

The Gods Same Birth and Same Name



I HOPE you will read this letter over and over again together with Toshiro's wife. The sun breaks through the pitch-black dark. A woman's heart is compared to the pitch-black dark, and the Lotus Sutra is compared to the sun. The baby does not recognize its mother, but the mother never forgets her baby. Shakyamuni Buddha is compared to the mother, and women are compared to the baby. If two people long for each other, as a rule they will never be parted. If one person yearns for the other, but the other yearns not, sometimes they will meet, and sometimes they will not. The Buddha is like the one who yearns, and women are like the one who does not. If we yearn for the Buddha, how could Shakyamuni Buddha possibly fail to appear?

You may call a stone a jewel, but that does not make it one. You may call a jewel a stone, but it remains a jewel. In our age, the doctrines of the Nembutsu and the other schools that are based on the Buddha's provisional teachings are all like stones. People may say that the Nembutsu is equal to the Lotus Sutra, but that does not in fact make it so. And people may slander the Lotus Sutra, but that does not affect it any more than calling a jewel a stone affects the jewel.

In the past there was an evil ruler in China named Emperor Hui-tsung.

Having been led astray by Taoist priests, he destroyed Buddhist statues and sutras and forced all the priests and nuns to return to secular life, and there was not one who refused to abandon their religious calling. Among them, however, a man called the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao refused to be cowed by the imperial command. As a result, he was branded on the face and exiled to a region south of the Yangtze River. I was born in an age when the rulers put their faith in the Zen school, which is as erroneous as the doctrine of the Taoists, and I, too, like Fa-tao, have met with great difficulties.

Both of you were born as commoners and live in Kamakura, yet you believe in the Lotus Sutra without concern for the prying eyes of others or the danger it may pose to your lives. This is nothing short of extraordinary. Though I am only guessing, it is as if a jewel had been placed in muddy water, and the water had become clear. It is as if one who was taught something new by a wise person had believed his every word and thus grasped the truth. Could Shakyamuni Buddha and the bodhisattvas Universal Worthy, Medicine King, and Constellation King Flower be dwelling in your hearts? Surely this is what is meant in the passage of the Lotus Sutra that says that those in the land of Jambudvipa who believe in this sutra do

so because of the power of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.¹

Women, for example, are like the wisteria, and men are like the pine. If the wisteria happens to be parted from the pine for even an instant, it never rises again. And yet, in such a turbulent world, and when you do not even have servants you can rely on, you have sent your husband here. This shows that your sincerity is deeper even than the earth, and the earthly gods must certainly realize it. It is loftier even than the sky, and the heavenly gods Brahma and Shakra must also be aware of it. The Buddha taught that one, from the very moment of one's birth, is accom-

panied by two messengers, Same Birth and Same Name, who are sent by heaven and who follow one as closely as one's own shadow, never parting from one even for an instant. These two take turns ascending to heaven to report one's offenses and good deeds, both great and small, without overlooking the slightest detail. Therefore, heaven too must know about this matter. How reassuring! How reassuring!

Nichiren

The fourth month

Reply to the wife of Shijo Kingo



Background

Shijo Kingo visited Nichiren Daishonin on Sado Island in the fourth month of the ninth year of Bun'ei (1272), and the Daishonin entrusted him with this letter for his wife, Nichigen-nyo, who was a devoted follower of the Daishonin's teachings. Nichigen-nyo was the name given to her by the Daishonin. He also named her two daughters, Tsukimaro and Kyō'o.

First, the Daishonin urges Nichigen-nyo to read the letter with Toshiro's wife. While little is known of Toshiro

and his wife, it is believed that he was one of Kingo's colleagues in the Kamakura government.

In the feudalistic society of the time, life was difficult for women since their social status was invariably inferior to that of men. Nevertheless, though she had no one else to rely on, Nichigen-nyo sent her husband all the way from Kamakura to Sado on a journey that was both difficult and dangerous. For this the Daishonin highly praises her faith.

Note

1. As described in the "Universal Worthy" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.