

On Recommending This Teaching to Your Lord and Avoiding the Offense of Complicity in Slander



I HAVE received the two thousand coins.

The foremost treasure of sentient beings is none other than life itself. Those who take life are certain to fall into the three evil paths. That is why the wheel-turning kings observed the precept of “not to kill” as the first of the ten good precepts, and why the Buddha taught the five precepts at the beginning of the Hinayana sutras and made “not to kill” the first of them. The Buddha also taught “not to kill” as the first of the ten major precepts in the Mahayana Brahma Net Sutra. The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the one that represents the merit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni’s practice of the precept “not to kill.” Accordingly, those who take life will be abandoned by all the Buddhas of the three existences, and the gods of the six heavens of the world of desire will never protect them. The scholars of our time are aware of this, and I, Nichiren, have a general understanding of it.

The nature of killing varies, however. The offense of the person killed is either heavy or light. If one kills the person who has murdered one’s father, mother, sovereign, or teacher, although the offense remains the same, what would have been a grave offense probably becomes a light one instead. This

is something our contemporary scholars are acquainted with. But even bodhisattvas with their great compassion, if they make offerings to the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, are certain to fall into the hell of incessant suffering. On the other hand, even those who commit the five cardinal sins, if they show animosity toward those enemies, will definitely be reborn in the human or heavenly world. King Sen’yo and King Possessor of Virtue, who had destroyed, respectively, five hundred and countless enemies of the Lotus Sutra, became Shakyamuni Buddha in this world. His disciples such as Mahakashyapa, Ananda, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and other countless followers were people who, at that time, were in the vanguard, defeating the enemy, or killing them, injuring them, or rejoicing in the fight. The monk Realization of Virtue became Kashyapa Buddha. He was a votary of the Lotus Sutra of great compassion who, at that time, urged King Possessor of Virtue to attack the enemies of the sutra as if they were the ones who had betrayed his father and mother in a previous lifetime.

Our present day corresponds to that time. If the ruler of our country had accepted what Nichiren said, he could very well have become like the two kings. Yet, in addition to rejecting it,

he has actually sided with the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, so that the entire nation attacks me. From the ruler on down to the common people, all have become slanderers of the Law whose offense exceeds the five cardinal sins. Therefore, all of you are also on the side of the ruler. Although at heart you are of the same mind as Nichiren, since your person is in service to your lord, it would have been extremely difficult for you to have avoided the offense of complicity in slander. How admirable it is that, despite this, you communicated this teaching to your lord and urged him to take faith in it. Even though he may fail to accept it now, you have managed to avoid the offense of complicity.

From now on, you should be careful about what you say. On the other hand,

surely the heavenly gods will protect you. I also will tell them to do so.

Determine to take every possible precaution. Those who hate you will be increasingly vigilant in watching for a chance to do you harm. Put a stop to all drinking parties at night. What dissatisfaction can there be in drinking sake alone with your wife? Do not let down your guard when you attend banquets with others in the daytime. Your enemies will have no opportunity to attack you, apart from your drinking. You cannot be too careful.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-sixth day of the ninth
month

Reply to Saemon-no-jo



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in the ninth month of the eleventh year of Bun'ei (1274) to Saemon-no-jo, commonly known as Shijo Kingo, who was one of his leading followers in Kamakura and a samurai in service to the Ema family, a branch of the ruling Hojo clan. The Daishonin praises Shijo Kingo for his courage in venturing to introduce the Daishonin's teaching to his lord, Ema.

The "offense of complicity in slander" in the title refers to the slander that occurs when, even though not committing slander oneself, one makes offerings to enemies of the Law or acts in concert with slanderers, failing to admonish them.

Shijo Kingo had recommended the Daishonin's teachings to Lord Ema around the time of the Daishonin's retirement to Mount Minobu. Like many other believers, Kingo had awak-

ened to a new conviction in faith when the Daishonin, against all odds, returned safely from Sado. While in exile, the Daishonin's prophecy of internal strife, made in his *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, had materialized in the form of a power struggle within the ruling Hojo clan, and with the Mongols now readying their forces for attack, the fulfillment of his second prophecy, that of foreign invasion, seemed imminent. Those may have been among the reasons that prompted Shijo Kingo to speak to his lord.

Lord Ema was at that time a follower of the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple. The Ema family is also said to have built Choraku-ji, a temple of the Pure Land school and one of the seven major temples in Kamakura. Lord Ema resented what he saw as his vassal's presumption in attempting to convert

him. At one point, he even threatened to transfer Kingo to the remote province of Echigo on the Sea of Japan if he did not renounce his faith in the Lotus Sutra. It took three years for the samurai to regain his lord's trust.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin

explains that "not to kill" is first among all Buddhist precepts. In one sense, however, slander of the Lotus Sutra is an even worse offense than killing, for one who opposes the sutra in effect denies the Buddha nature eternally inherent in all living beings.