

the leadership of Rennyo quickly moved in to fill the void, in company with the Zen sect that appealed to many of the former samurai followers of Ippen. During the Tokugawa period the national system of temple registration (*terauke*) also endangered the spirit of *yugyō* missionary practice and the major activity of the sect became the development of theology and editing sacred scriptures. It was during this time that the Tokugawa government recognized the leadership of the Yugyō-ha over the Jishū and legally unified the sect under the abbot of the Shōjōkōji temple.

## CHAPTER III

THE NICHIREN-SHŪ, FOLLOWERS  
OF THE LOTUS

A second single-practice new religious movement to develop during the Kamakura period that was also faith oriented was the Nichiren sect, where belief was placed in reciting the name of the *Lotus Sutra*.

## 1. Nichiren, the Founder

Nichiren is unique among the founders of Japanese Buddhism in that the major incidents of his life have all been carefully recorded and preserved. During his later years, he copiously wrote and interpreted the events and miracles that led him to the ultimate realization that he was the embodiment of Jōgyō (Viśiṣṭacāritra) bodhisattva, whose mission was to protect the *Lotus Sutra* and nation of Japan.

Nichiren was born the sixteenth day of the second month in the year 1222 in Kominato of Awa Province. Later followers were to attempt to portray Nichiren's family as aristocratic but in his own words, he was the 'son of an untouchable along the beach.'<sup>1</sup> This statement has caused certain confusion, but today it is generally believed to imply that his father professionally dealt with fishing—a livelihood that was not favourably regarded by idealistic Buddhists since it entailed the taking of life. Nichiren, however, was very proud of the lowliness of his birth.

At the time of Nichiren, the village where he was born was an estate of the Ise Shrine. And the sacred atmosphere undoubtedly served to stimulate his awareness of Japanese tradition and strong feeling of nationalism. As he later wrote while in exile:

The area of Tōjō in the province of Awa is a remote place but it appears to be the centre of Japan. The reason is because

Amaterasu Ō Mikami dropped her manifestation (*suijaku*) there. Originally in the past she dropped her manifestation at Ise but the rulers of the nation offered her little respect while profoundly venerating Hachiman and the Kamo gods, therefore she was angered. Minamoto Yoritomo by petition ordered Kodayū of Auga to receive her and the Outer shrine of Ise was reverently and secretly brought to this place satisfying Amaterasu, and thus he became Shōgun holding all of Japan in his hands. This man set the area of Tōjō as the residence of Amaterasu Ō Mikami and therefore the great god does not reside in Ise but rather in the Tōjō area of Awa province . . . Nichiren, in the Tōjō area, province of Awa in Japan of Jambudvīpa, for the first time has begun to propagate the true Dharma.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know anything about Nichiren's early education but by the time he reached the age of twelve, he arrived at two crucial questions in life and the search to answer them determined his future course:<sup>3</sup>

The first dealt with the misfortunes of the Imperial family, which Nichiren believed should have been divinely protected by the gods and temples of the land. He had been born the year following the Shōkyū war, an Imperial revolt against the Hōjō regents that resulted in the exile of Emperor Go-Toba (1180-1239). And he questioned why the Divine ruler of the nation was permitted to suffer disgrace and be ousted by usurpers. He also sought to know why the child Emperor Antoku had earlier been 'allowed to drown and become food for fish' at the close of the Gempei war that had placed Minamoto Yoritomo in charge of Japan. Nichiren believed that such Imperial ignominies must have had a reason for happening, and he sought to discover it.

Secondly, Nichiren questioned the nature of Buddhism. Observing the numerous sects and immense volumes of sutras, he came to the conclusion that 'just as a nation cannot peacefully function with two rulers, if Buddhism is to be effective there can only be one true sect and one true sutra,' these he also sought to discover. Thus making a vow to Kokūzō (Ākāśagarbha) bodhisattva, that he would become the 'fore-

most man of wisdom in Japan,' he entered neighboring Mt. Kiyosumi in 1233 to study Buddhism.

In those days, Mt. Kiyosumi belonged to the Tendai sect and had ties with the Yokawa *nembutsu* followers on Mt. Hiei. Dōzen, Nichiren's master was a *nembutsu* monk and in later years Nichiren was to write that while young, he had studied Zendō (Shan-tao), Genshin and Genkū (Hōnen).<sup>4</sup> The Kiyosumi-dera later became affiliated with the Shingon sect, and in 1392 its temple master belonged to the Shingon Sambōin-ryū. At that time forged historical records were made to prove the temple had always belonged to Shingon but during Nichiren's lifetime it officially was a branch of the Sanmon Tendai.

Upon arriving on the mountain, Nichiren was first given the child-name of Yakuō-maru and after four years of study when he was formally ordained, he received the religious name of Zeshōbō Renchō. In 1239, feeling confined by the lack of material for study at such a poor countryside temple, Nichiren decided to visit Kamakura, the *de facto* seat of government. Most historians surmise that it was then he completed further studies in Zen and Pure Land Buddhism, but we have to question exactly what forms of Zen and Pure Land were in Kamakura at the time.

According to legend, Nichiren studied Pure Land under Dai Amida Butsu but as this master died in screaming agony, Nichiren became convinced that Pure Land followers were fated to hell and abandoned the teachings. The story appears to be a later fabrication although it is known that Hōnen had a follower known as Dai-A, who signed the Seven Article Pledge. We can imagine that Nichiren must have had some unpleasant experience that turned him so bitterly against Pure Land Buddhism, and in particular against Hōnen, who had died eleven years prior to his birth. Historically this was the period when Ryōchū of the Chinzei-ha, a powerful future enemy of Nichiren, was becoming established in Kamakura, and although Shinran was also active in the Kantō area at the time, it is most likely Nichiren never heard of him.

If Nichiren studied Zen in Kamakura at this early date, it must have

been an impure form of Zen in the *Enmitsuzenkai* tradition such as propagated by Eisai at the Jufukuji, in accord with the wishes of the Kamakura leaders. For Nichiren's stay in Kamakura considerably antedated the arrival of Rankei Dōryū in 1246, who led the procession of Chinese priests transmitting pure Zen in Japan.

#### *Study on Mt. Hiei*

In 1242 when Nichiren returned to the Kiyosumi-dera, he wrote a small work entitled the *Kaitai Sokushin Jōbutsugi* (Essay on attaining Buddhahood with this body through the essence of the *śīla*) that summed up his religious studies. The interesting point about this is that he placed Shingon esoteric doctrines superior to the *Lotus* exoteric teachings. This was an opinion he was later to radically change, however, we can only assume that he was profoundly influenced in Kamakura by esoteric teachings and the concept of attaining Buddhahood with this body (*sokushin jōbutsu*) was to become a cardinal feature of his later philosophy. As a further preview of his future course, he also attacked the Pure Land sect in this short work and declared the *Lotus Sutra* closest to the truth. Nichiren's anti-Pure Land attitude was enforced the same year when at the age of twenty-one, he decided to go to Mt. Hiei for further study and became a disciple of Shunban, the monk in charge of academic affairs on the mountain, who was known to be a strong opponent of the *nembutsu*, Zen and Shingon.

In view of Nichiren's later theological position, we can imagine that he must have been influenced by the Eshin-ryū on Mt. Hiei founded by Genshin. This group, which tended to oppose Tendai esoterism as expressed in Taimitsu (a stand Nichiren also adopted), set forth the doctrine of *hongaku hōmon* (Teaching of the Dharma of Original Enlightenment), which emphasized all sentient beings as intrinsic Buddhas—a concept Nichiren used as a foundation for his philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

In his search for the 'true' Buddhism, Nichiren established certain rules. He refused to accept any sect based upon a treatise rather than a sutra and thus automatically ruled out the Kusha, Jōjitsu, Hossō and Sanron schools. Furthermore, while in Kamakura he had already decided

that Zen and Pure Land sects could not represent 'true' Buddhism and soon dismissed Kegon as inferior to Tendai. His final choice fell between Tendai and Shingon, but before he finally left Mt. Hiei, he was to decide that the Tendai sect alone represented 'true' Buddhism.

Nichiren's stay upon Mt. Hiei proved to be one of the most influential events in his life and we can place the movement he was later to found within the framework of the Tendai order. It was while there that Nichiren became firmly convinced the *Lotus Sutra* was the perfect culmination of Buddhist truth and the sole hope of salvation for men during the days of *Mappō* (Degeneration of the Dharma). He also came to envision himself as having the responsibility of restoring the Tendai sect to what he believed to be the original ideals of Saichō, its founder.

Initially, Nichiren traced his own unique reception of Tendai transmission in a direct line from Śākyamuni Buddha through Chih-I to Saichō, and finally to himself.<sup>6</sup> Later in life he was to omit the Tendai mediators and declare that he had received a direct transmission of the teachings from Śākyamuni Buddha, but even then, Nichiren never abandoned the conviction that he had a mission to restore the Tendai order. Undoubtedly one reason for his violent attacks against *nembutsu* followers was his belief that the popularity of Hōnen's movement had resulted in a serious decline for the Tendai sect. ✓

During Nichiren's stay on Mt. Hiei, he left the mountain for several years to study other sects of Buddhism. In his letters he mentions having visited the Onjōji, where Enchin's Jimon-ha of the Tendai sect had its headquarters, also Mt. Kōya and the Shitennōji in Osaka where the teachings of the older sects of Buddhism were studied. Strangely enough he makes no mention of ever going to Nara, but perhaps he felt the doctrines of the Nara sects were adequately represented at the Shitennōji.

#### *Beginning of his mission—Shakubuku*

When Nichiren decided finally it was time to leave Mt. Hiei, he had the answers to his previous questions. The Tendai sect represented 'true' Buddhism and during the age of *Mappō*, the *Lotus Sutra* alone could offer salvation. The reason the Imperial family had been forced to suffer

humiliations was due to the fact that the nation of Japan failed to take homage in the *Lotus* and had allowed heretical teachings to dominate the land, causing the protector gods to abandon it. This was to become the message he transmitted throughout the rest of his life.

On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in 1253, Nichiren at the age of thirty-three returned to Mt. Kiyosumi, believing the time had come to preach his doctrine to the world. Accordingly, as in the case of the historical Buddha, Nichiren first wished to preach to his former fellow disciples, and also to his old master. And although the *Honmon-shūyōshō* (Essentials of the Honmon sect) attributed to Nichiren is now generally considered to have been a forgery, the first preaching of Nichiren's had some similarities to the account found there:

*Nembutsu* followers will fall into the Avīci hell,  
Zen followers are devils,  
Shingon will destroy the nation,  
The Ritsu are enemies of the state,  
Tendai is an outdated calendar.<sup>7</sup>

The first four lines were to be frequently repeated on later occasions and formed the basis of Nichiren's method of *shakubuku* (conversion).<sup>8</sup> Throughout life Nichiren was known for intemperate emotional language, which he used as a deliberate weapon to shock and antagonize his opponents, at the same time attracting the more timid and fearful to his dynamic and confident cause. It is dubious whether on this first preaching that he criticized Shingon, for he did not begin overt attacks on that sect until after the threat of the Mongol invasions, when Shingon rituals gained great popularity throughout the nation. And the attack on Tendai seems to be a fabrication by later followers, since Nichiren personally did not speak ill of that sect. Most likely the initial attack at Mt. Kiyosumi was against the *nembutsu* and Zen, and since his old master and the majority of the monks practiced the *nembutsu*, his charges must have been as astonishing as the mission he claimed to propagate the *Lotus*.

In the audience during this first preaching was the powerful local

warlord, Tōjō Kagenobu, a *nembutsu* follower who was so incensed by Nichiren's remarks that he planned an ambush as he descended the mountain. Dōzen, Nichiren's old master, learned of the planned attack and in order to protect Nichiren, publicly disowned him, while secretly sending two monks to accompany him down the mountain. Tōjō's initial plan failed, but as a lifelong enemy of Nichiren he was to try again and be more successful the next time.

Subsequently, Nichiren was invited to the dedication of a local Amida hall. Those who requested his presence merely assumed he was a bright young scholar returning from study on Mt. Hiei and had no idea he entertained such radical views. Accepting the invitation, Nichiren enraged the audience by declaring that since Amida was the master of the western world and not this one, here Śākyamuni and not Amida should receive veneration. The reactions Nichiren deliberately provoked served as stimuli to carry on his *shakubuku* methods, since he astutely interpreted anger as a form of success, proving that he had indeed touched the people. In fact later in life he was to announce that he was 'the greatest man in Japan since he was the most hated person.'<sup>9</sup> For next to acceptance and recognition, hatred and criticism reflect human importance in society,—the most ignoble fate is to be ignored.

#### *First converts*

On his way to Kamakura, Nichiren stopped at the home of his parents and although they initially entreated him to cease his offensive style of preaching, ultimately they became the first converts to his movement. His mother received the new religious name of Myōnichī and his father, Myōren. According to legend, this is when Nichiren took the last characters from each of their new religious names to create his own name.

Arriving in Kamakura, Nichiren took up residence at a small hut in Matsubagayatsu on the southeastern outskirts of the city and commenced practicing *shakubuku* by denouncing the Zen and Pure Land sects. It has commonly been believed that Nichiren delivered his sermons on street corners, but contemporary historians question this view since street preaching was a later invention and not practiced at that time.<sup>10</sup>

Most likely he spoke at the homes of laymen or in public meeting places. At first he was met with derision, but in time began to attract disciples. In 1253 Jōben, a former Mt. Hiei monk a year Nichiren's senior, became his first disciple and received the religious name of Nisshō. The following year this monk's nephew, approximately ten years of age, joined Nichiren and received the name of Nichirō.

#### *Risshō Ankokuron*

During the years 1254-60, a series of major calamities in the form of earthquakes, drought, famine and epidemic struck Japan and Nichiren decided the time had arrived to warn the nation that these calamities were principally the result of the growing popularity of Hōnen's *nembutsu* movement. He wrote two essays to this effect, and then in the summer of 1260 summarized all his convictions in an official petition to the government entitled the *Risshō Ankokuron* (Treatise on the Establishment of Righteousness for the Peace of the Nation). This he submitted to the former regent, Hōjō Tokiyori, who still ruled from behind the scenes. The essence of this work, written in classical style as a dialogue between a traveller and master of the house, was that the calamities befalling the nation were due to the return of the *deva* and good gods protecting Japan to heaven as a result of the popularity of the teachings of Zendō and Genkū. In order to save the land, all support of the *nembutsu* heresy should be stopped and the country should take homage in the *Lotus Sutra*. If this advice was not heeded, foreign invasion and civil disturbances would be unavoidable.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Exile to Izu*

One interesting point about this treatise is the fact that Nichiren, being aware the Hōjō regents personally belonged to the Zen sect, significantly omitted any denunciation of Zen, placing total blame upon *nembutsu* followers. Despite this, his first warning to the nation was ostensibly ignored by the government. Perhaps it was out of kindness, since public notice would have inevitably resulted in charges against Nichiren. But the contents of his petition gradually became known and finally incited

an attack upon his hut by *nembutsu* followers. Barely escaping, Nichiren temporarily retired to Shimofusa province, yet when he returned to Kamakura the following year he resumed practicing *shakubuku* as violently as before. It was then that *nembutsu* followers made an official appeal to the Kamakura government to have Nichiren charged with slanderous speech, which under article twelve of the *Jōei Shikimoku* feudal code was punishable by death or imprisonment. As a result, Nichiren was exiled to Izu Peninsula, but he was to have the satisfaction of knowing that Hōjō Shigetoki of the Gokurakuji temple, who had instigated the petition against him, fell ill twenty days after his departure and died before the close of the year; Nichiren interpreted this as divine punishment.

In 1263, the same year that Hōjō Tokiyori died, Nichiren was pardoned and returned to Kamakura. And the following year when a great comet appeared in the sky, Nichiren interpreted the event as a portent of future disaster. He considered again warning the government, but the illness of his mother persuaded him to return home.

According to legend, Nichiren's mother was already dead upon his arrival, but due to his fervent prayers, she was restored to life for four more years. While in the vicinity, Nichiren decided to visit his old master Dōzen, now living at the Rengeji temple in Hanabusa, in order to rebuke him for continuing to practice the *nembutsu*. The old master, despite his affection for Nichiren, was not about to change his ways and years later after his death, Nichiren was further to address him a spiritual admonition.

While visiting his master, an invitation arrived from the warlord Kudō Yoshitaka, and Nichiren set out for his residence accompanied by six or seven disciples on the wintry eve of the eleventh day of the eleventh month (1264), but on the way met an ambush set by his old enemy Tōjō Kagenobu, the local warlord. This time one of Nichiren's disciples was killed, two seriously injured and Nichiren himself received a wound on his forehead as well as a broken left hand. Hearing of the attack, Kudō Yoshitaka and two retainers immediately came to aid but met death in the skirmish. Nichiren barely escaped and a month later upon

describing this assault to a follower, announced that he felt more convinced than ever in the divine inspiration for his mission; his confidence was to increase with future events.

In 1268 an envoy arrived in Japan demanding tribute from Kubhilai Khan, the great leader of the Mongols who had recently become Emperor of China. Unlike earlier Chinese messages, this was couched in polite language and clearly implied that the Khan was seeking peaceful tributary relations. The Korean representatives that accompanied the messenger informed the Kamakura *bakufu* that the Khan merely sought tribute as a formality to increase his prestige and suggested the *bakufu* comply with the request.

At the time of the messenger's arrival, Hōjō Masamura was about to turn over the regency to the eighteen year old Tokimune, and as one of his last moderate acts, after debating over the message for nearly a month, decided to turn the matter over to the Court in Kyoto. Shortly thereafter Tokimune became regent and with his more militant advisers firmly rejected the Mongol demand. It was evident that the Hōjō regents were annoyed although not seriously disturbed by the Mongol message, but by notifying the Court, it was not long before rumours spread throughout Japan that the Mongols were about to invade. To placate the people, the *bakufu* sent requests to the established shrines and temples for rituals to safeguard the nation and also cautiously took steps to prepare in the event of an invasion.

Hearing the news, Nichiren went to the Government Bureau of Retainers (*Samurai dokoro*) to submit another petition to the Regent, this time pointing out that the *Risshō Ankokuron* written nine years previously, had predicted foreign invasion if Japan failed to reject heretical teachings and take homage in the *Lotus*. And that now if the government allowed the Buddhist priests, whom he charged as being heretics, to perform rituals for the nation, it would anger the gods to destroy the land. Only he, Nichiren, could prevent the devastation that would inevitably occur and obliterate all within its wake (with the exception of the sacrosanct Mt. Hiei).

On the eleventh day of the tenth month (1268), Nichiren also sent

eleven letters addressed to the Regent, major figures of government, and the senior monks of the various temples. The essence of these, with the exception of his letter to Hōjō Tokimune, was to demand support of the temples he stopped, that faith be placed in him rather than in heretical teachings, and finally, that if any doubted the truth of his words, they should prepare to meet him in public debate. Doing this, he prepared to meet persecution or possibly another exile and forewarned his disciples, but the government ignored his advice, and at the leading temples his messengers were either met with derision or refusal to accept his letter.

Since Japan's initial rejection of Kubhilai Khan's demands stirred up no immediate retaliation, public excitement over the matter gradually subsided and was replaced by contemporary affairs. But a subsequent message the following year created further panic, and the nation psychologically prepared for a possible invasion. At this point Nichiren's timely predictions gained more appeal but once again when the invasion failed to materialize, the people lost interest.

Then in the spring of 1271 a drought hit Japan. By summer the situation was so severe that the government requested Ryōkan of the Gokurakuji, the most influential priest of the capital, to perform a rain ritual. When Nichiren heard of this, he made a public challenge to Ryōkan's followers promising that if their master could bring rain within seven days, he, Nichiren, would abandon his faith and become a disciple. But if Ryōkan should fail, then his hypocritical pretence of observing the *śīla* would be exposed.<sup>12</sup>

Supposedly some one hundred-twenty monks participated in the ritual but at the end of seven days there was no sign of rain. Nichiren then sent three messengers to Ryōkan informing him that if he could not perform a simple task like making rain, how could he expect to accomplish something as complicated as becoming a Buddha? After further prayers, allegedly the drought worsened; such failures increased Nichiren's popularity and it is believed that year his followers in Kamakura reached two-hundred sixty.

Because of his constant accusations and demands, Nichiren's oppo-

nents, led by Gyōbin, a disciple of the Jōdo priest Ryōchū of the Kōmyōji, brought charges against him to the government claiming amongst other things that of the teachings of Buddhism, only Nichiren exclusively rejected all others, and that his followers were known to throw sacred images of Amida and Kannon in the fire or river; finally, that he kept a group of armed followers as well as a cache of secret weapons at his residence.

The government was not overly concerned about the religious charges against Nichiren since such had been heard before, but they seriously considered the complaint that he kept armed soldiers and weapons. Nichiren had been known publicly to state that all the improper heretical temples should be burned and the leading priests supported by the Hōjō beheaded, thus if the charges were true that he kept a private army, there was a strong possibility that he actually intended to make good his threats. As a result, Nichiren was called to the Court of Appeals (*Hyōjōsho*) during the ninth month and questioned whether he had indeed made such inflammatory statements, and if it was true that he kept armed followers and weapons. In reply, Nichiren unhesitatingly stated that he did believe all heretical temples and priests should be destroyed and that it was true he kept armed followers at his residence for his own protection.

Such an admission placed the authorities in a quandry. If Nichiren actually intended to fulfill his threats and attack the established temples and shrines, he would in effect be attempting to overthrow the government. In fact his frequent criticisms of the Zen sect, to which the Hōjō family belonged, were considered indirect attacks against the Regents themselves. Particularly since Hōjō Tokiyori had been ordained a Zen priest seven years before his death by Rankei Dōryū, Nichiren's contention that Zen followers were inspired by devils and destined to hell was considered a criticism of the current Regent Tokimune, the son of Tokiyori. Furthermore, Nichiren's pro-Imperial views presented a challenge to the legitimacy of Hōjō rule. It was quite simple to establish a case of treason and conspiracy against him.

That day Nichiren was allowed to return home while the situation

was debated. On the twelfth day of the same month, a detachment of warriors led by Hei no Saemon was sent to arrest Nichiren. After several hours in court, he was sentenced to exile on Sado Island, but secretly it was arranged that he was to be executed on the way.

#### *Reprieve from Execution*

Late at night with an armed guard escort, Nichiren departed on horseback for the place of his secret execution. Midway he halted to call upon the god Hachiman for aid and shortly after midnight the group reached the public execution grounds of Tatsunokuchi where Nichiren was forced to dismount. He was about to be beheaded when a special reprieve from Tokimune arrived entrusting him instead to Honma Shigetsura, the governor of Sado Island.<sup>13</sup> It is not certain why Tokimune decided to commute Nichiren's secret sentence, but some historians believe certain supporters of Nichiren in government were able to use the pregnancy of Tokimune's wife in their campaign to save him.<sup>14</sup> Legendary accounts were to describe Nichiren's escape from execution as miraculous with a blinding light striking the executioner just as he raised his sword. Still, the near execution became a traumatic experience for Nichiren and changed the orientation of his spiritual life. After escaping this fate he felt spiritually reborn—found his convictions to be stronger than ever as well as his sense of divine mission, and the majority of his theological works were written after this event.

#### *Exile on Sado*

Nichiren stopped at the mansion of Honma Shigetsura in Sagami briefly before being sent to exile and arrived on Sado Island during the tenth month of 1271, there he was confined to a small abandoned temple-hall that had served as a place of disposal for the dead. He had extreme difficulty in surviving the cold snowy winter in the drafty hut, but gradually won a few converts who helped supply him with food and warm clothing. It was during this time that Nichiren wrote the *Kaimokushō* (Eye-opener Treatise) in which he made his famous vows:

I will be the pillar of Japan  
 I will be the eyes of Japan  
 I will be the ship of Japan<sup>15</sup>

and became aware that he was the embodiment of Jōgyō (Viśiṣṭacāritra) bodhisattva, the protector of the *Lotus Sutra*. In essence, the work declared the *Lotus Sutra* to be the only true sutra during the era of *mappō* and that although Śākyamuni was the leader of all sentient beings during his lifetime, now in the age of *mappō*, Nichiren alone was to be regarded as the rightful leader.

Gradually Nichiren's treatment improved, and the following spring he was permitted to take up residence with a farm family at Ichinosawa and his followers on Sado Island increased. At the same time, his movement on the mainland lost much of its vigour without Nichiren's presence.

During the year 1272, a second prophecy of Nichiren's appeared to be fulfilled as a leading member of the Kamakura *bakufu*, Hōjō Tokimune's half-brother Hōjō Tokisuke, who served in the post of *Rokuhara Tandai* (court watcher) in Kyoto, was charged with conspiracy and attempt to revolt. This scandal convinced Nichiren's followers that his prediction of political disturbance if the nation failed to take homage in the *Lotus*, had been fulfilled.

#### *The Daimandara*

While on Sado in 1273 (eighth day, seventh month) for the first time, Nichiren created the principal image of his movement in the form of a *Daimandara* (Great *Maṇḍala*). This portrayed the characters of *Namu Myōhōrengekyō* springing up from the earth like a great stupa and uniting with the heavens to symbolize the affirmation of eternal life. Surrounding these characters, were the figures of the Buddhas Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna in company with the four bodhisattvas who rose from the earth to protect the *Lotus*, led by Viśiṣṭacāritra (Jōgyō). In the next level various Śrāvaka such as Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana are placed among Mahāyāna bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra. Finally, in the lower level the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, Hachiman and various other deities are depicted along with the names of Tendai Daishi (Chih-I) and

Dengyō Daishi (Saichō). Thus we can see the final crystallization of Nichiren's thought. Earlier he had considered himself to be the spiritual successor of Chih-I and Saichō, but now, as the embodiment of Jōgyō bodhisattva, he stands directly in the company of Śākyamuni. Later certain minor modifications and variations were made in the *mandara*, but its essence remained unchanged.

#### *Return to Kamakura*

Nichiren's activities on Sado were carefully watched by the local countryside priests and in 1273, realizing that they were unable to compete with his learning, went in a delegation to Kamakura to appeal to the government that either Nichiren be banished from Sado or else be imprisoned to ensure the safety of their congregations. They also brought the charge that he acted like a madman, for day and night he would climb to the highest mountain on the island and rant and scream at the sun and moon. Little did they realize that this was the way Nichiren communed with the gods and scolded them for dereliction of their duties.

Finally in 1274 Nichiren was pardoned by Hōjō Tokimune and on the twenty-sixth day of the third month once again arrived in Kamakura. The reasons for Nichiren's pardon are historically uncertain. It was granted just eight months prior to the first actual Mongol invasion attempt, and the mood of the *de facto* capital of Kamakura was gloomy. Nichiren had some supporters in government and during such uncertain times it was believed that the nation needed all the help it could get. The feelings against Nichiren had changed as the psychological mood of the city had changed. Even prior to his pardon a member of the ruling family, Hōjō Tokimori, had sent a sword to Nichiren requesting him to perform a ritual, and in reply Nichiren had sent a stern but respectful letter urging the old warrior to be strong in his faith.

Upon his return to Kamakura, Nichiren was immediately besieged with requests to perform rituals for the benefit of the nation and even received an invitation from Hei no Saemon, head of the Bureau of Retainers, the same man who earlier had been so insensitive to his



petitions and officiated at his arrest. Saemon politely inquired if Nichiren could predict the date of the actual Mongol invasion. Nichiren replied that the sutra did not contain actual dates, but from his interpretation of various celestial signs, he was certain the invasion would arrive within the year. He added that he alone was capable of protecting the nation, and that the government should immediately abandon all Tantric rituals.

Although the government authorities listened respectfully to Nichiren at this time, they still were not convinced his remedies offered the only solution for the dangers confronting Japan. And during the fourth month, in the face of a new season of drought, they called upon Kagahōin Jōchō of the Amida-dō temple to perform a rain ritual. Since rain fell the day after his rite, Nichiren's critics were overjoyed, while his disciples became confused. Nichiren confidently explained to them that in the past many men had been proven capable of making rain, but it also happened that such rain was accompanied by severe damaging winds. Nichiren's prediction was fulfilled as sudden winds afflicted heavy damage in the area.

#### *Retreat to Mt. Minobu*

During the fifth month of the year 1274 Nichiren finally decided to retire from the world. He had made three formal appeals to the government commencing with his *Risshō Ankokuron*, then his defense prior to exile, and lastly his appearance upon his return to Kamakura. These had all been ignored and it was time to abandon hope and retire.<sup>16</sup> He was firmly convinced that the Mongol invasion would shortly destroy Japan, and thus sought sanctuary on remote Mt. Minobu, where he believed he could strengthen the faith of his followers and be prepared to return to Kamakura after the heretical sects had all been destroyed.

Mt. Minobu was nearly four thousand feet high surrounded by steep peaks and densely forested with cedar trees. To Nichiren it symbolized Vulture Peak where Śākyamuni had preached the *Lotus Sutra*. From October to April the mountain was covered with deep snow and nearly inaccessible. Nichiren built a crude hermitage where he lived with his small band of disciples. The group underwent extreme hardship lacking

sufficient food and clothing and during the winter a number died. Nichiren himself contracted a form of dysentery, but with the coming of spring more disciples joined his group bringing donations of food, clothing and precious salt. Eventually it would seem that Mt. Minobu developed into the centre of the Nichiren *danka* (lay member) organization providing memorial services and rites for the laity as well as religious education for the monks.<sup>17</sup>

#### *First Mongol Invasion*

While Nichiren was encountering his first fall on Mt. Minobu, the first Mongol invasion attempt occurred. On the twentieth day of the tenth month in 1274, a fleet of 900 Korean-style vessels entered Hakata Bay and commenced to land from three directions. Besides a crew of 15,000, which Japanese historians might have exaggerated, their vessels contained an estimated mixed force of 25,600 Korean, Chinese and Mongol troops, a number of whom were soldier-farmers carrying agricultural implements and prepared to colonize Japan. The first skirmish was in the Mongol's favour, but as they returned to their ships for the night a typhoon struck, dashing their vessels against the ragged cliffs of the bay, and according to Japanese accounts, some 13,500 men were lost. The remainder of the fleet limped back to safety in Korea.

Although the first invasion had not borne the results Nichiren anticipated, he interpreted it as a warning, indicating that his prophecy would soon be fulfilled. And indeed the first invasion merely strengthened Kubilai Khan's attitude towards Japan. Early the following year he sent another envoy to Kamakura, but unbeknown to him this messenger was put to death. The Japanese attitude had also hardened. By 1280 the Khan was preparing a massive six year invasion plan in which he was determined to make Japan a territory. But contrary to Nichiren's predictions, Kubilai Khan warned his general against a large scale massacre of the populace since he believed a conquest of land alone was futile.

After the failure of the first Mongol invasion, Nichiren turned from political prophecy to writing one of his most important theological works. Undoubtedly his retreat to Mt. Minobu had been intended as a

period to establish his theology and train future disciples. The first work he wrote there was entitled *Hokke-shuyōshō* (Treatise Selecting the Essentials of the Lotus Sect), in which he set forth his doctrine of the three secret Dharmas existing during the time of *mappō*.

Nichiren decided to make Mt. Minobu, which he considered to be symbolic of Vulture Peak, the centre of the universal propagation of his teachings. And gradually the hermitage became filled with disciples ranging by the year 1278 from a minimum of forty up to sixty residents. As a result, his solitude was interrupted, but his dream of establishing a centre for his order was being fulfilled; ultimately this hermitage developed into the famous Kuonji temple.

#### *Second Mongol Invasion*

From his retreat, Nichiren patiently awaited the second Mongol invasion that he believed would devastate the nation. This finally occurred in the year 1281 when Kubilai Khan sent a five times larger invasion force than during the first attempt, the number being estimated at approximately 140,000. But the plan was ill-fated from its inception. A force sailing from South China had been scheduled to meet a fleet from Korea but failed to arrive on time. The Korean armada attacked first but their pace was slackened by the wall the Japanese had completed about the strategic points of Hakata Bay. Finally the Chinese arrived, but before the invading force achieved any decisive victory a typhoon struck on the first day of the seventh month and 70–80% of the invading fleet was destroyed.

At the *de facto* capital Kamakura, the Shingon priests and others who had participated in the rites to safeguard the nation hastened to claim credit for the victory while Nichiren remained forlornly silent. His disciples were thrown into doubt and confusion at the failure of his predictions. But he had been ensnared in the age-old trap of mingling worldly prophecy with spiritual insight. From the time the first Mongol invasion failed to meet his anticipations, he began to observe silence or revert to ambiguity when forced to make a statement. Now as the second invasion met the same fate he found it exceedingly difficult to

face his neophyte disciples who trustingly looked to him for worldly as well as spiritual answers. To a follower in Kyoto he wrote:

An autumn wind destroyed the enemy's ships, but now the people boast of great success as if the commander of the enemy had been captured. And the priests pretend it was due to the efficacy of their rituals. Ask them if they took the head of the Mongol king? Whatever they say, they can make no reply to this.<sup>18</sup>

And then Nichiren lapsed into silence. Inexorably drawn into the role of worldly prophet, he was now to endure the harsh social consequences of failure and his enemies ridicule. But this time Nichiren was too ill and tired to fight back.

#### *Final Illness*

During the year 1278 a dysentery epidemic had swept the area and aggravated Nichiren's chronic problem. By 1282 the year following the Mongol invasion attempt, Nichiren became seriously ill and during the fall of that year in an effort to benefit his condition, he embarked on a trip to a hot spring in Hitachi province, also hoping to visit his old home. However, he became worse at Ikegami (Musashi province) where he had to rest at the house of a follower. As his condition deteriorated, his disciples gathered from the various provinces, and to his trusted attendant Nikkō (1245–1332), he dictated the names of the six disciples chosen to succeed him:

Nisshō	Nikkō 日向 (1253–1314)
Nichirō	Nitchō
Nikkō 日興 (1245–1332)	Nichiji

stating that after his death each was to rotate a monthly custodianship of his tomb. A few days later he divided his remaining belongings, and on the thirteenth day of the tenth month at the age of sixty-one, he passed away. Two days later he was cremated and according to his will, after the seventh day memorial, his ashes were transferred to Mt. Minobu. On the one-hundredth day memorial of his death, a mausoleum was

built in his memory which exists today. Seventy-six years after his death he was granted the title of 'Daibosatsu' (Great bodhisattva) by Emperor Go-Kōgon and finally in 1922 he was given the posthumous name of Risshō Daishi (Master of the Establishment of Righteousness).

## B. Faith in the *Daimoku*

The unique aspect of Nichiren's philosophy was his contention that salvation was attainable solely by chanting the sacred title (*Daimoku*) of the *Lotus Sutra*. As the last of the great Kamakura leaders, we can undoubtedly see an historical affinity in the choice of chanting with the *nembutsu* movement, however, Nichiren's application was based upon the Tendai tradition and in that respect can be viewed as an evolution of Tendai thought. To understand its basis, we have to take into consideration two fundamental Tendai concepts: the theory of Original Enlightenment, and the tradition of interpreting the *Lotus Sutra*.

### 1. *Hongaku shisō* (Theory of Original Enlightenment)

The Tendai view of 'Original Enlightenment,' which ultimately became quite controversial within the sect itself, was extremely influential among all the new movements of Kamakura Buddhism and served as a foundation of Nichiren's philosophy.<sup>19</sup> The concept was derived from the *Awakening of Faith*, which maintains the intrinsic nature of Enlightenment, contending that if man was not originally Enlightened, he would have no hope of ever attaining Enlightenment. The condition of the unenlightened is simply regarded as accidental and all that is necessary is for the individual to realize or actualize his 'Original Enlightenment.'<sup>20</sup> Hui-szu (515-77), the nominal founder of the Tendai sect equated 'Original Enlightenment' with the 'Buddha-nature,' 'as-it-isness,' and the '*Dharma-kāya*.'<sup>21</sup>

In Japanese Tendai, the concept of 'Original Enlightenment' was introduced by Saichō, and under the esoteric influence of Ennin, Enchin and Annen was linked to the *honjishin* (true nature body) of Dainichi Nyorai. Later, after the abbot Ryōgen and a renewal of Tendai (rather

than esoteric) theology, the concept was related to the *Hosshin* (Dharma-body) of Amida as well as the second half of the *Lotus Sutra*, known as *honmon* (Section of the Origin). It was this latter philosophy that Nichiren used as a basis for his own interpretation and emphasis upon the second half of the sutra. In Tendai, the concept was advocated by the Eshin-ryū, in contrast to the theory of gradual or 'beginning' (*shigaku*) Enlightenment set forth by the Danna-ryū, and later identified with the *shakumon* (Section of Manifestation) of the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>22</sup>

The difference in emphasis between 'gradual' versus 'instant' Enlightenment, and the 'relative' versus 'Absolute' approaches to Enlightenment had a long tradition in Buddhism. As a purist reformer and a product of the Kamakura age, Nichiren sought to obliterate all forms of expediency and approach the 'Absolute' directly. We find a similarity of attitude in the Zen schools and even to some degree in the Pure Land,<sup>23</sup> but Nichiren's emphasis upon the 'Absolute' Buddha particularly resembles the Shingon idealization of Dainichi Nyorai. In both Shingon and Nichiren thought the impulse towards the 'Absolute' is so consuming that everything in its pathway is reduced in significance. But we must keep in mind that in these sects, the 'Absolute' still serves as the very ground of one's own being, hence this is not a drive to an Other but rather a search within. Nichiren's idealism was such that he believed perfect Enlightenment possible for all beings and that as a result, the relative world could be transformed into a veritable Utopia. He interpreted the Shingon view of Enlightenment with this body (*sokushin jōbutsu*) on a grand scale and was willing to accept nothing short of perfection or the 'Absolute' itself.

In contrast, those who placed emphasis upon the manifestation (*shakumon*) section of the *Lotus Sutra* and the relative world, were concerned with the actual difficulties involved in attaining Enlightenment and the *upāya* methods of doing so. Nichiren was impatient with this attitude of the Tendai sect because it generally evolved into theorizing rather than practice and became a synonym for compromise with folk belief and superstition. This is one reason why certain later Nichiren followers were to narrow the definition of *upāya* into 'falsehood' and

even question whether the *upāya* chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* should be read. Anything other than focus upon the 'Absolute' and the single-practice of faith in the *Lotus* was to be cast aside as impure. And the Nichiren drive toward purity was epitomized by placing the essence of the 'Absolute' within the five Chinese characters forming the title of the *Lotus Sutra*.

## 2. The Role of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Myōhōrengekyō*)

In Tendai tradition, the *Lotus Sutra* had a long history of title exegesis. Allegedly Vasubandhu was the first to examine the significance of the title in his *Saddharmapuṇḍarikopadeśa*. The custom was continued in China where one of the most significant interpretations can be found in Chih-I's *Hsüan-I*. Title analysis became very popular in Chinese Buddhism since the Chinese characters naturally lent themselves to multiple interpretations and efforts were made to depict the entire doctrinal content of the sutra within the title itself. This tradition was continued in Japan by Saichō, Ennin and Enchin and formed the foundation of Nichiren's conviction that all the merits and teachings of the *Lotus* were expressed within the five Chinese characters forming its title, with merely the vocalization of the title being equivalent to chanting the sutra.

Another aspect of *Lotus* exegetical studies was the critical division of the sutra into *honmon* (Section of Origin) and *shakumon* (Section of Manifestation). The Kumārajīva Chinese translation of the text most commonly used, had twenty-eight chapters and these were divided by Chih-I, with the first half of the sutra designated as *shakumon* (Chin. *chi-men*), since it referred to the historical or 'manifestation' Buddha. The second half that spoke of an Eternal Śākyamuni existing from all ages, and the basis of the historical manifestation, was appropriately labeled *honmon* (Chin. *pen-men*). Each of these sections was based upon a key chapter believed to express its essence. In the case of the *shakumon* section, the second chapter in which the historical Buddha reveals his numerous methods (*upāya*) of teaching and leading sentient beings to Enlightenment was considered to be the essence. The Tendai sect came

to place their emphasis upon this chapter and section of the sutra since it dealt with the means of attaining Enlightenment.

In contrast, the essence of the second half of the sutra was believed to be expressed by the sixteenth chapter wherein an Eternal Śākyamuni reveals his existence from the beginning of time with the historical Buddha being one of his numerous manifestations. This Eternal Śākyamuni represents the idealization of the Buddhist Dharma itself or Absolute Truth and with his focus upon the 'Absolute,' Nichiren considered this section of the sutra most significant.

Analyzing the title of the sutra in conjunction with the critical *honjaku* divisions, Chih-I made the following analogy:

### *The Lotus*

1. For the sake of the fruit there is the flower
2. Open the flower and reveal the fruit
3. The flower drops and the fruit is established
- A. *The first half of the sutra (shakumon)*
  - 1) For the sake of the true there is the provisional
  - 2) Open the provisional and reveal the true
  - 3) Abandon the provisional and establish the true
- B. *The second half of the sutra (honmon)*
  - 1) From the origin the manifestation is dropped
  - 2) Open the manifestation and reveal the origin
  - 3) Abandon the manifestation and establish the origin<sup>24</sup>

In keeping with this analogy and the philosophy of 'Original Enlightenment,' Nichiren discarded the manifestation in the form of the historical Buddha and all other teachings, and placed his entire faith in the 'Absolute' or Eternal Śākyamuni. In later years the dispute over 'emphasis upon the Origin section' (*honshō shakuretsu*) versus treating both sections of the sutra equally (*honjaku itchi*) was to divide Nichiren's followers.

## 3. Nichiren's Five-Fold Interpretation of the *Lotus*

While in exile on Izu Peninsula, Nichiren set forth his own analysis of the *Lotus Sutra* that actually defined what he considered to be his mission in life based upon his religious realization. Later this became a

support for his sect. In Nichiren's view, proper application of the *Lotus Sutra* consisted of five related aspects:<sup>25</sup>

1. *Teaching (kyō)*

The doctrine of the sutra itself.

2. *Object (ki) of Teaching*

Since any true teaching must be directed towards an object, Nichiren was convinced that the particular object of the *Lotus Sutra* must be those who damage or destroy the Dharma (heretics). These were the individuals to whom the teachings of the sutra must be administered.

3. *Time (ji)*

Even if the true teaching and its object be established, unless the time is right for reception, it cannot be set forth successfully. Nichiren believed that the historical Śākyamuni preached the *Lotus* at the exact appropriate moment in time and that the legendary eight years it took to preach the sutra could actually be identified with the present moment of the *mappō* era. Thus in contrast to the Pure Land feeling of despair during the age of *mappō*, Nichiren took joy in the realization that this was the crucial moment for salvation.

4. *Master (shi)*

The subjective realization that the present moment was the chosen time to preach the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as an awareness of the existence of the teaching and its object, led Nichiren to the natural conclusion that he was the master who had the responsibility to preach to the heretics. He considered this belief confirmed by the persecutions he experienced, which he interpreted as fulfilling the prophecies of the sutra.

5. *Country (kuni)*

Japan was the one nation in the world where all the foregoing components were present. It was a nation filled with heresy during the age of *mappō*, possessing the *Lotus Sutra* and being the ground upon which Nichiren achieved his subjective realization of his mission as master; therefore, it represented the chosen land for his ministry.

In this application we can observe the basis of Nichiren's sense of destiny as well as the nature of his nationalism. Japan was viewed as the sacred

soil for his activities, yet if the nation chose to ignore his warnings, he was capable of turning away from it and leading his band of followers into an isolated retreat. Although he was born in an area steeped in the tradition of the Sun Goddess, he was not concerned with championing the cause of the Emperor against the usurping Kamakura government. In fact, he was perfectly capable of even admonishing the Sun Goddess herself if he found her remiss in her obligation to protect the followers of the *Lotus*. Thus Nichiren's nationalism was confined to the dream of establishing a Buddhist state, or as he expressed it himself on a grander scale, of making Japan the nucleus of a world community of *Lotus* followers, just as India (Jambudvīpa) had once been regarded as the centre of the world.

4. *Ichinen Sanzen* and the Three Secret Dharma

Closely related to Nichiren's five-fold application of the *Lotus Sutra*, was the Tendai concept of *ichinen sanzen* (one thought equals three thousand worlds). For he believed that his personal awareness that the *Lotus* was to be propagated at the present time was in fact the subjective awareness of the Eternal Śākyamuni of the Origin section of the sutra. In other words, Nichiren conceived that the entire universe of the Eternal Śākyamuni (Absolute Truth) was revealed within his individual awareness.

In Nichiren's teachings, *ichinen sanzen* became the metaphysical doctrine that was tangibly expressed in the religious practice of chanting the five characters forming *Myōhōrengekyō*. In effect, those sacred five letters contained the three thousand worlds symbolizing the 'Absolute,' and as a method of practice, this fact was revealed in the Three Secret Dharma:<sup>26</sup>

1. *Honmon Honzon (Principal Image of the Origin Section)*

The Eternal Śākyamuni or 'Absolute' as revealed in the 'Duration of the life of the Tathāgata' chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. As in the case of other Buddhist sects, this image is to be found within the subjective individual mind through self-reflection—or the stripping

away of the layers of ignorance to reveal the 'Original Enlightenment' within.

2. *Honmon Daimoku* (Sacred Title of the Origin Section)

The chanting of the sacred name of the *Lotus Sutra*, which effectively acts as the medium between ignorant man and the object of his veneration, or the 'Absolute' dwelling within him.

3. *Honmon Kaidan* (Ordination Platform of the Origin Section)

The true value of an ordination platform, whereupon one is granted the *śīla*, depends upon the quality of that *śīla* itself. Nichiren believed that all the good deeds of myriads of Buddhas and bodhisattvas were condensed within the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, hence wherever one chants that title becomes the *śīla* platform.

In later years these three Dharma were given added interpretations by Nichiren followers until eventually twelve theories evolved. These can be summarized as follows:<sup>27</sup>

1. One of the most popular interpretations considers the three Dharma representative of the traditional Three Buddhist learnings:

*Honzon* . . . *samādhi* (meditation)

*Daimoku* . . . *prajñā* (wisdom)

*Kaidan* . . . *śīla* (discipline)

This view is partially derived from Nichiren's writings.

2. Indirectly implied in Nichiren's works is the possibility of equating the Three Dharma with the Three Treasures and extending the equation in the following manner:

*Honzon* . . . Buddha . . . Śākyamuni

*Daimoku* . . . Dharma . . . *Lotus Sutra*

*Kaidan* . . . Sangha . . . Nichiren

3. Another view utilizes the Three Treasures also but in this instance, the Sangha is interpreted as the 'subjective individual' or devotee rather than Nichiren.

4. Utilizing three qualities of the Tendai interpretation of 'Myō,' the first character in the title of the *Lotus Sutra*:

*Honzon* . . . Original cause (*honin*)

*Daimoku* . . . Original effect (*honga*)

*Kaidan* . . . Original Land (*honkokudo*)

5. Another popular interpretation makes the *Trikāya* the basis of the Three Dharma:

*Honzon* . . . *Dharma-kāya*

*Daimoku* . . . *Samṣhogha-kāya*

*Kaidan* . . . *Nirmāṇa-kāya*

6. In analyzing the nature of various sutras, Chih-I and other Tendai scholars established five criteria:

a) Interpretation of title

b) Clarification of the fundamental spirit of the sutra

c) Essential points forming the basic framework of the sutra

d) Soteriological efficacy of the sutra

e) Criticism of the sutra's doctrine

Among these the following were equated with the Three Dharma:

*Honzon* . . . Clarification of the spirit of the sutra

*Daimoku* . . . Essential points of the sutra

*Kaidan* . . . Soteriological efficacy

This interpretation was probably derived from Nichiren's frequently expressed view that within the very title of the *Lotus Sutra* all of these points could be found.

7. Body, wisdom and manifestation

*Honzon* . . . Body

*Daimoku* . . . Wisdom of the Original Buddha

*Kaidan* . . . Manifestation

8. Original Buddha, Dharma and Residence

*Honzon* . . . Original Buddha

*Daimoku* . . . Dharma

*Kaidan* . . . Residence of Buddha and Dharma

9. Essence, Manifestation and Practice

*Honzon* . . . Essence (*tai*)

*Kaidan* . . . Manifestation (*sō*)

*Daimoku* . . . Practice (*gyō*)

This theory was devised by Nikkan (1665-1726)

10. Practice, Subject and Object

*Daimoku* . . . Practice

*Honzon* . . . Subject

*Kaidan* . . . Object

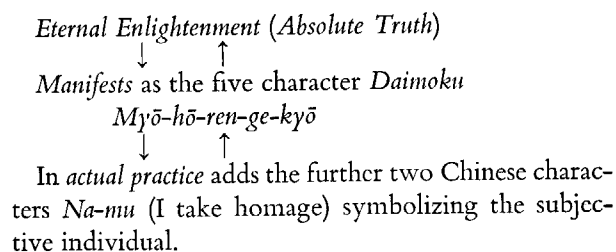
attributed to Nikki (1800-59)

11. Man, Dharma and Location (as objective principles)
  - Honzon* . . . Subjective man who reaches attainment
  - Daimoku* . . . Dharma, the object of attainment
  - Kaidan* . . . Place where man and Dharma exist
 attributed to Nichirin (1793-1823)
12. Realm, Wisdom and Unification (Subjective interpretation)
  - Honzon* . . . Realm or object of perception
  - Daimoku* . . . Wisdom (man's subjectivity)
  - Kaidan* . . . Unification of object and subjectivity

Nichiren avoided limiting the Three Secret Dharma with a single precise but confining definition, thus his followers were able to offer systematic interpretations within the Buddhist tradition. Each of these twelve interpretations present basic philosophies expressing the essence of Buddhism.

### 3. *Shōdai jōbutsu* (Chanting the *Daimoku* and Becoming a Buddha)

In keeping with his view of *ichinen sanzen*, Nichiren saw the fate of the individual inseparably linked to the destiny of society. Thus his effort to realize an ideal world, as expressed in the *Risshō Ankokuron* was based upon the notion that the evil and sufferings of the society could be reduced to the evil and sufferings of the individual and vice versa. If individuals could be saved, the inevitable result would be a perfect harmonious society, or to express this in a formula:



Thus the 'Absolute' assumes reality or is realized within the individual and man can be said to become part of the Enlightenment of the Original Buddha, who has existed from eternal aeons in the past. And on a wider scale, as each individual becomes Enlightened, the society itself assumes the entirety of the body of the Original Buddha. In this respect, Nichi-

ren's philosophy bore certain similarities to the Tendai influenced Yūzū Nembutsu and Ji movements, both of which emphasized the interreaction between individual religious practice and society, in definite contrast to the subjective and highly introspective emphasis of Jōdo Shinshū.

Through his belief in attaining Buddhahood with this body (*sokushin jōbutsu*), Nichiren envisioned making this world the ideal Buddhaland. With such a distinct emphasis on this world and the acceptance of present reality, he encouraged the performance of rituals for worldly benefits. In effect, these served as a form of *upāya* (although that term is presently avoided) to attract and confirm frail individuals in their faith, as well as to improve society in general. And like all other sects of Kamakura Buddhism, Nichiren extended hope of salvation to those who were outside the domain of the established church. We can particularly note the role of women in his movement, for of the one hundred sixty-two historically identifiable direct followers of Nichiren, forty-seven were women. Nichiren even offered the hope of salvation to those professionally engaged in the taking of life, such as fishermen, all that was necessary was faith in the *Lotus*.

### C. Nichiren's Attitude Towards the Native Gods and Other Beliefs

By the resolute practice of denouncing other sects of Buddhism through *shakubuku*, Nichiren exhibited his complete unwillingness to tolerate any form of truth other than his own. Repeatedly in his writings he states that Dengyō Daishi (Saichō) and he alone are the only two followers of the *Lotus* in Japan,<sup>28</sup> and in his later works he tends to minimize the role of Saichō. As Nichiren refused to grant other forms of Buddhism even a right to exist, we are forced to consider his movement 'exclusive' as well as 'purist.'

The major thrust of Nichiren's theological writings tend to be his denunciation of other sects, in particular the Pure Land and the followers of Hōnen. It would be interesting to count the vast number of times the name of Hōnen is condemned. In the *Risshō Ankokuron*, he begins by

recounting the burning of the woodblock plates of Hōnen's *Senjakushū* and the exile of his disciples,<sup>29</sup> and in the *Senjishō*, written on Mt. Minobu, Nichiren concludes by stating that after his death in order to revenge his exile, Hōnen became an evil spirit and entered the bodies of the leaders who had charged him with sedition as well as various temple priests, and created revolt.<sup>30</sup> Nichiren did not seem to waste much energy condemning other Japanese Pure Land followers by name with the exception of Genshin,<sup>31</sup> whom he specifically charges on several occasions. But Nichiren did focus an attack against Tendai esoterism claiming that just as the founders of Shingon, Zen and Jōdo were 'three worms' (*sanchū*), so in Tendai the 'three worms found in the lion body of Dengyō Daishi Lotus belief were: Jikaku (Ennin), Annen and Eshin (Genshin).'<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere he includes Chishō (Enchin) and the abbot Jien in his condemnation.<sup>33</sup>

Nichiren's attacks against the Zen sect were aimed primarily at the controversial Dainichibō Nōnin and his disciple Butchibō.<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that Nichiren closely observed the growth of Zen in Kamakura and the arrival of Rankei Dōryū in 1246, as well as the invitation to Enni Bennen in 1257 to correct the Zen discipline at the Jufukuji. After this period his attacks against Zen intensified, for he interpreted the popularity of Zen as being detrimental to the Tendai sect and a factor contributing to the decline of *Lotus* teachings. Thus he even risked the hostility of the Hōjō Regents by attacking their faith. In particular, Nichiren criticized Zen for their belief in 'transmission outside the scriptures' and doctrine of 'no-words' (*furyū-monji*), which he pointed out was after all expressed in words.<sup>35</sup>

Some historians question why Nichiren failed to specifically mention the name of Shinran, who was known to have been active in the Kantō area, or Dōgen, whom legend asserts he met.<sup>36</sup> They theorize that perhaps Nichiren deliberately ignored Dōgen's following because he considered it too intellectual for the masses, and perhaps believed that Shinran's affirmation of the present life bore similarities to his own views, in contrast to Hōnen's 'other-worldliness,' a product of late Heian thought.<sup>37</sup> This is an interesting point, however, historically neither

Shinran nor Dōgen enjoyed the prominence during their lifetimes that they received during later generations, and most likely Nichiren did not consider them of consequence.

The specific targets of Nichiren's attacks were the priests who enjoyed the most popularity, and Hōnen by far led the list, albeit posthumously. In fact, Nichiren's preoccupation with Hōnen was so great and knowledge of the *Senjakushū* so thorough, that some modern critics consider this to have exerted a tremendous influence upon his thought.<sup>38</sup> Most likely Nichiren included all of Hōnen's followers in his criticism of their master. A similar situation existed in the case of Dainichibō Nōnin, a controversial Zen exponent, although Nichiren's charges against Nōnin constitute merely a small fraction of those levelled against Hōnen. The only actual contemporary that Nichiren spent efforts to discredit was the Ritsu priest Ryōkan (also known as Ninshō) of the Gokurakuji, who had the somewhat questionable reputation of being an ambitious miracle-worker.

#### *Other Buddhas and the Native Kami*

In the year 1271, when the priest Gyōbin officially charged Nichiren with sacrilegious actions against Amida and Kannon, Nichiren denied the accusations. Although he did not personally believe in the efficacy of Amida and Kannon, there is no indication that he displayed disrespect toward them. But this did become a problem among his followers and the intensive practice of *shakubuku* tended to be accompanied by often times violent behaviour against other Buddhas as well as the Shintō gods.

Nichiren was confronted with the same problem all Kamakura leaders faced in respect to the role of the native gods. Like the founders of other movements, he instinctively identified the *kami* with the land of Japan itself and was keenly aware of the importance of the gods and folk beliefs to the masses, whom he sought to influence. In order to explain the role of the gods within his teachings, Nichiren used the *honji-suijaku* (true-nature-manifestation) theory. He considered every Shintō god commencing with the Sun Goddess to be a *suijaku* (manifestation) of



the Eternal Śākyamuni of the *Lotus Sutra* and he also believed that the gods had an obligation to protect the followers of the *Lotus*, as well as to punish their enemies. Faced with what he considered to be so many heresies dominating the land, Nichiren could merely conclude that the gods had abandoned the nation and returned to their heavenly abodes.

On the fourteenth day of the eleventh month (1281), shortly after the news of the failure of the second Mongol invasion reached Kamakura, the shrine of Hachiman at Tsurugaoka caught fire and burned to the ground. As Hachiman was regarded as the god of war, the event was considered portentous. The following month Nichiren wrote a petition to Hachiman (*Kangyō Hachimanshō*), in which he claimed that Hachiman had agreed to protect the followers of the *Lotus Sutra* but failed to punish those who had persecuted Nichiren and his adherents, thus the destruction of his shrine was Hachiman's punishment for dereliction of duty.<sup>39</sup> When efforts were made to rebuild the shrine, Nichiren objected, claiming that Hachiman had abandoned Japan and returned to heaven, therefore why should the government waste efforts to rebuild a hollow and empty shrine?

The fourth month of 1281 when some of Nichiren's followers were called upon to assist in the reconstruction project, they asked his approval and he allowed their participation. But when wind blew down the first frame, Nichiren interpreted the event as the will of Śākyamuni, demonstrating that Hachiman had indeed abandoned the land.

Nichiren's attitude toward the native gods tended to be quite ambivalent. On Sado Island, observers who watched him cry out on a mountain top to the sun and moon, believed he had gone mad, but this was Nichiren's method of communing with the gods, imploring them to fulfill their obligation, and strike down the enemies of the *Lotus* and end the heresies prevailing throughout the land. He also scolded them for neglect of their duties. Thus he wavered between hostility when he considered them derelict, to the certain belief that they hovered above him and protected him against evil.

Upon Nichiren's death, his followers had increasing difficulty in maintaining cordial relations with the Shintō shrines. Many claimed

that the gods had abandoned Japan therefore, there was no point in honouring empty shrines, while others contended the gods had returned to protect *Lotus* followers and this dispute created a serious division. Another complication was the single-practice of the *Lotus*, that naturally led to a certain exclusiveness. Just as in the case of Jōdo Shinshū, later zealots confused purity of practice with intolerance and deliberately sought to obliterate all veneration of the Shintō gods. Such views as the foregoing, combined with *shakubuku* practice and the later doctrine of *fujū-fuse* (no giving, no receiving) made intolerance a characteristic of many of the Nichiren schools.

#### D. Development of the Nichiren Order

During Nichiren's lifetime he attracted individuals from all walks of life despite the handicaps of two painful exiles and his last years of isolated retreat on Mt. Minobu. The majority of his direct disciples had been drawn from the clergy of the established churches, primarily Tendai, but from the start he also received the children of his faithful lay followers.

The major financial support for Nichiren's movement came from the local warlords or the stewards (*jitō*) of the Kamakura and later Muromachi governments. As a result of such patronage, Nichiren temples gradually assumed the form of *ujidera* (clan temples). A warlord patron would establish a temple in his domain and through his family connections and alliances, assist in propagating the sect to new areas. Also the sons of these patrons frequently became priests and would officiate at the local clan temples, such a method of propagation created firm established roots. But the development of the Nichiren sect became exceedingly complex due to doctrinal disputes.

#### *The Six Direct Disciples*

At the time of Nichiren's death, six direct disciples besides the six he had appointed as custodians of his tomb, decided to take turns in handling the affairs of his mausoleum on Mt. Minobu. Since many had active