of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is equivalent to observing one’s mind. By such worship the common mortal can attain Buddhahood in the

present life, without undergoing any transformation or practice of austerities. A common mortal, in other words, can become a Buddha.

It was now clear, from a doctrinal viewpoint, that the object of worship the Daishonin intended to inscribe would embody Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the Law, and the life of Nichiren Daishonin as the Person eternally manifesting that Law. The Daishonin carefully composed "The True Object of Worship" in classical Chinese, as was the practice for all important writings in those days. He gave it to Toki Jonin, and it has been preserved in its original form at Nakayama Hokekyo-ji temple, which developed from Toki's estate. In addition, the faithful disciple Nikko Shonin made a copy which has been preserved at Yoho-ji temple in Kyoto.

"The True Entity of Life," dated May 17 and given to Sairen-bo, abridged "The True Object of Worship," much in the way that "Letter from Sado" was used a year earlier to back up "The Opening of the Eyes." "The True Entity of Life" is famous for the passage with which it closes. This passage has continued to be quoted throughout the centuries as the basic spirit of Buddhist practice:

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of worship in the world. Forge strong faith and receive the protection of Shakyamuni, Taho and all the other Buddhas. Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if only a single sentence or phrase (Ibid., pp. 94-95).

In the same month, Nichiren Daishonin addressed a letter to Gijo-bo, who had been his senior at Seicho-ji temple when he studied Buddhism there in boyhood. The Daishonin said that, of all the chapters in the Lotus Sutra, the Juryo [Life Span] (sixteenth) chapter was especially important to him. He quoted a passage, "Single-mindedly yearning to see the Buddha, they do not begrudge their lives," and noted: "I, Nichiren, have called forth Buddhahood from within my life by living this sentence. This means that I actualized the Three Great Secret Laws, the embodiment of *ichinen sanzen* in the Juryo chapter" (MW-2, 236).

THIS is the first written mention in his extant works of the Three Great Secret Laws: the invocation (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), the object of worship (the Dai-Gohonzon, toward whose inscription he was working), and the place of worship (the sanctuary of the true object, whose construction he would leave to his disciples). He clarified these three in "Repaying Debts of Gratitude" in 1276, though it is possible that he also did so prior to 1273 in writings which may have been lost.

He authored several other important writings in May 1273. In the Gosho "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings," the Daishonin took the opportunity to state that refuting misleading sects and converting their believers, based on unwavering faith in the Lotus Sutra, comprise the practice that accords exactly with Shakyamuni's teachings. In this work he also stated that the three powerful enemies will surely

arise to confront those who practice correctly.

In "On the Buddha's Prophecy," another important writing, the Daishonin said that the appearance of his Buddhism had been predicted in the Lotus Sutra. In addition, he confidently stated that his teaching would never fail to spread throughout the world. Further, in writings he addressed to Toki Jonin and Hakiri Sanenaga (MW-6, 46-48) he expressed his complete confidence that his teachings were far superior to those of the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo.

By this time the Daishonin had already begun bestowing individual Gohonzon (objects of worship) on his staunchest disciples. In fact, he had begun inscribing mandalas shortly after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Those that he bestowed on his disciples have come to be known as "the Gohonzon of specific receptivity and relatedness." Some of these are still extant, and from them one can see that they were rather simply inscribed in comparison to the elaborateness of the Dai-Gohonzon of the high sanctuary he would bestow upon all humankind several years later. Still, these mandalas carried the inscriptions, "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" and "Nichiren," which contained the expression of the oneness of the Person and the Law.

In the accompanying letters that Nichiren Daishonin sent to the recipients of these Gohonzon, he taught the relationship between the object of worship and the life of the original Buddha, and the correct attitude in faith. A letter dated August 15, 1273, and sent to Shijo Kingo is typical of these. It was a reply to Kingo's report of the illness of his daughter, Kyo'o. The Daishonin wrote:

Always cherish the Gohonzon which I sent some time ago for her protection. This Gohonzon was never known, let alone inscribed, by anyone in the Former or Middle Day of the Law. The lion, king of beasts, is said to advance three steps, then gather himself to spring, unleashing the same power whether he traps a tiny ant or attacks a fierce animal. In inscribing this Gohonzon for her protection, Nichiren is equal to the lion king. This is what the sutra means by "the power of an attacking lion." Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-rengekyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle? (MW-1, 119)

Then he went on to say, in one of the most famous passages of his writings:

A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then he will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff. I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi [black Chinese ink], so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (Ibid., p. 120)

He concluded with a final exhortation about faith: "Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?"

The two most essential writings of the Daishonin, "The Opening of the Eyes" and "The True Object of Worship," dealt with the theoretical or doctrinal basis of the

Gohonzon. A writing given to Sairen-bo in 1273, but of uncertain date, now broached the subject of what one attains by embracing faith in this object of worship. It was called "The Entity of the Mystic Law."

IN this, the Daishonin said that in theory every single human being is the entity of Myohorenge-kyo, but in practice only those who invoke Nam-myohorenge-kyo with faith in the Lotus Sutra are truly manifesting Myoho-renge-kyo or the Buddha nature within themselves. He then added that Myoho-rengekyo is the enlightenment of the original Buddha of *kuon ganjo*,⁸ or time without beginning, and that all kinds of Buddhist teachings have been expounded as a means to let people understand *Myoho-rengekyo*. The Law that was transferred by Shakyamuni Buddha to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth during the Ceremony in the Air was this very Myohorenge-kyo.

He then stated that teachers such as Nan-yueh⁹ and T'ien-t'ai in China and Dengyo in Japan all perceived the Law of *Myohorenge-kyo*, and he quoted from their diaries to show that they themselves had cherished Nammyoho-renge-kyo. He concluded by saying that they did not teach Nam-myoho-renge-kyo because it was not yet the Latter Day.

The importance of "The Entity of the Mystic Law" lies in its teaching that people need not transform themselves through rigorous self-discipline, austerities or self-mortification to reach Buddhahood. By embracing the true object with faith, all people can attain the enlightenment of Buddhahood just as they are.

On March 8, 1274, a government envoy arrived with a pardon for the Daishonin. No reasons were given for the government's action, but it appears in retrospect that the officials were concerned about the arrival of a Mongol emissary and the abortive coup of Hojo Tokisuke, events which seemed to bear out the Daishonin's earlier predictions. And so Nichiren Daishonin ended more than two years of exile, a period during which he had authored some of his most important writings and laid the foundation for inscribing an object of worship to be bestowed not on individuals but on all human beings.



Upon his return to the capitol, Kamakura, the Daishonin remonstrated again with the government, but to no avail. He then took up residence in the remote mountains of Minobu where he continued to write important works and instruct his disciples.

Chapter 10 (pp. 83–89): Mongol Invasion

THE Mongols struck in October 1274 in massive numbers: 15,000 Mongols and Chinese, 5,000 Koreans, 5,000 colonials and 6,000 mariners borne aboard 300 warships, 300 swift boats and 300 water-supply vessels, all constructed by the Koreans at the order of Khubilai Khan. The odds overwhelmingly favored the Mongol forces, whose close-order tactics and use of gunpowder rendered the

Japanese warriors, with their bows and arrows and reliance on hand-to-hand combat, almost defenseless.

At first, the Japanese losses were staggering, and the Mongols seemed unstoppable. They would be conquerors swept through the islands of Tsushima and Iki, and by the middle of the month were pressing their attack in Kyushu, the southwestern island of the Japanese archipelago. Hirato, Chikuzen and Imazu came under attack, but the main part of the invading force struck at the port city of Hakata, the first and only barrier to the political center at Dazaifu. The local government rushed its warriors to Hakata, but they were cut down in rapid order. When things looked the bleakest, however, a storm came to the aid of the Japanese and sank more than two hundred of the Mongols' battleships. Staggered by their losses, the invaders withdrew to Korea.

News of the attack did not reach Kamakura until November 1, and Nichiren Daishonin commented on the invasion in a letter dated November 11 and sent to his follower Nanjo Tokimitsu:

Since I hear that the Great Mongol Empire has invaded this country I think with regret what the situation would have been like if they had heeded what I, Nichiren, had warned. Tears do not stop flowing when I think of the destiny of the Japanese people, which will be the same as that of Iki and Tsushima which have now been destroyed (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1509).

The Mongols, of course, were still determined to conquer Japan, and they sent envoys again in March of the next year. The Kamakura government set up coastal defenses and ordered tight security around the western perimeter of Kyushu. The envoys were beheaded in September.

While the government was worrying about foreign invasion, the Daishonin was in retirement on Mount Minobu. Retirement, however, did not exactly mean a life of leisure for the Daishonin; he was busy writing letters (some 120 between 1274 and 1278), training his disciples and followers, and giving lectures on the Lotus Sutra. The task of propagation had now been assumed by the senior priests, who were scattered in various regions of the country, and by the lay believers, who heretofore had concentrated on supporting the Daishonin through offerings.

As the lay followers became more active in propagation, they ran into various difficulties and persecutions of their own. Each time, the Daishonin hurried letters of guidance and encouragement to them. Perhaps the two most famous cases involving individual followers were those of the faithful warrior, Shijo Kingo, and the Ikegami brothers, Munenaka and Munenaga.

AROUND 1274, Shijo Kingo began trying to convert his lord Ema to the Daishonin's Buddhism. Lord Ema did not take kindly to these efforts at propagation and, fueled by slander from Kingo's colleagues, reduced the believer's fief. The situation worsened in 1277 when Kingo attended a debate between Sammi-bo Nichigyo, a disciple of the Daishonin, and Ryuzo-bo, a

follower of the Tendai sect. Kingo's colleagues again assailed him before Lord Ema, this time for what they claimed was an attempt to disrupt the debate and embarrass Ryuzo-bo.

The Daishonin wrote Shijo Kingo several letters and even went so far as to write an appeal to Lord Ema on Kingo's behalf. In these letters, the Daishonin offered much practical advice as well as guidance in faith. He told Kingo that he should regard service to his lord with the same reverence and dedication that he showed toward the Daishonin's teachings. He thus stated a principle of Buddhist practice that has endured as one of the fundamental guidelines for more than seven centuries— faith is not separate from daily life but reveals itself precisely in the realm of worldly affairs.

Later, Lord Ema contracted an illness, and Shijo Kingo used his medical skills to cure him. The grateful lord then restored and actually increased Kingo's fief. Shijo Kingo had remained steadfast in his faith throughout the ordeal.

THE circumstances involving the Ikegami brothers were somewhat similar, but they pitted sons against father, rather than vassal against lord. Both Munenaka and Munenaga had been believers in the Daishonin's Buddhism for many years, but around 1275 their father, Yasumitsu, the director of the Office of Construction and Repairs of the Kamakura government, started making demands of them. He disowned the older, Munenaka, and informed the younger, Munenaga, that he would have to choose between his faith and his father. If he chose the former, he, too, would be disowned.

The reason for Yasumitsu's abrupt change of sentiment toward his sons' faith is not clear, but it appears that Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple had a hand in influencing him. Nichiren Daishonin encouraged Munenaka and Munenaga in the "Letter to the Brothers," telling them that faith in the Lotus Sutra will invariably invite the persecution of others and urging them never to retreat. Yasumitsu's repudiation was withdrawn, temporarily, in 1277, but he soon disowned the elder son again. This time, the Daishonin wrote a letter to Munenaga telling him that he should not discard his faith just to curry favor with his father and win an inheritance, but that he should continue his faith until his father became a believer. The Daishonin's advice was heeded, and Yasumitsu became a believer in 1278. He died shortly after.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote many important treatises during the period from 1274 to 1278, including "On the Buddha's Behavior" (MW-1, 173-202) in which he described the events from Tatsunokuchi until his retirement to Minobu. "The Selection of the Time" (MW-3, 79-184) noted that the most essential requirement is to understand the time and which teaching befits it. "Teaching, Practice and Proof" (MW-4, 111-32) said that Shakyamuni's teachings have become inappropriate in the Latter Day of the Law and that only Nam-myohorenge-kyo taught by the Daishonin combines the three elements of teaching, practice and proof essential to making Buddhism viable.

On hearing that Dozen-bo had died, Nichiren Daishonin wrote "Repaying Debts of Gratitude." In this he said that he was repaying his debt to his teacher,

whom he had left at an early age, by spreading the true teaching to save all people. He wrote, in explanation of the doctrine he taught:

First, in Japan and all the other countries throughout the world, the object of worship should in all cases be the Lord Shakyamuni of true Buddhism.¹⁰ The Shakyamuni Buddha and Taho Buddha who appear in the Treasure Tower, as well as all other Buddhas, along with the four bodhisattvas¹¹ including Jogyo, shall act as attendants to this Buddha. Second, there is the high sanctuary of true Buddhism. Third, in Japan, China, India and all the other countries of the world, every person, regardless of whether he is wise or foolish, shall set aside other practices and join in the chanting of Nammyoho-renge-kyo. (MW-4, 271)

There was a constant stream of visitors at the Daishonin's cottage, including Abutsu-bo who, despite his advanced age, made the hazardous journey from Sado Island at least three times. Other followers came as well, but the Daishonin seems to have spent most of his time training the youths who were entering the priesthood from the families of lay believers. One of these, who hailed from the Nitta family, which was related to the Nagoe family, became the Daishonin's disciple in 1276. He was seventeen at the time; he went on to become the third high priest, Nichimoku Shonin.

AS a way of fostering the faith of these disciples, Nichiren Daishonin gave a series of lectures on the Lotus Sutra, using as his reference material the major works of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. The series began with a lecture on Nammyoho-renge-kyo and they proceeded through each of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. When it was completed, it was set down as the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) by Nikko Shonin. The Daishonin himself revised and edited the manuscripts, and they appeared in their final form in January 1278.

Thus, the Daishonin spent a fruitful four years following his frustrated attempt to convince Hei no Saemon of the validity of his predictions and teachings. In those four years, he had not budged from Mount Minobu despite his earlier hesitation about staying. Now, as the lay believers grew more determined in their propagation activity, the Daishonin saw that the time was rapidly approaching when he would have the chance to fulfill the purpose of his life. He would not have to wait long, for the next year the opportunity arose.

Chapter 11 (pp. 90-96): Inscription of the True Object of Worship

FROM the moment he declared the essence of Buddhism, he had been hunted and hounded almost to the point of death. Two disciples had died in the process Kudo Yoshitaka and Kyonin-bo at Komatsubara—but the Daishonin had always been the prime target. Now in their zeal to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism, his followers were beginning to feel the brunt of official persecution. A confrontation was in the making.

In his retirement, the Daishonin was attended by Nikko Shonin, who had accompanied him throughout the years since their meeting at Jisso-ji temple. Being a native of the Minobu region, Nikko Shonin would spend much of his time in the neighboring villages converting friends and relatives. On the days that the Daishonin would give lectures, he would hurry back. He was particularly active at Shijuku-in temple in Suruga Province, where he was registered as a priest. He converted several of the resident priests, including Nichiji, who later became one of the six seniors. Nikko Shonin's success at proselytizing quickly drew the suspicious eye of the temple's administrator Gon'yo, who petitioned the government in 1278 to have Nikko Shonin and the others expelled on the grounds that they were spreading heresy. Nichiren Daishonin wrote an appeal calling for a debate to settle the issue, but it was ignored.

NIKKO Shonin moved on to the Tendai temple Ryusen-ji in Atsuhara Village in the Fuji area of Suruga. His efforts again won him converts among the priests, and, what was more significant, among the local farmer population as well. And once again his actions drew the ire of temple officials, this time in the person of Gyochi, deputy chief priest. Gyochi demanded that Nichiren, Nisshu and Nichizen, who had converted and been renamed, as well as Mikawa-bo Raien, who had also taken faith, write an oath to discard their faith in the Lotus Sutra and begin reciting the Amida Sutra again. Only Mikawa-bo Raien agreed. Gyochi then demanded that the other three leave the temple. Nichizen did; the others stayed.

In addition to the growing number of farmer believers, Nanjo Tokimitsu, the steward of Ueno Village, under Nikko Shonin's direction, had begun converting his immediate family and relatives. Gyochi grew furious at the success of the Daishonin's Buddhism in attracting believers in the Atsuhara area, and he started venting his anger on laymen as well as priests. In April 1279, Gyochi conspired to harm a lay believer, and in August a believer by the name of Yashiro, who had been converted by Nisshu, was decapitated for unknown reasons.

The situation became critical on September 21 when the government arrested twenty farmer believers who were harvesting rice from Nisshu's fields on the temple grounds. The arrest had been requested by Gyochi, who claimed the farmers not only were harvesting rice that did not belong to Nisshu, whom Gyochi had told to leave, but also had descended on the deputy chief priest's lodging, armed and angry. The farmers were taken to Kamakura and detained for trial.

Nichiren Daishonin, sensing the gravity of the situation, sent a letter on October 1 "to the people there" meaning the imprisoned farmers and other lay believers in Kamakura facing persecution in the wake of the Atsuhara incident. He advised them to use the persecutions to deepen their faith. "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month," he said. "Should you slacken even a bit, demons will take advantage" (MW-1, 241-42).

Meanwhile, Nikko Shonin drafted an urgent appeal to Hei no Saemon who had taken charge of the farmers. The appeal was written in part by the

Daishonin, but it was of little avail. First, Hei no Saemon had the lay believers tortured. Then, on October 15, after they had steadily refused to give up their faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism, he had three of the believers—the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro and Yarokuro—summarily executed. Even so, the others refused to recant.

Nikko Shonin immediately sent word of the executions to the Daishonin, who received the letter two days later, on the seventeenth. He wrote back that it "is something extraordinary that they chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo at the time of execution" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1455).

HIS letter of October 1, written in the midst of the persecution and entitled "On Persecutions Befalling the Buddha," proved to be more than just an attempt to encourage his lay followers; it was also a proclamation of the purpose of his life. He wrote:

Now in the second year of Koan (1279) it is twenty-seven years since I first proclaimed the true teaching at Seicho-ji temple. It was noon on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kencho (1253),... The Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years; T'ien-t'ai took about thirty years, and Dengyo, some twenty years. I have repeatedly spoken of the indescribable persecutions they suffered during those years. For me it took twenty-seven years, and the persecutions I faced during this period are well known to you all. (MW-1, 239)

"For me it took twenty-seven years" was the Daishonin's reference to the fulfillment of his lifelong purpose. He did not just mean that his followers were now actively pursuing his will to spread his Buddhism, but something far greater. In the perspective that history allows, it is clear that he was referring to the inscription of the DaiGohonzon which would take place eleven days later.

Though he greatly cared for his followers and did not want to see any of them harmed, Nichiren Daishonin deemed it extremely meaningful that they now showed a steadfastness of faith that had been lacking during the Tatsunokuchi and Sado persecutions. Then, many of them had wavered; now they showed they were willing even to die for their beliefs. To the Daishonin, the crucial factor in his being able to inscribe a universal object of worship had been fulfilled. Before, he had bestowed Gohonzon only on those with the staunchest faith; now that staunch faith was the rule rather than the exception, he could bestow the Dai-Gohonzon (*dai* in Japanese means supreme or great) upon all humanity. This he did on October 12, 1279.

The writings of Nichiren Daishonin, especially "The Opening of the Eyes" and "The True Object of Worship," had led him step by step to that inscription. In one of his orally transmitted teachings, the Daishonin said that he had seen his life reflected in a pond at Seicho-ji temple as "the great mandala."¹² Thus, the image of the object he was to inscribe was clearly in his mind even before he actually gave it concrete form.

What is the Dai-Gohonzon? Down the center the Dai-Gohonzon contains the inscription, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren,” referring to the fusion of the Law of life and the original Buddha. On both sides of this are the representatives of the ten worlds, indicating the aspects of *ichinen sanzen*. By this graphic arrangement, the Daishonin showed that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the true entity of all phenomena. At the top of the ten worlds stands Buddhahood, at the bottom the condition of Hell. All are essential to life, but the way to bring them into perspective and release their full creativity is through the supreme Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which, when invoked, allows a person to take complete charge of his or her life.

In the lower left-hand corner of the Dai-Gohonzon is a dedication to a fictional lay believer, who represents the common people of the world at last able to realize their own Buddha nature. On the right are the words, *ichiembudai soyo*—“bestowed upon the entire world.” So, far from being an individual Gohonzon, the Dai-Gohonzon is a gift to all people for all time, i.e., the fundamental principle for them to wrest control of their destinies and create peace and prosperity.

The Daishonin once said that he had “inscribed my life in sumi [ink].” By this, he meant that he had embodied his state of Buddhahood in the mandala and that the purpose of his life lay in that mandala; it was his legacy. In the case of the Dai-Gohonzon, however, the Daishonin took extra precaution to insure its survival. He inscribed it in ink on a plank of camphor wood and had his disciple Nippo carve the characters into the wood so that it would last, as traditionally said, “for ten millennia or more.”

Believers who visited Nichiren Daishonin at Minobu would invariably pray to the Dai-Gohonzon. When they sent offerings to the Daishonin, he would write back, “I have respectfully placed them in front of the Lotus Sutra,” by which he meant he had placed them in front of the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined in the main temple at Minobu. The Daishonin himself recited the Hoben [Expedient Means] (second) and Juryo (sixteenth) [Life Span] chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in front of this object of worship.

The government eventually relented in the face of the farmers’ steady faith and the pleas of Nikko Shonin and Nichiren Daishonin, and thus the worst phase of the Atsuhara Persecution drew to a close at the same time that the year 1279 neared its end. Twenty-seven years after the establishment of his Buddhism, the Daishonin completed the task of laying the foundation for the peace of the world in the Latter Day of the Law. Though only few knew of the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon at the time, the Daishonin, remaining at Mount Minobu, took steps to insure its preservation for all time. To that task, and to the care of his beloved followers, he devoted the remainder of his life.

Chapter 12 (pp. 97–110): Transferring the Heritage

EVEN as the Atsuhara persecution was taking place, Shijo Kingo was getting into difficulties again in Kamakura. The Daishonin had repeatedly warned him not to

be boastful or arrogant and to take every precaution lest his jealous comrades in Lord Ema's employ attack him in the middle of the night, but that was exactly what happened. The skilled Kingo drove them off, news of which prompted the Daishonin to write him again. He said:

It is a matter of rejoicing that your usual prudence and courage, as well as your firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, enabled you to survive unharmed.

When one comes to the end of his good fortune, no strategy whatsoever will avail. When one's blessings are exhausted, even his retainers will no longer follow him. You survived because you still possess good fortune. Moreover, in the Zokurui chapter, the heavenly gods pledged to protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra.... Never doubt that all gods protect those who embrace the Lotus Sutra.... Therefore, you must summon up the power of faith more than ever. (MW-1, 245-46)

Nanjo Tokimitsu soon fell into disfavor with the government for having protected many of the farmer believers who might otherwise have been rounded up and detained during the Atsuhara incident. The year after the persecution, the Hojo regime had the taxes on Tokimitsu's estate raised to the point of nearly forcing him into destitution: Tokimitsu had to pay so much that he could not even afford a horse.

Seeing the difficulty that his samurai follower was undergoing and seeing also that his faith was not being shaken in the least, Nichiren Daishonin wrote a letter of praise to Tokimitsu and gave him the title of Ueno the Wise. One of his letters to Tokimitsu delineated two types of faith—one that is temporarily as brilliant as fire but soon lapses, and one that continues onward like the flow of a river:

Today there are people who have faith in the Lotus Sutra. The belief of some is like a fire while that of others is like water. When the former listen to the teachings, their passion flares up like fire, but when by themselves, they are inclined to discard their faith. To have faith like water means to believe continuously without ever regressing. Since you pay frequent visits to me regardless of the difficulties, your belief is comparable to flowing water. It is worthy of great respect! (MW-2, 296)

The Daishonin during his later years seems to have been most involved in training the young priests who had come to Mount Minobu to learn Buddhism. Most outstanding among them was Renzo-bo Nichimoku, later to become the third high priest. He was barely twenty years old at the time of the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon, but already he had been a believer and a resident at Minobu for three years. Legend has it that each day Nichimoku would descend the mountain slopes for a bucket of water. On the way back up, he would carry the bucket on his head. After years of doing so, he found that the top of his head had developed a depression where the bucket rested on it.

Lay followers like Shijo Kingo, Nanjo Tokimitsu, Toki Jonin, Soya Kyoshin and

Ota Jomyo continued to make visits to Mount Minobu, but the journey that the aged Abutsu-bo made in 1278 appears to have been his last. He died in March 1279 at the age of ninety-one. In a letter addressed to his wife, Sennichi-ama the Daishonin wrote: "Some may wonder where the spirit of the late Abutsu-bo may be at this moment. But by using the bright mirror of the Lotus Sutra to reflect his image, I, Nichiren, can see him among the assembly on Eagle Peak, seated within the Treasure Tower of Taho Buddha and facing toward the east, [toward the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Taho]" (MW-6, 297).

ABUTSU-BO had bequeathed his legacy of faith to his son, Tokuro Moritsuna, and on July 2, 1279, the son brought Abutsu-bo's ashes to be laid to rest at Mount Minobu. The son came again the next year to pay homage to his father's grave.

The Daishonin's writings in the last years of his life contained no new or lengthy revelations, being mostly letters of encouragement to lay believers. Among them, however, were some important works which elucidated the Daishonin's Buddhism. "The Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas throughout the Three Existences," addressed to Sairen-bo in October 1279, and "On the Three Great Secret Laws," given to Ota Jomyo on April 8, 1282, remain indispensable to the study of his thought.

In "The Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas throughout the Three Existences," Nichiren Daishonin said that all the earlier teachings of Shakyamuni were but steps leading to the great revelations of the Lotus Sutra, the true and essential teaching affirmed by all the Buddhas. He added, however, that this true teaching came to life only within the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

"On the Three Great Secret Laws" provided him with an opportunity to define the substance of the true teaching handed down to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the Jinriki [Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One] (twenty-first) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. He said it consisted of the Three Great Secret Laws which the Daishonin had revealed during his lifetime—the object of worship, the invocation and the sanctuary. He wrote in part:

These Three Great Secret Laws I, Nichiren, have certainly inherited directly from Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment and the lord of teachings, in person as the head of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth more than two thousand years ago. What I, Nichiren, am doing now does not deviate in the slightest from the bequeathal that took place at Eagle Peak, nor does it differ from the actual phase of the three great principles gleaned from the Juryo chapter. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1023)

He explained these three laws. He said: (1) the object of worship means the Buddha of absolute freedom who has existed since time without beginning; (2) the invocation refers to the chanting of Nam-myohorenge-kyo for both oneself and others (in contrast to the self-oriented practice taught by T'ien-t'ai and his followers); and (3) the high sanctuary should be built in a place of magnificent beauty, like the pure land of Eagle Peak.

It was this last, the construction of a sanctuary, which would insure the

survival of the Dai-Gohonzon—coupled with the pure flow of the Daishonin’s teachings throughout the future. Of course, his training of disciples was meant to guarantee the latter, but even the Daishonin lamented that the seeking spirit was lapsing in places away from Mount Minobu. His health deteriorating, the Daishonin could do nothing outside the confines of his center at Minobu.

MEANWHILE, the Mongols attempted another invasion of Japan in 1281. This time the forces came in even more massive and awesome numbers: 140,000 Mongol and Korean troops, and more than 4,000 battleships. The strategy was the same—to land in Kyushu, take the government headquarters at Dazaifu and sweep northward to engulf the entire country.

The Japanese had been preparing for a second invasion for years. Around 1276 the government enjoined the samurai to build stone ramparts along the coast of northern Kyushu and to drive piles into the sea to prevent the Mongol battleships from landing. Some warriors grew so anxious that they gathered at Hakata hoping to invade Korea, but this plan never materialized. In July 1279 the Mongols dispatched envoys again, but they, too, were beheaded.

The stage was set for a massive confrontation. The first wave of 40,000 troops left Korea and quickly overran Tsushima and Iki islands in May. They were supposed to rendezvous with another force of 100,000 men sailing from southern China and together descend on Kyushu, as in the previous invasion. But the troops from China were delayed, and the stone ramparts prevented the first force from entering the bay at Hakata. The groups joined up in June, but before they could organize a full-scale invasion a terrible storm struck on the night of July 30. All but about two hundred of the warships were sunk; only about one-fifth of the troops were able to return home.

Though nature had once again turned back the invaders, the cost to Japan was tremendous. The warriors entrusted with the task of defending the homeland had to raise so much money that many were forced to sell their fiefs. As a result, the system by which the Kamakura government bought the warriors’ support by granting them fiefs was undermined, and the Kamakura regime itself was destined to an early death.

If Nichiren Daishonin wrote any comments on the second invasion, they have not survived the centuries. At any rate, by 1281, the Daishonin’s health was already declining rapidly, and he found it increasingly difficult to carry on the many activities to which he had grown accustomed, including the writing of letters.

In the best of times, the area around Mount Minobu was never very warm, and a minor glacial epoch in the thirteenth century made the conditions even worse. It was biting cold. Food was another problem. Following the custom of Buddhist monks in those days, the Daishonin abstained from eating fish and meat, and the food provided by his disciples and believers did not render all the nutrition he needed. In addition, from 1277 through 1278 he was bothered by chronic diarrhea. In a letter he wrote to Shijo Kingo in October (intercalary) 1278, he reported:

I, Nichiren, am not as healthy as others, and in addition, I dwell in this remote mountain forest. This year was especially difficult, with widespread epidemics and famine in spring and summer, which worsened in autumn and winter. My sickness grew worse again, too, but you prescribed various medicines and sent them to me along with quilted silk clothes. Thanks to your remedies, I improved steadily; I have now recovered and feel much better than before. (MW-1, 225)

The cure evidently did not last long, for in November 1281 he wrote Ikegami Munenaga that the diarrhea had returned. By this time, the Daishonin knew that he could not live much longer. As early as the previous May he had written the Ikegami brothers of his condition, saying:

Already I have been expounding this doctrine for no less than twenty-nine years. The past seven or eight years my strength has ebbed markedly with each year and I have suffered from illness, perhaps because my body has been weakened and my mind exhausted by the debates in which I have engaged daily, the persecutions which have assailed me every month, and the two exiles to which I have been subjected. Still, I have been able to survive until now. Since the first month of this year, however, I have felt fatigued and ill, and it now seems that my life is drawing to a close. In addition, I have already reached the age of sixty. If, with one chance out of ten, I were somehow able to make it through this year, I do not know how it would be possible to survive the following year or two. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1105)

In December, he wrote the mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu, lamenting, "I have never taken a step out of this mountain forest from the seventeenth day of the sixth month in the eleventh year of Bun'ei (1274), when I retired here, through the eighth day of the twelfth month this year" (Ibid., p. 1583) In January 1282 he wrote a letter to Nanjo Tokimitsu, thanking him for his gifts of rice and noting:

Thin are the garments I wear and sparse the food I have, and I am no better than the Kankucho bird [which is tortured by the cold in the Snow Mountains] during the night. In the daytime I can never even for a single moment contain my desire to go down to the village. The voice reciting the sutra has all but ceased and the seeking spirit has faltered. (Ibid., p. 1585)

When spring came in 1282, the warm weather enabled the Daishonin to regain his health. He wrote that he felt like he had "captured a tiger" and was "riding a lion." His vitality returned, but he and his disciples knew that it would last only until autumn. As summer waned, he was urged to go to the hot springs at Hitachi (presently Ibaraki Prefecture), and he accepted the advice. Before setting out on September 8, he wrote the "Document for Entrusting the Law That Nichiren Propagated throughout his Life." In this he named Nikko Shonin as his legitimate successor:

I, Nichiren, transfer all of the teachings I have propagated throughout my life to Byakuren Ajari Nikko, who should be the supreme leader for propagating true Buddhism. When the sovereign accepts this Law, the high sanctuary of Hommon-ji temple should be erected at the foot of Mount Fuji. Simply wait for the time to come. This is the actual high sanctuary of true Buddhism. Above all, my disciples should observe this document.

The ninth month of the fifth year of Koan (1282), cyclical sign *mizunoe-uma*.—Nichiren

The order of heritage: from Nichiren to Nikko (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600)

THUS, the Daishonin ensured the perpetuation of his teachings in their entirety. He also named the place where the sanctuary should be constructed, whereas before he had only said a spot of great splendor. As for his successor, it appears that by 1280 or earlier he had already decided upon Nikko Shonin. In 1280, he had transferred his document, "The Hundred and Six Comparisons," to Nikko Shonin, proclaiming: "As the teacher of the True Cause¹³ [and the teacher of the Buddhism of sowing], I, Nichiren, hereby respectfully incorporate my teachings in this writing and transfer it to my immediate disciple, Nikko, [who is to save the people of the Latter Day of the Law for ten thousand years and more into the future]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 854).

THE central message of this document was the declaration that the Buddhism of sowing, or the Buddhism which implants the seed of Buddhahood in the lives of all people, is the highest form of Buddhism.

After leaving Mount Minobu, Nichiren Daishonin traveled northward around Mount Fuji and, sensing that death was imminent, shunned the hot springs in favor of a trip to the home of Ikegami Munenaka in which is presently Ota Ward of Metropolitan Tokyo. There he took final measures to ensure the perpetuity of his teachings. On October 8, he named six priests as seniors. They were Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nitcho and Nichiji. On October 13, he drafted a second transfer document, called the "Document for Entrusting Minobu-san." He declared:

I transfer Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings of fifty years to Byakuren Ajari Nikko, who should become the chief priest of Minobu-san Kuon-ji temple. Those priests and lay believers who disregard this will be slanderers of the Law.

The thirteenth day of the tenth month in the fifth year of Koan (1282), cyclical sign *mizunoe-uma*

At Ikegami, Musashi Province

Nichiren (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600)

It was the last thing he would ever write. As he and his disciples chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren Daishonin breathed his last early on the same morning, October 13, 1282, three years and one day after the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon.

Hearing the news, disciples and followers rushed to the Ikegami residence, where the Daishonin's body had been placed in a coffin. The next evening at eight o'clock, a

formal funeral was conducted. At midnight, everyone bid farewell to their revered master and committed his body to cremation. As an expression of utmost respect, a funeral procession was held in the manner befitting a deceased worthy samurai, with the lay believers taking virtual charge.

A life of passionate commitment to the welfare and happiness of all humanity had come to a close after sixty-one years, but Nichiren Daishonin lived on—in the hearts of his disciples and followers, in the teachings he left behind, in the Dai-Gohonzon he bestowed upon all humanity throughout the world and in the gratitude of the millions of people who would find solace and fulfillment through the practice of his teachings in the Latter Day of the Law. His life and achievements proved to be in accord with the stanzas of eternity which conclude the Juryo (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

Because of the befuddlement of ordinary people,
though I live, I give out word I have entered extinction.
For if they see me constantly,
arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds.
Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to the five desires¹⁴
and fall into the evil paths of existence.
Always I am aware of which living beings
practice the way, and which do not,
and in response to their needs for salvation
I preach various doctrines for them.
At all times I think to myself:
how can I cause living beings
to gain entry into the unsurpassed way
and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha? (The Lotus Sutra, pp. 231-32)

Chapter 13 (pp. 111–115): Epilogue

AS the legitimate successor of Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin inherited the totality of the Daishonin's teachings. He and his disciples carried the Daishonin's ashes to Minobu to fulfill their master's desire that his ashes would rest there. On January 23, one hundred days after the Daishonin's death, his ashes were placed in a small temple built especially for their repose.

Eighteen representatives, including the six seniors, were to take turns watching over the Daishonin's ashes and studying the Daishonin's commentary on the sutra there. But all failed to do so except Nikko Shonin and his immediate disciples. After the death of the Daishonin, the five seniors, other than Nikko Shonin, had returned to their various regions of responsibility and begun extending their influence: Nissho in Kamakura, Nichiro in Kamakura and Ikegami, Niko in Boso territory (presently Chiba Prefecture), Nitcho around the residence of Toki Jonin, and Nichiji in the area that is presently Shizuoka Prefecture.

Although he had devoted the last few years of his life to training disciples,

Nichiren Daishonin had actually been able to spend little time with the senior priests, except for Nikko Shonin; they were too valuable as central figures for propagation in the various territories. Consequently, they knew little of the Daishonin's ultimate teachings or of the purpose of his life. They began to feel that the Daishonin had only taught a form of Tendai Buddhism, so they sent their disciples to Mount Hiei, center of the Tendai sect. They discarded the object of worship, the Gohonzon, in favor of images of Shakyamuni Buddha, totally misreading the Daishonin's intention to save people through faith in the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as embodied by the Daishonin himself. They even destroyed many of his letters and treatises that were not written in classical Chinese, for they felt them to be uncultured and a disgrace to their deceased master.

NIKKO Shonin, only thirty-six years old when the Daishonin died, grew increasingly concerned. He was more than happy when Niko came to Mount Minobu in 1285, and he appointed him chief instructor of the priests. But Niko soon showed his true colors. Under his influence, Hakiri Sanenaga, the steward of the Minobu area, committed what are called the four slanderous acts: He commissioned a statue of Shakyamuni, made pilgrimages to Shinto shrines, donated a tract of land for the construction of a Nembutsu monument, and even had a Nembutsu seminary built.

Nikko Shonin strictly warned Niko and Lord Hakiri about the nature of these acts, but to no avail. He recalled the words of the Daishonin's will that should the steward of Minobu turn against his teachings, the Daishonin's spirit would not remain there. Though Nikko Shonin felt deep regret at having to leave Kuon-ji temple, he also knew that the only way to answer his master's expectations was to protect the true teachings of Buddhism and perpetuate them for the sake of future generations. In 1289 he pronounced Minobu to be a land of heresy, and took the treasures of his faith—the Dai-Gohonzon, the letters, treatises and ashes of his master—and left. He stayed for a while at the residence of his maternal grandfather in Kawai Village in Fuji District, but he soon moved on to the estate of Nanjo Tokimitsu, steward of Ueno Village in the same district. Lord Ueno offered Nikko Shonin a tract of land called Oishigahara, located northeast of his residence. as a temple site. In October 1290, Nikko Shonin's followers, with the help of Lord Ueno, completed a building there called the Dai-bo, which was hardly more than twenty-four square meters. And so, with the construction of the Dai-bo, Taiseki-ji temple was founded. The site accorded with the Daishonin's will that the sanctuary of true Buddhism be constructed near the foot of Mount Fuji.¹⁵

Nikko Shonin continued to work actively, lecturing on important writings such as the "Rissho Ankoku Ron," collecting and copying the Daishonin's works, promoting his teachings and instructing disciples and followers—whom he charged with the task of propagation after his death. All his efforts were aimed at ensuring the eternal prosperity and perpetuation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

He stated in his "Gonin Shoha Sho" (On Refuting the Five Priests): "Just as the Sanskrit texts have already been translated and introduced into China and Japan for the sake of propagation when the Buddhism of India spread eastward, so should the

Japanese be rendered into Sanskrit and Chinese for the sake of transmission when the day comes for the sacred teachings of this country [Japan] to spread far and wide" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1613). (Sanskrit is an Indo-European language and thus, in a broader sense, here represents Western languages as a whole.)

Shortly before his passing, Nikko Shonin wrote the "Nikko yuikai okimon" (Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko); his purpose was to protect the purity of the Daishonin's teachings and to convey a correct understanding of the Daishonin's intention. Nikko Shonin summed up the Daishonin's will for the future in admonition number thirteen: "Until kosen-rufu is achieved, propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability without begrudging your life" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618). He then transferred the entirety of the Daishonin's teachings to his lineal successor, Nichimoku Shonin, and passed away at the age of eighty-eight.

The flow of Buddhism, which originated with Shakyamuni Buddha, reached its culmination with the advent of Nichiren Daishonin. His establishment of the supreme teachings of Buddhism has generated a fresh movement toward the far-reaching goal of attaining kosen-rufu, or world peace and the happiness of all humanity throughout time. □

1. Kukai (774-835): The founder of the Shingon sect in Japan. His posthumous name and title are the Great Teacher Kobo. While denouncing the Lotus Sutra he asserted the supremacy of the Dainichi Sutra over all other sutras.
2. Shotoku (574-622): The second son of Emperor Yomei and the regent during the reign of Empress Suiko. He is best known for his application of the spirit of Buddhism to government.
3. In the Japanese edition of Nichiren Daishonin's writings called the *Gosho Zenshu*, these early works are not included because they were written simply to organize the knowledge he had gained through his studies.
4. Jogyo: The leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appear in the Yujutsu [Emerging from the Earth] (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the sutra to Bodhisattva Jogyo in the Jinriki [Entrustment] (21st) chapter entrusting him with its propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. Jogyo is a provisional entity of the original Buddha of kuon ganjo.
5. Vasubandhu (4th or 5th century) and Nagarjuna (2nd or 3rd century): Indian Mahayana scholars. Vasubandhu criticized Mahayana but later converted to it at his older brother Asanga's urging. He wrote many treatises clarifying the Mahayana teachings. Nagarjuna mastered Hinayana [Theravada] Buddhism but later he devoted himself to the study and propagation of Mahayana Buddhism. He wrote many treatises concerning Mahayana.
6. Ceremony in the Air: The second of the three assemblies described in the Lotus Sutra in which the entire gathering floats in space. The ceremony continues from the Hoto [The Emergence of the Treasure Tower] (11th) to the Zokurui [Entrustment] (22nd) chapter. During the ceremony Shakyamuni reveals his original enlightenment in the remote past and transfers the essence of the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth led by Jogyo.

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7. *ichinen sanzen*: A philosophical system that Tien-tai set forth based on the Lotus Sutra. It clarifies the mutually inclusive relationship of the ultimate truth and the phenomenal world. *Ichinen* is the life that is manifest at each moment and *sanzen* (three thousand) the varying aspects and phases it assumes. Both a theoretical and an actual *ichinen sanzen* exist. Theoretical *ichinen sanzen* refers to the life of the common mortals of the nine worlds and actual *ichinen sanzen* to the life of the Buddha. Nichiren Daishonin embodied actual *ichinen sanzen*—the life of the Buddha in the concrete form of the Gohonzon.

8. *kuon ganjo*: Defined as the infinite past in contrast with a specific point in time indicated by the distant past of *gohyaku-jintengo*. *Kuon ganjo* is an expression suggesting a dimension that is outside the temporal framework and that has neither beginning nor end. The “original Buddha of *kuon ganjo*” means the Buddha who has been enlightened since time without beginning.

9. Nan-yueh (515-577): Tien-t'ai's teacher. He dedicated his entire life to the practice of the Lotus Sutra and for this reason suffered many persecutions.

10. Lord Shakyamuni of true Buddhism: The Buddha of the teaching indicated in the depths of the Lotus Sutra, who appeared as Nichiren Daishonin in the Latter Day of the Law and expounded the ultimate Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

11. four Bodhisattvas: Jogyo, Muhengyo, Jyogyo and Anryugyo. They are the leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth described in the Yujutsu [Emerging from the Earth] (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

12. *Fuji shugaku yoshu* (Selected Works of the Fuji School), vol. 1, pp. 32-33.

13. teacher of the True Cause: Another name for the Buddha of *kuon ganjo*. Although Shakyamuni revealed his enlightenment in the remote past of *gohyaku-jintengo*, he did not clarify the cause that led him to Buddhahood. The original cause for the enlightenment of all living beings is the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The Buddha who directly reveals and himself embodies the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is called the Buddha of *kuon ganjo*, that is, Nichiren Daishonin. His Buddhism is called the “Buddhism of sowing” because it plants the original seed of Buddhahood in the lives of all people.

14. five desires: Here, earthly desires stimulated by the five sensory organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin.

15. The Sho-Hondo (Grand Main Temple) was completed in 1972 approximately 700 years after the Daishonin passed away, the result of the initiative and leadership of Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International, and of donations from more than 7.5 million Soka Gakkai members. The Dai-Gohonzon is enshrined within it.

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