

Letter to Priest Nichiro in Prison



TOMORROW I am to leave for the province of Sado. In the cold tonight, I think of what it must be like for you in prison, and it pains me. Admirable Nichiro, because you have read the entirety of the Lotus Sutra with both the physical and spiritual aspects of your life, you will also be able to save your father and mother, your six kinds of relatives,¹ and all living beings. Others read the Lotus Sutra with their mouths alone, in word alone, but they do not read it with their hearts. And even if they read it with their hearts, they do not read it with their actions. It is reading the sutra with both one's body and mind that is truly praiseworthy! Since the

sutra teaches that "the young sons of heavenly beings will wait on him and serve him. Swords and staves will not touch him and poison will have no power to harm him,"² certainly nothing untoward will befall you. When you are released from prison, please come as quickly as you can. I am eager to see you, and to show you that I too am well.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The ninth day of the tenth month
in the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271),
cyclical sign *kanoto-hitsuji*

To Chikugo



Background

On the ninth day of the tenth month, 1271, on the eve of his departure for Sado Island, Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Chikugo-bo Nichiro, who was later to become one of his six senior disciples. Nichiro and his father had converted to the Daishonin's teachings in 1254, and Nichiro had received the tonsure under the supervision of his uncle Nissho, also later to become one of the six senior disciples. At the

time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in the ninth month of 1271, Nichiro and several other priest-disciples were imprisoned in the custody of Yadoya Mitsunori, an official of the Kamakura government, in a dungeon carved into the side of a hill near Mitsunori's residence in Kamakura.

In the interval between the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and his exile to Sado Island, the Daishonin was held at the

mainland residence of Homma Rokuro Saemon, the deputy constable of Sado, in Echi of Sagami Province. It was here that the Daishonin wrote this letter, which demonstrates that, even when

about to embark for a destination sure to be marked by privation and hardship, his chief concern was for his disciples.

Notes

1. One's father, mother, elder brother, younger brother, wife, and son or daughter. According to another classification, the

father, son or daughter, elder brother, younger brother, husband, and wife.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14.