

## Letter to the Lay Nun of Ko



I HAVE received three hundred coins from the wife of Abutsu-bo. Since you two are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together.

I have also received the unlined robe you sent all the way from the province of Sado to the mountain recesses of Hakiri Village in Kai Province. The “Teacher of the Law” chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: “If there is someone who seeks the Buddha way and for the space of a kalpa presses palms together in my presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these praises of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable blessings. And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra, one’s good fortune will be even greater.” This passage means that the blessings from making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law surpass those from earnestly making offerings with one’s words, thoughts, and deeds for the space of an entire medium kalpa to a Buddha such as Shakyamuni. Though this seems impossible, you must never doubt it, because these are the Buddha’s golden words.

In addition, a man called the Great Teacher Miao-lo further clarified this passage from the sutra, saying, “Those who slander [the practitioners of the

Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split into seven pieces, but those who give alms to them will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles.”<sup>1</sup> The meaning of this commentary is that the blessings from making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age exceed even those from making offerings to a Thus Come One endowed with the ten honorable titles, while those who persecute a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the defiled age will have their heads split into seven pieces.

I, Nichiren, am the most perverse person in Japan. The reason is as follows. The seven reigns of the heavenly deities I will set aside, and the five reigns of the earthly deities are beyond my comprehension, but for the ninety reigns from the first human emperor Jimmu until the present, or during the period of more than seven hundred years since the reign of Emperor Kimmei, no one has ever been so universally hated by people in connection with either secular or Buddhist matters as Nichiren. Moriya burned down temples and pagodas, and the lay priest Kiyomori had Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples destroyed,<sup>2</sup> but the people of their clans did not hate them. Masakado and Sadato<sup>3</sup> rebelled against the imperial court, and the Great Teacher Dengyo was detested by the priests of the seven major temples of Nara, but they were

still not hated by the priests, nuns, laymen, and laywomen of the entire land of Japan. In my case, however, parents, siblings, teachers, and fellow priests—every single person from the ruler on down to the common people—torment me as if I were their parents' enemy, or even more than if I were a rebel or a robber.

Thus, sometimes I have been vilified by several hundred people; other times, besieged by several thousand, I have been attacked with swords and staves. I have been driven from my dwelling and ousted from my province. Finally, I twice incurred the wrath of the country's ruler and was exiled first to the province of Izu and then to the island of Sado. And when, with neither provisions to sustain my life nor even garments made of wisteria vine to cover my body, I was banished to Sado in the northern sea, the priests and lay believers of that province hated me even more than the men and women of Sagami Province<sup>4</sup> did. Abandoned in the wilderness and exposed to the snow, I sustained my life by plucking grasses.

I realized through my own experiences what it was like for Su Wu, who survived by eating snow in the land of the northern barbarians for nineteen years, and for Li Ling, who suffered in a rocky cave by the northern sea for six years. This was not because of any fault of my own, but solely because I

meant to save the country of Japan.

While I was there, however, you and your husband, the lay priest of Ko, being apprehensive of the eyes of others, brought me food in the middle of the night. Never fearing even punishment from the provincial officials, you are persons who were ready to sacrifice yourselves for me. Thus, though it was a harsh land, when I left, I felt as if the hair that had been shaved from my head were being tugged from behind and as if with each step I took I were being pulled back.

Just when I was wondering what sort of karmic bonds from the past this was due to, and when I least expected it, you sent your most precious husband as your messenger all the way here. Is it a dream or an illusion? Even though I cannot see you, I am certain that your heart is here. If you find that you miss me, always look at the sun that rises [in the morning] and the moon that rises in the evening. Whatever the time, I will be reflected in the sun and the moon. And in our next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the sixth month

To the lay nun of Ko in Sado Province



## Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the sixth month of the first year of Kenji (1275) to a lay nun who lived in a village that was the seat of the provincial government of Sado Island. Ko means provincial office. Hence the name “the lay nun of Ko.” While the Daishonin was in exile on Sado, she

and her husband, known as the lay priest of Ko, converted to his teachings, presented him with offerings, and helped protect him. After the Daishonin was pardoned and left Sado, her husband, like Abutsu-bo, made the long journey to Minobu to visit him.

## Notes

1. A rephrasing of a passage in *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* The ten honorable titles are the ten epithets for a Buddha, which express his power, wisdom, virtue, and compassion.

2. Moriya is Mononobe no Moriya (d. 587), a powerful minister who opposed the introduction of Buddhism. Kiyomori is Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181), warrior and leader of the Heike clan. In 1177 he uncovered a plot against the Heike clan in Nara

and had Taira no Shigehira raze Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji as punishment for their support of the conspirators.

3. Masakado is Taira no Masakado (d. 940), a warrior who wielded power in eastern Japan, and Sadato is Abe no Sadato (1019–1062), the head of a powerful family in eastern Japan. They both were killed in a battle with the imperial forces.

4. The province where Kamakura, the seat of the warrior government, was located.