

Letter from Echi



THE government's persecution of me has clearly demonstrated my faith in the Lotus Sutra. There is no doubt that the moon wanes and waxes, and that the tide ebbs and flows. In my case, too, since punishment has already occurred, benefit must be forthcoming. What is there to lament?

At the hour of the cock (5:00–7:00 P.M.) on the twelfth day, I incurred the wrath of the government authorities. Placed in the custody of the lord of Musashi,¹ I left Kamakura at the hour of the ox (1:00–3:00 A.M.) on the thirteenth day for exile in the province of Sado. At present, I am in a place called Echi, which is the domain of Homma,² under the supervision of a person called Uma Taro, a deputy of Homma Rokuro Saemon-no-jo of Echi. I will probably be staying here for four or five days.

Your grief is understandable, but because I have been certain from the beginning that this would occur, I myself do not grieve. Rather, I regret that I have yet to be beheaded. Had I been decapitated on account of the Lotus Sutra in a past existence, I would not have been born as such a lowly person in this life. By undergoing repeated persecution, just as is noted in the sutra when it says, “again and again we will be banished,”³ I can erase the grave offenses of my past and for the first time attain Buddhahood. I therefore engage in these difficult practices of my own accord.

Nichiren

The fourteenth day of the ninth month

Reply to Toki



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the fourteenth day of the ninth month of the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271) and addressed it to Toki Jonin, immediately following the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

When this letter was written, the

Daishonin was staying at the residence of Homma Rokuro Saemon-no-jo in Echi, Sagami Province. The Daishonin had been sentenced to exile on Sado Island under the supervision of Hojo Nobutoki, the constable of Sado. Nevertheless, on the twelfth day, an attempt

was made to behead him at Tatsunokuchi in the early hours of the thirteenth day. The attempt failed, however, and the Daishonin was placed under the custody of Homma Rokuro, Hojo Nobutoki's deputy. Although the Daishonin estimates in this letter that he would be kept at Echi for four or five days, he was to remain there until the tenth day of the following month.

For the first time in his writings, the Daishonin cites the passage from the Lotus Sutra that reads, "again and again we will be banished." The implication

here is that, through his previous banishment to Izu (1261–1263) and the upcoming exile to Sado, the Daishonin is reading and experiencing the words "again and again" with his entire being. Although at the end of this letter the Daishonin declares the certainty of his attaining enlightenment in the future, this statement and his conviction in the face of persecution apparent in this letter can be seen as an expression of the Daishonin's state of life as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Notes

1. The lord of Musashi is Hojo Nobutoki, the governor of Musashi Province, who held this post from 1267 to 1273. He was also the constable of Sado.

2. Homma is Homma Rokuro Saemon-no-jo Shigetsura, a retainer of Hojo Nobutoki and also the deputy constable of Sado.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.