

Reply to the Lay Priest Soya



I HAVE written out the prose section of the “Expedient Means” chapter for you. You should recite it together with the verse portion of the “Life Span” chapter, which I sent you earlier.

The characters of this sutra are all without exception living Buddhas of perfect enlightenment. But because we have the eyes of ordinary people, we see them as characters. For instance, hungry spirits perceive the Ganges River as fire, human beings perceive it as water, and heavenly beings perceive it as amrita. Though the water is the same, it appears differently according to one’s karmic reward from the past.

The blind cannot see the characters of this sutra. To the eyes of ordinary people, they look like characters. Persons of the two vehicles perceive them as the void. Bodhisattvas look on them as innumerable doctrines. Buddhas rec-

ognize each character as a golden Shakyamuni. This is what is meant by the passage that says, “[If one can uphold this sutra], one will be upholding the Buddha’s body.”¹ Those who practice with distorted views, however, are destroying this most precious sutra. You should simply be careful that, without differing thoughts, you single-mindedly aspire to the pure land of Eagle Peak. A passage in the Six Paramitas Sutra² says to become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you. I will explain in detail when I see you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third month in the twelfth year of Bun’ei (1275)

To the lay priest Soya



Background

This letter was written at Minobu to Soya Kyoshin, a believer who lived in Soya Village of Katsushika District in Shimosa Province. Soya Kyoshin converted to the Daishonin’s teachings around 1260 and became one of the

leading believers in the area, together with Toki Jonin and Ota Jomyo. Later, he took the tonsure, and the Daishonin gave him the Buddhist name Horen Nichirai.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin

urges Soya Kyoshin to recite both a portion of the “Expedient Means” chapter and the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter, the two key chapters of the Lotus Sutra, in his daily prayers. He also states that each char-

acter of the Lotus Sutra is in fact a living Buddha of supreme enlightenment. Therefore, to uphold and recite this sutra is to uphold the body of the Buddha—that is, to attain Buddhahood in one’s present form.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.
2. A sutra translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Prajna of the T’ang dynasty. It explains in detail the six kinds of practices,

or “perfections” (Skt paramita), that bodhisattvas must carry out in order to attain enlightenment.