

The Offering of an Unlined Robe



A WOMAN is like water, which takes on the shape of its container. A woman is like an arrow, which is fitted to the bow. A woman is like a ship, which is dependent on its rudder. Therefore, if her husband is a thief, a woman will become a thief, and if her husband is a king, she will become the consort. If he is a man of goodness, she will become a Buddha. Not only this life but also the life to come depends on her husband.

At the same time, Hyoe no Saemon¹ is a votary of the Lotus Sutra. No matter what may happen, because you are Saemon's wife, the Buddha must acknowledge you as a woman of the Lotus Sutra. And, moreover, you have aroused faith of your own accord and have sent me an unlined robe² for the sake of the Lotus Sutra.

There are two kinds of votaries of the Lotus Sutra: sages and ordinary people. The sage peels off his skin and uses it to copy the sutra passages.³ If ordinary persons offer their only robe to the votary of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha will acknowledge it as an offering equal to peeling off their skin.

Since your unlined robe has been offered to the Buddhas of the 69,384 characters that make up the Lotus Sutra, it is 69,384 robes. And since every one of these 69,384 Buddhas is made up of the 69,384 sutra characters, it is as though you had offered that many robes to each of them. To illustrate, if a spark as small as a bean is set to a single blade of grass in a spring field of a thousand square *ri* thick with grass, it becomes in an instant an immeasurable, boundless blaze. Such is also the case with this robe. Though only one robe, it has been offered to the Buddhas of all the characters of the Lotus Sutra.

Be firmly convinced that the benefits from this will extend to your parents, your grandparents, nay, even to countless living beings, not to mention your own husband, whom you hold most dear.

Nichiren

The twenty-fifth day of the fifth month

Reply to the lady of Sajiki



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the fifth month of the first year of Kenji (1275) and addressed to a woman who was a follower of Nichiren Daishonin living at Sajiki in Kamakura. She is said to have been the wife of Indo Saburo Saemon Sukenobu, or related to Nissho, one of the Daishonin's six senior disciples. Very little exists in the way of reliable data about her.

The recipient of this letter had kindly made a robe for the Daishonin to wear in summer. At this time he was living in a small dwelling at the foot of Mount Minobu, and enduring many privations. In this letter, after express-

ing his gratitude for the robe, Nichiren Daishonin explains the significance and benefit of the offering and praises his follower's faith.

The opening paragraph reflects the society of feudal Japan, when women had little independence and their fortunes were largely determined by their husband. Since the lady of Sajiki's husband was a believer in the Daishonin's Buddhism, the Daishonin says she has thus formed a connection with the Lotus Sutra and will be able to attain Buddhahood. What he praises, however, is the self-motivated faith that prompted her to make and offer him a robe.

Notes

1. Hyoe no Saemon probably refers to Indo Saburo Saemon Sukenobu, a follower of the Daishonin, who is thought to have been the husband of this letter's recipient.

2. An unlined robe for summer use, made of hemp cloth or crinkled silk.

3. Reference is to the story of the ascetic Aspiration for the Law (*see* Glossary).