

Reply to the Lay Priest of Ko



I HAVE received two paper bags of sea laver, ten bundles of seaweed, one paper bag of algae, and one bunch of mushrooms.

The human mind is inconstant; it is ever-changing and unfixd. I thought it wondrous that you pledged faith in my teachings while I was in the province of Sado, and your sincerity in sending your husband all the way here is even more remarkable. The provinces we live in are far apart, and months and years have passed, so I was concerned that you might slacken in your resolve. However, you are increasingly demonstrating the depth of your faith and accumulating good deeds. Surely this is not a result of practice over just one or two previous lifetimes.

Because the Lotus Sutra is difficult to believe, the Buddha assumes various forms, such as that of one's child, parent, or wife, to enable one to take faith in it. However, you have no children and live alone as husband and wife.

The sutra states, "The living beings in it [the threefold world] are all my children."¹ If this is so, then Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, must be a compassionate father to both of you. I, Nichiren, must be your child, but, wishing to save the people of Japan, I am residing for the time being in the central part of the country. The meritorious deeds you have accumulated in previous existences are indeed precious.

When the Mongols come pouring into Japan, please make your way here. And since you have no sons, please consider coming here to live with me in your old age. No place is secure. Be convinced that Buddhahood is the final abode.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twelfth day of the fourth month
Reply to the lay priest of Ko



Background

This letter is thought to have been written at Minobu in the twelfth year of Bun'ei (1275). There are only two extant letters addressed to the lay priest

of Ko and his wife—this letter and *Letter to the Lay Nun of Ko*—and very few clues remain about them.

Because they lived in the town

where the government of Sado Province was located, the husband was known as the lay priest of Ko—the lay priest who lives in the seat of the provincial government (*ko*). Although this letter was written to both of them, the contents—in particular, Nichiren Daishonin’s praise of the fact that the lay nun had sent her husband such a long way to visit him—suggest that it was directed toward her.

During the Daishonin’s exile on Sado Island, the lay priest and his wife protected him and presented him with offerings, even though by doing so they were putting themselves at risk with the local authorities. And after the Daishonin had gone to live in Minobu, the lay priest made the demanding and perilous journey from Sado to visit him there.

Note

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.