

4

The Izu Exile



I HAVE received the rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves, sake, dried rice, peppers, paper, and other items from the messenger whom you took the trouble to send. He also conveyed your message that these offerings should be kept secret. I understand.

When, on the twelfth day of the fifth month, having been exiled, I arrived at that harbor I had never even heard of before, and when I was still suffering after leaving the boat, you kindly took me into your care. What karma has brought us together? Can it be that, because in the past you were a votary of the Lotus Sutra, now, in the Latter Day of the Law, you have been reborn as Funamori no Yasaburo and have taken pity on me? Though a man may do this, for your wife, as a married woman, to have given me food, brought me water to wash my hands and feet with, and treated me with great concern, I can only call wondrous.

What caused you to inwardly believe in the Lotus Sutra and make offerings to me during my more than thirty-day stay there? I was hated and resented by the steward and the people of the district even more than I was in Kamakura. Those who saw me scowled, while those who merely heard my name were filled with spite. And yet, though I was there in the fifth

month when rice was scarce, you secretly fed me. Have my parents been reborn in a place called Kawana, in Ito of Izu Province?

The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, “[I will send . . .] men and women of pure faith, to offer alms to the teachers of the Law.”¹ The meaning of this sutra passage is that the heavenly gods and benevolent deities will assume various forms such as those of men and women, and present offerings to help the persons who practice the Lotus Sutra. There can be no doubt that this refers to you and your wife being born as a man and a woman, and making offerings to Nichiren, the teacher of the Law.

Since I wrote to you in detail earlier,² I will make this letter brief. But I would like to mention one thing in particular. When the steward of this district sent me a request to pray for his recovery from illness, I wondered if I should accept it. But since he showed some degree of faith in me, I decided I would appeal to the Lotus Sutra. This time I saw no reason why the ten demon daughters should not join forces to aid me. I therefore addressed the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, and also the Sun Goddess, Hachiman, and other deities, both major and minor. I was sure that they

would consider my request and show some sign. Certainly they would never forsake me, but would respond as attentively as a person rubs a sore or scratches an itch. And as it turned out, the steward recovered. In gratitude he presented me with a statue of the Buddha that had appeared from the sea along with a catch of fish. He did so because his illness had finally ended, an illness that I am certain was inflicted by the ten demon daughters. This benefit too will surely become a benefit for you and your wife.

Living beings like ourselves have dwelt in the sea of the sufferings of birth and death since time without beginning. But they become votaries of the Lotus Sutra, and realize that their bodies and minds, which have existed since the beginningless past, are inherently endowed with the eternally unchanging nature; awaken to their mystic reality with their mystic wisdom; and attain the Buddha's body, which is as indestructible as a diamond. How then could they be different from that Buddha? Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, who said numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago, "I am the only person [who can rescue and protect others],"³ refers to living beings like ourselves. This is the Lotus Sutra's teaching of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, and the action of "I am always here, preaching the Law."⁴ Even though such an admirable Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha exist, ordinary people are unaware of it. The passage in the "Life Span" chapter that reads, "I make it so that living beings in their befuddlement do not see me even when close by," refers to this. The disparity between delusion and enlightenment is like that between the four views in the grove of sal trees.⁵ What is called the Buddha of three thousand realms in a single moment of life means that the entire realm

of phenomena attains Buddhahood.

The demon who appeared before the boy Snow Mountains was Shakra in disguise. The dove that sought the protection of King Shibi was the god Vishvakarman. King Universal Brightness, who returned to the palace of King Spotted Feet [to be executed], was Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. While the eyes of ordinary people are blind to this, the eyes of the Buddha see it. A sutra passage states that there are paths by which birds and fish come and go in both the sky and the sea. A wooden statue [of the Buddha] is itself a golden Buddha, and a golden Buddha is a wooden statue. Aniruddha's gold turned into a hare and then a corpse.⁶ In the palm of Mahanama's hand, even sand turned into gold.⁷ These things are beyond ordinary understanding. An ordinary person is a Buddha, and a Buddha, an ordinary person. This is what is meant by three thousand realms in a single moment of life and by the phrase "I in fact attained Buddhahood."⁸

In that case, perhaps the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, the lord of teachings, has been reborn and has helped me as you and your wife. Though the distance between Ito and Kawana is short, our hearts are kept far apart. I write this letter for the sake of the future. Do not discuss it with others, but ponder it yourself. If people should learn anything at all about it, it will go hard with you. Keep it deep in your heart and never speak of it. With my deepest regards. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Nichiren

The twenty-seventh day of the sixth month in the first year of Kocho (1261)

Sent to Funamori Yasaburo.

Background

In the eighth month of 1260, infuriated by Nichiren Daishonin's refutation of the Pure Land school in his *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, a group of Nembutsu followers attacked his dwelling at Matsu-bagayatsu in Kamakura. The Daishonin narrowly escaped and went to the home of his loyal disciple Toki Jonin in Shimosa Province. In the spring of 1261, however, he returned to Kamakura and resumed his propagation efforts.

On the twelfth day of the fifth month, 1261, without any official investigation, the government sentenced the Daishonin to exile in the Izu Peninsula, which was a stronghold of the Pure Land school. The Daishonin was taken to Kawana, a small fishing village on the northeastern coast of the Izu Peninsula. Here he was given shelter and

food by Funamori Yasaburo, a fisherman, and his wife, and the couple became his steadfast followers. The steward of Ito District in Izu, Ito Sukemitsu, learning of the Daishonin's presence a month after his arrival, had the Daishonin summoned in order that he might offer prayers for Sukemitsu's recovery from a serious illness. Sukemitsu regained his health, and it is said that he, too, became the Daishonin's follower.

Both Yasaburo and his wife were concerned about the Daishonin's safety when he went to Ito to pray for the steward's health. Yasaburo sent a messenger to the Daishonin at Ito with various offerings. *The Izu Exile* is the Daishonin's reply. The Daishonin's exile ended on the twenty-second day of the second month, 1263, and he returned to Kamakura.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
2. Little is known about the letter referred to here; only the letter *The Izu Exile* is extant today.
3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, chap. 16.
5. Shakyamuni passed away after expounding his last teaching, the Nirvana Sutra, in a grove of sal trees. The Sutra on Resolving Doubts about the Middle Day of the Law describes that grove of sal trees in four different ways: (1) as a grove composed of earth, trees, plants, and stone walls; (2) as a place adorned with the seven kinds of treasures, including gold and silver; (3) as a place where all Buddhas practice Buddhism; and (4) as the eternal, enlightened land of the Buddha. The different views arise in accordance with the capacity and state of life of the people.
6. Aniruddha was one of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples, known as the foremost in divine insight. This story is found in *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*. Long ago, a pratyekabuddha named Rida was engaged in the practice of begging alms,

but could obtain nothing. Seeing this, a poor man offered him millet. Later, when the poor man went in search of more millet, a hare jumped on his back and then turned into a corpse. Frightened, the man tried to shake it off, but in vain. As soon as he returned home, however, the corpse fell off and turned into gold. Hearing of this, wicked men came to rob him, but to them it looked merely like a corpse. In the eyes of the poor man, however, it was genuine gold, and he became wealthy. Ninety-one kalpas later, he was born as Aniruddha.

7. Mahanama was one of the five monks who were ordered by Shakyamuni's father, the king, to accompany Shakyamuni when he forsook the secular world and entered religious life. They followed and practiced asceticism with Shakyamuni, but left him when he renounced this path. Shortly after Shakyamuni obtained enlightenment, however, he preached his first sermon to them at Deer Park, and they became his first disciples. According to the Increasing by One Agama Sutra, Mahanama was said to possess occult powers. The story of "sand in

his palm turning into gold” is found in Ts’ung-i’s *Supplement to T’ien-t’ai’s Three Major Works*.

8. Lotus Sutra, chap. 16. About this phrase, Nichiren Daishonin states in *The*

Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings that “I” indicates all the people in each of the Ten Worlds, and that it means that the people of the Ten Worlds are all Buddhas eternally endowed with the three bodies.