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Priest Nisshin's Ordeals

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The *Virtuous Deeds of Nisshin Shōnin* (*Nisshin Shōnin tokugyō ki*) is a hagiographical account of the life of Kuonjōin Nisshin (1407–1488), an evangelizer of the Nichiren or Lotus sect (Hokkeshū). The historical Nisshin was born or adopted into the Haniya family, a warrior clan in Kazusa Province in eastern Japan, and was tonsured as a young man in the Nakayama lineage of Nichiren Buddhism. In his early twenties, he journeyed to the imperial capital of Kyoto and began his career of disseminating faith in the *Lotus Sutra* by roadside preaching. Over the course of his life, he traveled throughout the country, based primarily in Kyoto and in Hizen in Kyushu, and founded more than thirty temples. Among these was the Honpōji in Kyoto. *Virtuous Deeds* was written by Honji-in Nisshō (1628–1689), the Honpōji's twentieth chief abbot. Its twenty sections deal with Nisshin's early mastery of doctrine; the mysterious portents of his proselytizing mission; his successes in preaching and converting; his confrontation with the shogun; his resulting imprisonment, torture, and eventual release; his founding of temples; and the manifestations following his death of his supernatural power to answer prayers. Nisshō wrote the *Virtuous Deeds* in literary Chinese; later, however, the Honpōji's twenty-seventh chief abbot, Jōon-in Nichidatsu, expanded and rewrote it in the Japanese syllabary for accessibility to a broader readership. This version was published in 1704. The following translation is of seven sections from Nichidatsu's edition of the text.

Nisshin's efforts to spread faith in the *Lotus Sutra* were modeled on those of Nichiren (1222–1282), the originator of the Hokke sect. Nichiren is regarded as one of the founders of the new Buddhist movements of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Like others of these founders, Nichiren taught that only one, universally accessible form of Buddhism led to enlightenment in the Final Dharma age (*mappō*). For Nichiren, this single form was faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, expressed in the chanting of its *daimoku* or title, *Namu-myōhō-rence-kyō*. Nichiren, who began his religious life as a monk of Tendai Buddhism, adopted the premise of that school that the *Lotus Sutra* represents the Buddha's true teaching, and all

other sutras, his provisional teachings. However, while the Tendai school tended to encompass other forms of Buddhism as "skillful means" leading to the one vehicle of the *Lotus*, Nichiren took a strongly exclusivistic approach. In the Final Dharma age, he claimed, teachings other than the *Lotus* were utterly ineffectual. To disbelieve the *Lotus Sutra*, or to hold some other teaching to be its equal, was in his eyes tantamount to "slander of the Dharma" and the cause for falling into the hells. He therefore adopted the practice of *shakubuku*, the "harsh method" of spreading the *Lotus* by actively rebuking attachment to other teachings. *Shakubuku* was for him an act of compassion necessary to awaken others from the sin of "slandering the Dharma" and enable them to form a karmic connection with the *Lotus Sutra* that would eventually assure their enlightenment. He therefore believed himself bound to declare the exclusive truth of the *Lotus*, even at the risk of his life.

In Nichiren's view, belief or disbelief in the *Lotus Sutra* was not merely an individual matter but had implications for society as a whole. Based on Tendai notions of the nonduality of the self and the objective world, he argued that a succession of disasters besetting Japan in his day—drought, famine, epidemics, and earthquakes—had come about because the people at large had abandoned the *Lotus Sutra* in favor of Pure Land, Zen, and other "erroneous" teachings. His *Treatise on Establishing the Right [Teaching] and Bringing Peace to the Country* (*Risshō ankoku ron*) urges that the ruler cease offering support to the priests of such teachings and uphold the *Lotus* alone in order to restore peace to the land. Nichiren submitted this treatise as a memorial to Hōjō Tokiyori, the most powerful figure in the Kamakura *Bakufu* or warrior government, in 1260. In it, he warned that two further disasters—internecine strife and attack from abroad—would occur if his advice were not heeded. An attempted rebellion in 1271 and the Mongol invasion attempts of 1274 and 1281 lent seeming credence to his predictions.

Nichiren's attacks on other forms of Buddhism aroused hostility among both leading clergy and government officials. He was exiled twice, attempts were made on his life, and his followers were occasionally imprisoned or had their lands confiscated. Nichiren saw the persecutions he met as opportunities to expiate his own past acts of slander against the Dharma that he believed he had committed in prior lives. Moreover, the *Lotus Sutra* speaks of trials that its practitioners shall encounter in the evil age after the Buddha's nirvāṇa. Probably a reflection of the difficulties encountered by the emerging Mahāyāna community that had compiled the sutra, these passages appeared to Nichiren as predictions being fulfilled in his own person. The harsh treatment he encountered thus served to confirm in his own eyes the righteousness of his actions. The idea that one meets persecution as a validation of one's faith recurs throughout the Nichiren tradition and has played an important though double-edged role in its history. At times, it has provided adherents with a moral basis for resisting secular authority, as well as the courage to endure brutal opposition. However, it has occasionally inspired some among them to court opposition deliberately, thus becoming a self-fulfill-

ing prophecy. The theme of willingness, even eagerness, to suffer for the sutra's sake emerges clearly in *Virtuous Deeds*, as does Nisshin's desire to follow in Nichiren's footsteps in this regard. Judging from his writings, Nisshin believed that being Nichiren's Dharma heir was not merely a matter of belonging to a Hokke lineage, but of acting as Nichiren had acted and experiencing the hardships he had experienced. Like Nichiren, he was also convinced that facing persecution on account of the *Lotus Sutra* would guarantee his eventual achievement of Buddhahood.

After Nichiren's death, the memory of his uncompromising stance and his readiness to give his life for his faith provided an inspiration that helped shape the early tradition. Virtually all monks (and also some nuns) among his following took Buddhist names having as their first character the *nichi* of Nichiren, indicating that they were heirs to his teaching and task of proselytizing. Leaders among the fledgling order also carried on his practice of *shakubuku* through preaching, debate, and memorializing officials. A distinctive activity of the emerging Hokke sect was "admonishing the state" (*kokka kangyō*), a practice modeled on Nichiren's submission of the *Risshō ankoku ron* as a memorial to Hōjō Tokiyori. Letters of admonition (*moshijō*) were submitted to the ruler—the emperor or, more often, the shogun, or his local officials. Such letters restated the message of the *Risshō ankoku ron*, urging the ruler to discard provisional teachings and uphold the *Lotus* alone for the peace and prosperity of the country. Sometimes a copy of the *Risshō ankoku ron* itself was appended or, less frequently, a composition of similar purport by the writer of the letter, such as the admonitory treatise written by Nisshin in *Virtuous Deeds*. Going up to Kyoto to "admonish the state" was almost expected of any monk who was chief abbot of a Hokke lineage in eastern Japan. An early example was Jōgyōin Nichiyū (1298–1374) of the temple Hokekyōji of the Nakayama lineage in Shimōsa Province, who figures in *Virtuous Deeds* as Nisshin's forebear and spiritual protector. In 1334 he went to Kyoto to present a letter of admonition to the Emperor Godaigo. He was arrested and imprisoned for three days, counting it an honor to meet persecution, even briefly, for the sutra's sake. Six years later he made the journey again to admonish the first Ashikaga shogun, Takauji. By Nisshin's time, the tradition seems to have elaborated on Nichiyū's activities. In the *Transmission of the Lamp* (*Dentō shō*), his history of the various Nichiren lineages, Nisshin wrote that Nichiyū was nearly beheaded in the course of another remonstrance attempt in 1356. Nisshin, who was also of the Nakayama lineage and who practiced as a young man at the Hokekyōji, must have been deeply impressed by Nichiyū's example. Nisshin himself is said to have remonstrated with nobles and warrior officials on eight occasions.

Following the initial efforts of Higo Ajari Nichizō (1269–1342), who first preached Nichiren's doctrine in Kyoto, the major Hokke lineages all began to establish temples in the imperial capital. By the mid-fifteenth century, it is estimated that nearly half the population of Kyoto belonged to the Hokke sect. While its major social base was among the rising urban mercantile population or *machi-*

ishū, converts were also made among aristocrats and powerful samurai. As the various Hokke lineages became well established, Nichiren's exclusivistic stance and the practice of confrontational *shakubuku* became harder to sustain. The history of the sect can in fact be seen in terms of ongoing tensions between conciliatory factions seeking to make practical accommodations with ruling authorities and other forms of religion to ensure the sect's welfare and prosperity, and those who insisted on a strongly exclusivistic position. Nisshin was among a number of monks, chiefly from new lineages that had split off from older ones, who believed that the Nichiren order was becoming excessively accommodating and losing the strict spirit of proselytizing by *shakubuku*, the refutation of other Buddhist teachings. As suggested in the *Virtuous Deeds*, Nisshin was an uncompromising purist. In 1433, a few years after his first journey to Kyoto in 1427 when he preached by the Returning Bridge, Nisshin was dispatched to Kyushu to oversee branch temples of the Nakayama Hokekyōji in Hizen Province. There, to his dismay, he found images enshrined of Buddhas and bodhisattvas unrelated to the *Lotus Sutra* or the Nichiren teachings. His repeated remonstrations and criticisms on that score, addressed to the leading local lay patron and to the Hokekyōji's chief abbot, eventually resulted in his expulsion from the lineage in 1437. Memorializing the shogun, as Nisshin did in 1439—while undeniably true to the founder Nichiren's example—was also viewed with alarm by the leaders of older Hokke lineages as a possible threat to their temples' security. While overtly an attempt to convert the ruler and benefit the country, by this time, "admonishing the state" also carried implicit criticism of more conciliatory elements within the Nichiren tradition. It is quite possible that Nisshin had as many enemies among the moderates within his own sect as he did outside it.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that men like Nisshin won the Hokkeshū large numbers of converts and kept alive the normative Nichiren Buddhist ideal of exclusive devotion to the *Lotus*, acting as a check on accommodations made to social custom and secular authority. Nisshin himself appears to have been an enormously charismatic figure, as popular among the people as he was detested by government officials and prominent clerics. In 1460 the bakufu received complaints from temples of other sects in Hizen, where Nisshin was engaged in proselytizing under the protection of the local landholder Lord Chiba Taneshizu, and decided to impose sanctions on him. Lord Chiba was ordered to bring him back to Kyoto. Although the journey usually required only one month, it took them nine months to reach to the capital. Lord Chiba explained that they had been delayed by throngs of people crowding the roads and demanding to meet Nisshin and receive his teachings.

The *Virtuous Deeds* generally follows the known facts of Nisshin's career, while providing considerable embellishment. From Nisshin's own writings, we know that he did indeed memorialize Ashikaga Yoshinori in 1439, was told not to do so again, composed the *Risshō jikoku ron* in defiance of this order, and was arrested before completing the fair copy. The description of the low, cramped cell with the nails protruding point first from the ceiling is also taken from his own account.

The treatment he received while incarcerated was undoubtedly harsh; Nisshin writes that he was "tormented by water and fire." However, he does not go into detail. The specific, gruesome tortures so enthusiastically elaborated in *Virtuous Deeds*—including the celebrated incident of the pot—are almost certainly the products of a later imagination. As the text indicates, Nisshin was released in an amnesty following Yoshinori's assassination, but there is no indication that the Ashikaga clan converted en masse to faith in the *Lotus Sutra*.

Virtuous Deeds reflects several themes that recur in Nichiren's writings and in the later literature of the Nichiren tradition: propagation of the *Lotus Sutra* in the Final Dharma age is invariably accompanied by great trials; the *Lotus* has a higher claim on the believer's loyalty even than does the ruler; and giving up one's life for the sutra's sake is a supreme honor and will assure one's future enlightenment. At the same time, the image of Nisshin depicted in *Virtuous Deeds* also reflects a type of practitioner not confined to Nichiren Buddhism or indeed to Buddhism at all, but found elsewhere in Japanese religions. This is the figure of the ascetic who acquires magical or supernatural abilities through a regimen of harsh disciplines, and whom it is dangerous to cross because of his command of magical powers.

Virtuous Deeds does not address the doctrinal or philosophical side of Nichiren Buddhism; it is a work of popular hagiography. It may well have served to provide entertainment and promote support for the Honpōji, as well as to encourage piety. It is clear that it both reflected and advanced an emerging cult of devotion to Nisshin that flourished in Kyoto and the surrounding area during the Edo period (1600–1868). Nisshin's extraordinary strength of purpose as reflected in the legends told about him, especially his ability to withstand the most horrific tortures, was regarded by many as proof of immense spiritual power. Temples sprang up around sites connected with him. Picture scrolls depicting his ordeals, many of them based on the descriptions in *Virtuous Deeds*, were issued by these temples and were valued as talismanic. The "pot-wearing saint" was believed to answer prayers for healing, safe delivery, worldly success, freedom from misfortune, long life, and so forth. A wooden image of Nisshin enshrined at the Honjōji in Sakai attracts believers even today.

The translation is based on *Nisshin Shōnin tokugyō ki*, in Washio Junkei, ed., *Kokubun tōhō Bukkyō sōsho*, series 1, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Kokubun Tōhō Bukkyō Sōsho Kankōkai, 1925–1927): 541–590.

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The Virtuous Deeds of Nisshin Shōnin

MAKING A VOW AND RECEIVING A SIGN [3]

At one time in the year Ōei 33 (senior Fire, Horse) [1426], when Master Nisshin was twenty, he made a vow. "One's body is insignificant, but the Dharma is profound. To spread the Wonderful Dharma [of the *Lotus Sutra*] without begrudging bodily life—this is the teaching of the Thus Come One. The World Honored One also admonishes against witnessing enmity toward the Buddha-Dharma and failing to rebuke it. Our founder [Nichiren] received the Buddha's mandate to spread this sutra in the Final Dharma age. He upheld the golden words, 'We do not cherish bodily life,' and, even though he encountered many great trials, he endured them all, spreading the Wonderful Dharma, widely benefiting beings stained by the five impurities [of the kalpa, mental defilements, beings, views, and life-span] and repaying the great debt owed to all Buddhas. I am privileged to number among his later disciples. How should I not carry on his task of converting and guiding? Ready to discard bodily life, I will single-mindedly spread the *Lotus Sutra* and help fulfill the original intent of our founder." So he resolved. Then he further reflected: "To spread [the *Lotus Sutra*] in the Final Dharma age will surely entail many trials. [The Buddha] restrained even great bodhisattvas from undertaking it. Without the protection of the Three Treasures [the Buddha, the Dharma teaching, and the Sangha community] and of the founder, how could one successfully accomplish the great deed of disseminating [the sutra]? If I have a sign of their response, I will commit myself to its propagation."

At the end of that year, from autumn through winter, for a hundred days, he went each night during the hours of the Rat and the Ox [11:00 P.M. to 3:00 A.M.] to the graveyard of the Shōchūzan [the Hokekyōji]. Seating himself firmly before the many stone stūpas [marking the graves], he recited the *Jiga* verses [from the *Lotus Sutra*] each night a hundred times. In the place where the graves were was a line of trees that obscured the light of the sun and moon. The only inhabitants were foxes and badgers; it was far removed from any place that people frequented. The wind blew through the bare branches of the trees, and the scene of snow and frost in the depths of night was utterly frightful. Nevertheless, Master Nisshin's resolve was firm, and he did not miss a single night. Strangely, on the hundredth night, the stone stupas all recited the *Jiga* verses together with him. One had a particularly high and awe-inspiring voice that rang out clearly. Master Nisshin wanted to identify the stūpa, but because the sky so late at night was thoroughly dark, he could not make out whose grave it was. He embraced the stone stūpa and pulled it over; then he left. When day dawned, he hurried back. When he examined it, it proved to

mark the grave of Nichiyū Shōnin, who had been chief abbot of the Hokkekyōji. Nisshin rejoiced greatly and shed tears of emotion. Bowing with his palms placed together, he thought with gratitude, "Nichiyū Shōnin was truly the founder of our sect reborn. Now he has displayed this mysterious sign that he will aid my efforts. My wish has been splendidly fulfilled, and I am resolved to preach the Wonderful Dharma widely." From then on, his faith was all the firmer, and he pledged himself to fulfill the great vow to disseminate and teach [the *Lotus Sutra*].

A SUPERNATURAL DREAM [5]

One night Nisshin dreamed that Nichiyū Shōnin came to where he was studying and announced, "You have resolved to spread this sutra. When one person launches such a vow, he himself rejoices, and others are delighted as well. Now I will confer upon you a sign that your propagation [of the *Lotus*] will be accomplished." Thereupon he conferred upon Nisshin his written seal. Nisshin awoke, filled with joy, and suddenly noticed the shape of that seal impressed on the ashes in the incense burner before the altar. From that time until his death, Master Nisshin used that seal as his own. The sacred objects of worship, [the *daimoku* mandalas inscribed by him,] which have been handed down until this day, all bear this written seal. On another occasion, Master Nichiyū taught him the method of inscribing the characters "Dharma" (*hō*) and "lotus" (*ren*) of the *daimoku* as it appears on the mandala. This is recorded in Nisshin's *Transmissions Concerning the Mandala* (*Mandara sōjō shō*). The founder [Nichiren] conferred the *Prayer Sutra* [compendium of passages from the *Lotus Sutra* recited for protection] (*Kitōkyō*) upon Toki Nichijō Shōnin, and Nichijō transferred it to Nichiyū. Nichiyū's saying he would give Nisshin a sign means that he encompassed the *Prayer Sutra* within his seal and conferred it upon Master Nisshin. For that reason, Master Nisshin was neither killed nor harmed, even when tortured by fire or water, and at last he fulfilled his vow to spread the [*Lotus*] sutra. Therefore, those who are born after Master Nisshin's time should, with deep and single-minded resolve, believe in and revere the objects of worship inscribed by him as well as his virtuous deeds. It is as clear as the palm of one's hand that, by so doing, one can transmit the Wonderful Dharma with perfect wisdom and firm faith, widely benefiting others.

GOING UP TO THE CAPITAL AND SPREADING THE DHARMA [6]

His resolve to preach widely and transmit the Wonderful Dharma having become firmly established, and having beheld with his own eyes wondrous signs of the Buddhas and patriarchs, Master Nisshin lost no time in setting out for the capital. He was twenty-one at the time, and it was near the end of the first month of the year Ōei 34 (Junior Fire, Snake) [1427]. On the eighth day of the second month of the same year, he first began to preach in the vicinity of

the Returning Bridge (*Modori-bashi*) on First Avenue in the capital. He chanted the Wonderful Dharma [i.e., the *daimoku*] and firmly rebuked the error of slandering the Dharma. Before his time, Bodhisattva Nichizō had [similarly] spread the doctrines of the [Hokke] sect in the Einin era [1293–1298]. That was the beginning of the spread of [faith in] the king of sutras in the capital. At that time, the followers of other schools who slander the Dharma had profound attachments to the provisional teachings that could not immediately be controlled, so [Nichizō's] admonitions about doctrine and observance were not strict. Since then, with the passage of time, there were many people of the one [Hokke] sect who, like those of other sects, visited the shrines of deities who protect the provisional teachings [other than the *Lotus*], or who pasted heretical amulets on the gates of their homes and looked up to them with reverence. However, when they came to hear Nisshin's teachings, a great change occurred.

Because no one of the sect, monk or layperson, would give him a night's lodging, Nisshin went day and night to the roadside near the Returning Bridge. Using a stone as a seat and raising an umbrella, he chanted the *daimoku* as loudly as he could and vigorously preached the errors of other sects. He declared that sutras other [than the *Lotus*] do not lead to Buddhahood, and he clarified the sin of slandering the Dharma, which leads to the hells. He preached that, through the power of the wondrous sutra of the one vehicle, there is not a single person who shall not attain Buddhahood, expounding the scriptural passages in detail and recommending the Wonderful Dharma that accords with both the time and human capacity. However, people both high and low frowned and grew angry, or clapped their hands and laughed. What is more, men and women of other sects pelted him with rocks and tiles, while monks and nuns who slandered the true teaching plotted single-mindedly to do him harm. There was no one who treated him cordially or approached him. However, Nisshin truly expounded the doctrine, now rebuking [errors], now citing sutras to demonstrate his point. His wisdom opened [the meaning of] the sutras of the Buddha's lifetime and the treatises written about them, while his eloquence was like flowing water that knows no obstruction. At first people shunned and despised him, but later they revered and esteemed him. Day after day, they congregated to hear him preach. It so happened that two men from Kajiori Village (also called Kajiwara) in Shimagami district of Settsu Province, Uno Magozaemon and Nishimura Hikohyōe, came up to the capital and mingled with the crowd, where Nisshin sat preaching at the Returning Bridge and heard him. Because of good karma from the past, they at once realized the truth of his teaching. Both bent their heads and stepped beneath the umbrella to receive his Dharma. [Later they helped Nisshin establish his first temple.] Not only men and women of other sects bent their heads in faith and acceptance, but persons of the Hokke sect also reformed the impurity of their slanders of the Dharma. In this way, the spread of the *Lotus Sutra* [in the capital] was begun by Master Nichizō, while the fact that people came to adhere strictly to the admonitions of the sect was solely because of Nisshin's teaching. After that,

the sect prospered and the Wonderful Dharma spread all the more. That followers of the Nichiren sect today in both city and countryside strictly avoid slanderous acts is due largely to the virtuous achievement of Master Nisshin.

At that time, there was a stone near the Returning Bridge on which Master Nisshin seated himself to preach. From then on, it was called the "preaching stone." It is said that whoever sat on it by mistake, even briefly, or those who treated it disrespectfully, received some supernatural warning. In the past it was called the Seimei Stone [possibly in memory of the yin-yang master Abe no Seimei]. For some reason, in the year Genroku 15 (senior Water, Horse) [1702], on the sixteenth day of the eighth month, the stone was moved to the Honpōji. Since the Ōei era, it had weathered 280 years, remaining undisturbed. It had never been moved anywhere, and then finally it happened to be brought to Master Nisshin's chief place of practice. Surely this is most mysterious.

"TREATISE ON GOVERNING THE COUNTRY" [9]

In carrying out his original pledge to spread the Wonderful Dharma in the imperial capital, Nisshin admonished the shogun on multiple occasions. In the year Eikyō 11 (junior Earth, Ram) [1439], when he was thirty-three, he again admonished the Great Barbarian-Subduing General Minamoto no Yoshinori [the sixth Ashikaga shogun]. Lord Yoshinori grew enraged. Glaring, he said in a rough voice, "The reason you have still not been taught a lesson is that I have not yet given orders [to that effect]. If you come appeal to me again, I will make sure that you are punished." Master Nisshin heard him out [and replied], "I am a disciple of the Buddha, a vassal of the Dharma. How could I go against the Buddha's teaching out of fear of your commands? No matter what punishments you may inflict on me when I appeal to you again, I will be like the Venerable Āryasiṃha [, who was killed by King Danmira, an enemy of Buddhism,] or the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao [, who opposed Emperor Hui-tsung's attempts to suppress Buddhism]. Would it not rather be a great happiness to discard my wretched body in this [one] insignificant lifetime for the sake of the *Lotus Sutra* and thus ensure that the great Dharma will remain for ages to come?" So stating, he returned. After that, he composed the *Treatise on Establishing the True [Teaching] and Governing the Country* (*Risshō jikoku ron*) in one volume, modeling it on the founder [Nichiren's] *Treatise on Establishing the True [Teaching] and Bringing Peace to the Country* (*Risshō ankoku ron*). He intended to submit it in remonstrance on the occasion of thirty-third annual memorial service for Yoshinori's father, Rokuon-in Yorimitsu. In it he widely cited from the sūtras, making clear that faith in wrong teachers is the root cause of disorder in the realm. He set forth in detail the words and principles of the Wonderful Dharma and demonstrated that establishing the true teaching is the basis for governing the land. Its words were indisputable and its reasoning was clear. This writing is stored in the treasure repository of the Honpōji.

IMPRISONMENT AND TORTURE [10]

No sooner had Nisshin finished the *Risshō jikoku ron* than someone got word of it and slandered him in various ways to the shogun, saying, "Priest Nisshin pays no heed to my lord's prohibition but instead has composed a writing of appeal. This is how he violates your order." The shogun grew very angry on hearing this but did not immediately order punishment. [Instead,] he summoned eminent priests of the Zen and Nembutsu [sects]. The shogun Lord Yoshinori addressed them as follows: "Priest Nisshin has on several occasions appealed to me to take faith in the *Lotus Sutra*. I do not believe nor have I accepted his appeals, but last year he came to appeal to me again. At that time, I said that if he came to memorialize me any further, I would have heavy punishment inflicted on him. Nisshin replied, 'I am a disciple of the Buddha and a vassal of the Dharma. How could I go against the Buddha's teaching out of fear of your commands?' So saying, he returned. This is how he disregards my orders. Moreover, he has now composed a treatise intending to memorialize me again. This priest reveres the *Lotus Sutra* alone; he holds his person in disregard but values the Dharma. I have not yet determined the rights and wrongs of the other teachings. You priests must each ascertain [in debate with Nisshin] in my presence the relative profundity of the various sutras and whether or not they lead to Buddhahood."

In their hearts, the majority of the Zen and Nembutsu priests feared to debate with Master Nisshin, so they replied to Lord Yoshinori: "Of all the various Exoteric and Esoteric schools based on the eighty thousand sacred teachings, there is none that does not represent the essential teaching of the Buddha. How could the *Lotus Sutra* alone be true? Moreover, when the Buddha was about to enter nirvana, he entrusted the Dharma to the ruler and his ministers. How could one propagate the Dharma if he goes against your command? Nisshin is completely ignorant of Buddhism. What point could there be in debating pros and cons with him? All he does is malign others. To fling away one's life in vain, reaping the world's derision, is to become a laughingstock. And even though he may speak boldly now, if he is punished as serious criminals are, he will at once abandon the *Lotus Sutra* and chant the sacred name of [A]mida. We ask that you deal with him in this manner." Slandering [Nisshin] in various ways, they made this recommendation. Lord Yoshinori did not know that, among the teachings of the Thus Come One, there are various expedients [and not all represent the ultimate truth]; nor did he know of men like Āryasiṃha or Fa-tao, who went against the ruler's command in order to teach the Dharma. He simply believed the errors and deceptions of the Zen and Nembutsu priests, who were ignorant and of limited ability, and he grew more and more enraged.

On the sixth day of the second month of the twelfth year of the Eikyō era (senior Metal, Monkey) [1440], Nisshin was seized and roughly thrown into prison. He was thirty-four at the time. His prison cell measured four feet, five inches high, and its width accommodated only four mats. Nails, seven or eight

inches in length, hung pointing down from the ceiling. At this time there were eight people together in this cell. There had been thirty-six originally, but the jailor, feeling pity, had removed twenty-eight of them to a broader, six-sided cell. The remaining eight could neither sit nor stand readily, nor could they urinate and defecate as they wished.

[On one occasion,] Master Nisshin was taken out into the prison yard in the fierce heat of the summer sun. Firewood was piled up, and he was made to cross through the flames. Forced to confront the fire, he was admonished, "If you think the pain will be hard to bear, then quickly say [the name of A]mida." Master Nisshin replied, "The heat is truly difficult to bear. However, when one commits the sin of slandering the Dharma, he will fall into the Hell without Respite and be scorched in the flames of [the Hell of] Great Heat. Nothing can compare to the heat of those fires. How could I, because I shunned a brief spell of suffering from this heat, plant the seeds for long ages of torment?" And he chanted the *daimoku* in a loud voice. Again, at night in the freezing cold of winter, he was led out into the yard where the frost lay thick. There he was stripped naked, tied to a plum tree, and flogged throughout the night. "This is what the suffering of cold is like. Why don't you rely on Amida?" Master Nisshin replied, "There is no way to describe how hard the cold is to endure. However, one who receives the Dharma of an evil teacher falls into the eight cold hells and is pierced by the ice of [the Hell of] the Great Crimson Lotus. No comparison can describe how many times the suffering of cold [in that hell] exceeds my present torments. How could I, because I shunned a brief spell of cold in this world, plant the seeds for long kalpas of suffering?" He did not flinch but chanted the *daimoku* in a loud voice. When day dawned, Lord Yoshinori came to see the sight. Nisshin was chilled from the night's cold, and when he appeared to shiver slightly, Yoshinori said, "Whom does the practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* fear, to tremble in this way?" Master Nisshin replied, "If you had been treated like this, you would have soon frozen and perished. In my case, thanks to the power of the *Lotus Sutra*, I am still alive."

On another occasion, he was locked in a bathhouse that was heated [with firewood] for three hours. At first his voice could be heard loudly chanting the *daimoku*, but then it gradually subsided until no sound could be heard. People said that he must have died. But when they opened the door, Master Nisshin was there looking just as he had before, chanting the Wonderful Dharma in a soft voice. Or [at another time], he was tied to a ladder, and water was scooped up in a ladle and poured into his mouth. He himself was able to count up to thirty-six ladles-full; after that, he did not know how many [he was forced to swallow]. Though he was tormented in this way, he did not relax or weaken [in his resolve] even in the slightest. [On occasion,] bamboo skewers were applied to his testicles, or [the blades of] hoes, heated red-hot, were placed in his armpits. But although he was tortured in countless ways, he gave no sign of being troubled or pained. At one time, a bamboo saw sharp as a metal blade had been hung near his prison cell. When Nisshin asked its purpose, the jailor replied, "It is a saw to remove your reverence's head." Nisshin then took the

saw and bashed it against the earthen floor of his cell. The jailor grew angry and said, "Even if you break that saw, it will be to no purpose. There are other saws, to put an end to your life." To this, Master Nisshin declared, "I do not shun suffering in the slightest, nor do I begrudge my life. But if you cut off my head with a sharp, swordlike blade such as this, it will be altogether too easy. Because my life will be discarded solely in order that I may offer my body to the *Lotus Sutra* and widely benefit others, I would wish the suffering to be longer and more intense. That is why I am trying to dull this sharp blade." Truly, because of such deep resolve, he was able to endure these many tortures, and his life was not harmed. His bearing was as composed as ever. Filled inwardly with the virtues of wisdom and meditation, he outwardly displayed forbearance and compassion. Were it not for the protection of the Buddhas and kami, who could do as he did?

CROWNED WITH A POT [11]

Though subjected to numerous tortures, Master Nisshin did not waver in the least. Out of resentment of his firm resolve, on one occasion, a pot was heated until it glowed like flames and then placed over his head. This too he endured well, and he gave no sign of extreme pain. From that time on, people in the world all called him "the pot-wearing saint." It was because of this torture that he came to be revered by this name. On another occasion, Lord Yoshinori commanded that his tongue be cut out. The person who received the order had pity on him, and, in his sympathy, sliced off only a bit of the tip. After that, Master Nisshin lisped like a child. The top of his head scarred where the pot had rested, so he was unable to shave it as he wished and had to trim his hair with scissors as it grew out. Thus his head looked like that of a small boy [with a cropped haircut]. It remained so, even when he grew old. Master Nisshin would joke, "The saying, 'In old age, one becomes a child again,' must refer to me." Thus, taken out [of his cell], he was tormented in various ways, and returning to it, he underwent numerous sufferings. The term of his imprisonment exceeded a year, lasting 503 days. Who else could have endured as well as Master Nisshin did, unless he were the founder [Nichiren] reborn? In the Honpōji, there is an object of worship dated the first year of the Kakitsu era (1441) that he inscribed while in prison. Day and night in his cell he chanted the Wonderful Dharma and refuted [the doctrines] of false teachers. His voice carried beyond the prison. Among those who heard him, there were some who slandered him, and some who took faith and converted. And when he was tortured, there were many who quickly realized that he was no ordinary person and revered him.

YOSHINORI'S PUNISHMENT [12]

On the thirteenth day of the third month of the first year of the Kakitsu era (junior Metal, Rooster) [1441], the shogun Lord Yoshinori sent a messenger

to demand of Nisshin in his prison cell: "One who torments a practitioner of the *Lotus Sutra* will surely receive punishment in this life—so it is written in the sutra itself. I have tormented you harshly for more than a year now, but there is no sign of anything untoward. Can the sutra be false? Or if not, it is clear that you are surely no true practitioner of the *Lotus*." Master Nisshin replied, "How could the sutra be false? And I am a true practitioner of the *Lotus*. Before three years have passed, my lord will surely incur punishment." The shogun sent a further message: "What you say is foolish. If after three years were I to meet some misfortune, how could one say it was specifically on account of tormenting you?" Master Nisshin replied, "If you think three years would be too late, then before a hundred days are out, you will quickly incur heavy punishment." Hearing this, the shogun laughed with derision. He was extremely angry. Declaring that he would never lose his life, he passed the days in various counsels. Then, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, ninety-nine days after the messenger had been sent [to Nisshin], the lay priest Akamatsu Mitsusuke Shōgu murdered the shogun Yoshinori in his mansion. (This is related in the *Summary of Reigns* [*Ōdai ichiran*] and other sources.) Thus Nisshin's words that Yoshinori would incur punishment within a hundred days were fulfilled. In the past, the regent in Kamakura, the governor of Sagami [Hōjō Tokimune], exiled the founder [Nichiren] to the island of Sado, and within a hundred days fighting broke out in his domain. On investigating the past case of the founder and comparing with it the more recent case of Master Nisshin, thoughtful persons, considering Yoshinori's immediate punishment, will revere Nisshin's virtuous deeds and take faith in him. Throughout the capital, men and women all said, "Because Yoshinori inflicted various tortures on a noble priest, he met with this misfortune." Word spread from the streets to every house. On this account, the shogun's clan pardoned a great number of criminals as a memorial offering for Lord Yoshinori. Their intent was solely that Nisshin be pardoned and released, and to nullify Yoshinori's offenses. But Master Nisshin refused to leave the prison. He had borne grave sufferings and upheld the *Lotus Sutra* without begrudging his life, solely in order to lead others to embrace the Wonderful Dharma. The shogun had not discerned this and brought disaster on himself. Master Nisshin announced, "If those close to the shogun, down to the last man, do not now receive this Wonderful Dharma that I uphold, I will never leave prison." Yoshinori's family and retainers were unable to oppose him, and the shogun's entire clan became devotees of the *Lotus*. Thereupon Master Nisshin left prison. He was thirty-five at the time. During his days of incarceration, he had tirelessly preached the Dharma. Those who had muttered that it was only the noise of an arrogant priest were many, while those who had taken faith were few. From that point on, however, both high and low, men and women, were awestruck by the power of Master Nisshin's virtue and believed and revered him. Master Nisshin himself practiced *shakubuku* all the more with respect to other sects and widely declared the Hokke doctrine. Those who heard him directly at once embraced the Dharma, while

those to whom the word was passed also converted as they heard it. There were very few who slandered him and none who tried to do him harm. That same year, Yoshinori's heir, Lord Yoshikatsu, at eight years of age, was invested as shogun by the emperor. However, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month in the third year of the Kakitsu era (junior Water, Boar) [1443], the Great Barbarian-Subduing General Minamoto no Yoshikatsu fell from his horse and died an early death. This was due to the sin of his father in tormenting a practitioner of the *Lotus*. Nisshin's predictions of "three years" and "a hundred days" came true as exactly as matching tallies. How fearful! Was he not a sage who knew beforehand what was yet to happen?