

Banishment to Sado



ON the twelfth day of the ninth month, I incurred the wrath of the government authorities, and on the tenth day of the tenth month of this year, I am to leave for the province of Sado.

From the beginning, I pursued my studies because I wanted to master Buddhism and attain Buddhahood, and also to save the people to whom I am indebted. It seems to me that on the path to attain Buddhahood it may invariably be when one has done something like lay down one's life that one becomes a Buddha. I think that perhaps it is encountering such difficulties as have already been explained in the sutra—being cursed, vilified, attacked with swords and staves, shards and rubble, and banished again and again—that is reading the Lotus Sutra with one's life. My faith springs up all the more, and I am confident about my next existence. If I should die, I will definitely also save each of you.

In India a man called the Venerable Aryasimha was beheaded by King Dammira, and Bodhisattva Aryadeva

was murdered by a non-Buddhist. In China, a man named Chu Tao-sheng was banished to a mountain in a place called Su-chou, and the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao was branded on the face and exiled to a place south of the Yangtze River. All these were because of the virtue of the Lotus Sutra, and because of the Buddhist teachings.

Nichiren is the son of a chandala family who lived near the sea in Tojo in Awa Province, in the remote countryside of the eastern part of Japan. How could giving up a body that will decay uselessly for the sake of the Lotus Sutra not be exchanging rocks for gold? None of you should lament for me. Please convey what I have said to the Reverend Dozen-bo, too. I have also thought of writing to the wife of the lord of the manor,¹ but because of my present circumstances, she may no longer wish to be reminded of me. Should the opportunity arise, please tell her what I have said.

Nichiren

The tenth month



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in the tenth month of the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271), just before he left for his exile on Sado Island. At the time, he was being held at the mainland residence of Homma Rokuro Saemon, the deputy constable of Sado. The Daishonin wrote the letter to an acquaintance at Seicho-ji temple in Awa Province, possibly a priest named Enjo-bo.

Exile to Sado Island was a harsh punishment, second only to the death penalty. In this letter the Daishonin

declares that he has met this persecution solely for the sake of the Lotus Sutra; he emphasizes that the very fact that it has happened demonstrates that he is "reading" the Lotus Sutra with his life. Since the Daishonin seeks to dispel doubts among his followers and revive their flagging courage by pointing out his mission as the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day, this letter may be said to foreshadow *The Opening of the Eyes*, a major treatise he wrote four months later.

Note

1. Reference here is to the lay nun of Nagoe. The wife of Hojo Tomotoki, a younger brother of the third Kamakura regent and lord of Nagasa District in Awa Province, where the Daishonin was born. After the Daishonin entered the priesthood, the lay nun apparently assisted his parents in some way, and he therefore felt

indebted to her; moreover, she was one of his first converts. Her resolve was not firm, however, and she abandoned her faith around the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Later, she resumed her practice and requested a Gohonzon from the Daishonin, but he refused.