

The Blessings of the Lotus Sutra



I HAVE received the five thousand blue-duck coins¹ you sent. The first of the five precepts is not to take life, and the first of the six paramitas is that of almsgiving. The ten good precepts, the two hundred and fifty precepts, the ten major precepts, and all the other rules of conduct begin with the prohibition against the taking of life.

Every being, from the highest sage on down to the smallest mosquito or gnat, holds life to be its most precious possession. To deprive a being of life is to commit the gravest kind of sin.

When the Thus Come One appeared in this world, he made compassion for living things his basis. And as an expression of compassion for life, to refrain from taking life and to provide sustenance for living beings are the most important precepts.

In providing another with sustenance, one obtains three kinds of benefit. First, one sustains one's own life. Second, one brings color to one's face. Third, one gains strength.

"To sustain one's own life" means to be born in the human or heavenly world and receive the karmic reward of long life. When one becomes a Buddha, one manifests oneself as the Thus Come One of the Dharma body, a body that is as vast as space.

Because one "gains strength," having been born in the human or heavenly

world, one becomes a person of virtue and influence, attracting many followers. When one becomes a Buddha, one manifests oneself as the Thus Come One of the reward body, dwelling on a lotus pedestal where one shines like the full moon in a clear sky on the fifteenth night of the eighth month.

And because one "brings color to one's face," having been born in the human or heavenly world, one acquires the thirty-two features and becomes as graceful and dignified as a lotus flower. When one becomes a Buddha, one displays oneself as the Thus Come One of the manifested body and comes to resemble Shakyamuni Buddha.

If we inquire into the origin of Mount Sumeru, we find that it began with a single speck of dust; and likewise, the great ocean began with a single drop of dew. One added to one becomes two, two becomes three, and so on to make ten, a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, or an *asamkhya*. Yet "one" is the mother of all.

As for the beginning of Buddhism in the country of Japan: After the seven reigns of the heavenly deities and the five reigns of the earthly deities, the hundred reigns of human sovereigns began, the first of whom was called Emperor Jimmu. In the time of Emperor Kimmei, the thirtieth sovereign

following Jimmu, the Buddhist scriptures were introduced to Japan from the kingdom of Paekche, along with a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha, priests, and nuns.

Then Prince Jogu, a son of Emperor Yomei, began to study the Buddhist writings. He had a copy of the Lotus Sutra brought from China, wrote a commentary on the text, and endeavored to propagate its teachings.

Later, in the time of Emperor Kōtoku, the thirty-seventh sovereign, the Administrator of Priests Kanroku introduced the Three Treatises and Establishment of Truth schools from the kingdom of Silla to Japan. During the same period a priest named Dosho introduced the Dharma Characteristics and Dharma Analysis Treasury schools from China, and the Preceptor Shinjo introduced the Flower Garland school.

In the reign of Empress Gensho, the forty-fourth sovereign, an honorable monk² from India introduced the Mahavairochana Sutra, and in the time of Emperor Shomu, the forty-fifth sovereign, the Reverend Ganjin came from China, introducing the Precepts school to Japan. At the same time, he brought with him copies of *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, *Great Concentration and Insight*, commentaries on the Vimalakirti Sutra, and other works of the T'ien-t'ai school. But he did not propagate the teachings of the True Word and [T'ien-t'ai] Lotus schools.

In the reign of Emperor Kammu, the fiftieth sovereign, there was a young priest named Saicho, who was later to be known as the Great Teacher Dengyo. Before going to T'ang China, he spent fifteen years studying on his own the writings and commentaries of the True Word and T'ien-t'ai schools. Later, in the seventh month of the twenty-third year of the Enryaku era (804), he sailed for China. He returned to Japan in the sixth month of the fol-

lowing year, and thereafter instructed several dozen learned priests of the seven major temples of Nara in the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai and True Word schools.

Four hundred years have passed since then. In all, it has been more than seven hundred years since Buddhism was first introduced to Japan. During that time, there have been persons who urged the populace to call upon the name of Amida, to call upon the name of Mahavairochana, or to invoke the name of Shakyamuni. But there has never been anyone who urged them to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the daimoku, or title, of the Lotus Sutra.

This does not apply to Japan alone. In India, in the thousand years following the passing of the Buddha, there were great scholars such as Mahakashyapa, Ananda, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Asanga, and Vasubandhu who worked to propagate Buddhism throughout the five regions of India. And in the first several hundred years after Buddhism was introduced to China, people such as Kashyapa Mantanga, Chu Fa-lan, the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva, Nan-yüeh, T'ien-t'ai, and Miao-lo wrote commentaries and expounded the teachings of the sutras. But none of these persons ever urged that the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra be chanted in the same manner as the name of Amida. They only chanted it themselves, or, when lecturing on the Lotus Sutra, the lecturer himself alone recited it.

The teachings of the eight schools and the nine schools³ differ from one another, yet generally speaking, we find that, in the majority of cases, the founders and leaders of these schools recited the name of Amida. Next in number were those who recited the name of Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and next those who invoked the name of Shakyamuni Buddha, followed by those who called upon the

name of Mahavairochana, Medicine Master, or others. But for some reason there were none who chanted the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, the heart and core of the Buddha's entire lifetime of teachings.

You should inquire very carefully into the reason why this was so. A skilled physician, for example, may discern the causes of all kinds of illnesses as well as the relative efficacy of various medicines, but nevertheless refrains from indiscriminately applying the most powerful medicine and instead employs other medicines, depending upon the nature of the illness. Thus perhaps it was because, during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law following the Buddha's passing, the sickness of delusion had not yet become critical, and therefore no one urged that the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo, the finest medicine in all the Buddha's lifetime of teachings, be applied. But now we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and people are all suffering from grave illness. This illness can hardly be cured by such minor medicines as invocations to Amida, Mahavairochana, or Shakyamuni.

Though the moon is beautiful, the full splendor of its light can only be seen in autumn. Though the cherry blossoms are lovely, they open only in spring. All things depend on the time. Since that is so, may we not suppose that, during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law, the time had not yet come for the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra to spread?

Again, it is the Buddha's messengers who propagate his teachings. These disciples of the Buddha have different doctrines that they received from him. Thus, the scholars who appeared during the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law and the teachers who appeared during the thousand years of the Middle Day of the Law were in most cases persons who had been en-

trusted with Hinayana or provisional Mahayana doctrines, or with the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra or other ancillary doctrines. Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who is entrusted with the daimoku, the core of the essential teaching, had not yet appeared in the world.

But now he will appear in the Latter Day of the Law and propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo to all the nations and people throughout Jambudvīpa. Surely it will spread just as the invocation of Amida's name has spread throughout Japan at the present time.

I, Nichiren, am not the founder of any school, nor am I a latter-day follower of any older school. I am a priest without precepts, neither keeping the precepts nor breaking them. I am an ordinary creature like an ox or a sheep, who is neither particularly wise nor ignorant.

Why did I first begin to chant as I do? Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the one destined to make his advent in this world to propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo. But before he had even appeared, I began, as though speaking in a dream, hardly aware of what I was doing, to utter the words Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, and so I chant them now. In the end, is this a good thing I do, or a bad thing? I do not know, nor can anyone else tell for certain.

But when I open the Lotus Sutra and reverently peruse it, I see that even the bodhisattvas Manjushri, Maitreya, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, and Universal Worthy, who had reached the stage of near-perfect enlightenment, were scarcely able to uphold so much as a single phrase or verse of this sutra, because the sutra itself states that it can "only be understood and shared between Buddhas."⁴

The Flower Garland Sutra represents the first exposition of the sudden

teaching preached immediately following the Buddha's enlightenment. It is a sutra that embodies the complete and perfect teaching; yet it was entrusted to four bodhisattvas, including Dharma Wisdom, to expound.⁵ The Wisdom sutras, though not on the same level as the Flower Garland Sutra, nevertheless represent the loftiest among the other sutras that the Buddha had preached thus far. And yet Subhuti was the one entrusted with the task of expounding them.

Only the Lotus Sutra represents the wonderful teaching preached directly from the golden mouth of Shakyamuni Buddha, who is perfectly endowed with the three bodies. Therefore, even Universal Worthy and Manjushri were hardly able to expound so much as a single phrase or verse of it. How much more difficult then must it be for us, who are no more than ordinary people living in this latter age, to embrace even one or two words of this sutra!

Because the founders of the various schools read the Lotus Sutra, their respective disciples all assumed that their own teacher had grasped the sutra's heart. However, if we look carefully into the essence of the matter, we find that the Great Teacher Tz'u-en read the Lotus Sutra while making the *Profound Secrets Sutra* and *The Treatise on the Consciousness-Only Doctrine* his teachers, and the Great Teacher Chia-hsiang read the Lotus Sutra while making the Wisdom sutras and *The Treatise on the Middle Way* his teachers. Men like Tu-shun and Fa-tsang read the Lotus Sutra while making the Flower Garland Sutra and *The Commentary on the Ten Stages Sutra* their teachers. And Shan-wu-wei, Chin-kang-chih, and Pu-k'ung read the Lotus Sutra while making the Mahavairocana Sutra their teacher. All these men thought that they had read the Lotus Sutra. But in fact they had not read so much as a single phrase or verse of it.

In the end, it is as the Great Teacher Dengyo meant when he said, "Though he praises the Lotus Sutra, he destroys its heart."⁶ They were like non-Buddhist believers who, though they read the Buddhist sutras, interpret them to be the same as non-Buddhist teachings; or like bats that, in their blindness, mistake day for night. Or they were like a red-faced man who, looking into a clear mirror, supposes that the whole mirror has turned red, or like a round-faced man who, seeing his reflection in a narrow sword blade, thinks that his face has become long and thin.

But I am different from such persons. I firmly uphold the teaching that the Lotus Sutra is supreme among the sutras the Buddha has preached, now preaches, and will preach.⁷ Moreover, I chant the daimoku, which is the heart and core of the entire sutra, and I urge others to do likewise. Although the mugwort growing in a hemp field or wood marked for cutting with an inked line⁸ may not be straight to begin with, they will as a matter of course become so.

In the same way, one who chants the daimoku as the Lotus Sutra teaches will never have a twisted mind. For one should know that, unless the mind of the Buddha enters into our bodies, we cannot in fact chant the daimoku.

The Buddhist teachings that have been disseminated by others are in all cases those that have been learned and received from their respective teachers. It is like the case of fiefs possessed by immediate vassals of the ruling house of Kamakura, or estates administered by the stewards of the districts. Though their lands may measure no more than one or two *cho*, in all cases they received them through the favor of the late shogun.⁹ How much more indebted to him are those whose holdings measure a hundred *cho*, a thousand *cho*, a whole province, or two whole provinces!

One who carries on the doctrines of a good teacher is called a worthy. One who realizes the truth for oneself without the aid of a teacher is called a sage. In the lands of India, China, and Japan since the passing of the Buddha, there have been two sages. They were T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo. These two men deserve to be called sages.

They also deserve to be called worthies. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai carried on the doctrines of Nan-yüeh; in that sense he was a worthy. But he also realized the supreme vehicle of Buddhahood by himself at the place of meditation; in this sense he was a sage.

Similarly, the Great Teacher Dengyo received instruction in the teachings on the practice of concentration and insight and on the great precepts of perfect and immediate enlightenment from his teachers Tao-sui and Hsing-man. In that sense he was a worthy. But even before he journeyed to China, while still in Japan, he had already understood and mastered all the doctrines of the True Word and the Concentration and Insight [T'ien-t'ai] schools without the aid of a teacher, and had come to realize that the wisdom of the T'ien-t'ai school surpassed that of the six or the seven schools. In this sense he was a sage.

So it is that one of the Confucian classics declares, "Those who are born with an understanding of this are the highest. ('Highest' indicates a sage.) Those who study and thereby reach this understanding are the next. ('Next' indicates a worthy.)"¹⁰ And one of the Buddhist sutras contains the passage, "In my religious practices, I am without the aid of a teacher."¹¹

Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, is the foremost sage of this saha world. T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo were both sages as well as worthies. Ashvaghosha and Nagarjuna, Asanga and Vasubandhu, and Lao Tzu and Confucius were all both sages and worthies of either the Hinayana teachings, the provisional Ma-

hayana teachings, or the non-Buddhist teachings; however, none of them was a sage or worthy of the Lotus Sutra.

Now I am neither a sage nor a worthy man; I neither adhere to the precepts, nor am I without precepts; I neither possess wisdom nor lack it. Nevertheless, I was born some 2,220 years after the Buddha's passing, in the last five-hundred-year period, when the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is destined to spread. Before any other person of the various schools—whether here in Japan or in the far-off lands of India and China—could begin to invoke the daimoku, I began chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in a loud voice and have continued to do so for more than twenty years.

During that time, I have been cursed and beaten, and at times have sustained injury. Twice I have been exiled, once I was condemned to death,¹² and the other great trials that I have suffered are too numerous to mention; I have been like a soybean tossed into a large pot of boiling water, or a large fish in a tiny puddle.

The Lotus Sutra says, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?"¹³ It also states, "It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe."¹⁴ And it says, "There will be many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill of us and will attack us with swords and staves, with rocks and tiles . . . again and again we will be banished."¹⁵

If I, Nichiren, had not been born in the land of Japan, then these passages of the sutra would have been mere words on the Buddha's part—empty of all significance. They would have been like blossoms that open but form no fruit, or like thunder that rumbles but never ushers in rain. These golden words of the Buddha would have been in vain, and the Lotus Sutra, which

speaks honestly, would have been found to be tainted with great falsehoods. When I consider all this, it seems to me that I must equal the sages T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo, and that I stand above Lao Tzu and Confucius.

In this entire country of Japan, I am the only one who has been chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. I am like the single speck of dust that marks the beginning of Mount Sumeru or the single drop of dew that spells the start of the great ocean. Probably two people, three people, ten people, a hundred people will join in chanting it, until it spreads to one province, two provinces, and all the sixty-six provinces of Japan, and reaches even to the two islands of Iki and Tsushima. Those persons who have spoken slanderously of me will in time chant in the same way; and everyone from the ruler on down to the multitude of common people will, as described in the "Supernatural Powers" chapter of the Lotus Sutra,¹⁶ chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with a single voice. Though the trees may desire to be still, the wind will not cease to blow; though we may wish for spring to linger, it must give way to summer.

Though the people of Japan think highly of the Lotus Sutra, because of their animosity toward me, the priest Nichiren, they refuse to chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. But when invaders from the great kingdom of the Mongols strike once or twice again as they did at Iki and Tsushima, attacking and killing the men and taking the women prisoner; when they battle their way as far as the capital Kyoto and the city of Kamakura, seizing the sovereign himself along with his high ministers and hundred officials, flinging them in the dirt before their oxen and horses, and violently abusing them—how then will the people of Japan be able to keep from chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo?

In the past, when I was struck several times in the face with the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra,¹⁷ I felt no resentment at it. In fact, I was actually delighted. For to be attacked in the manner described in the "Never Disparaging" chapter, to suffer assault as predicted in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter, is indeed a high and precious honor.

But how vexing such attacks must be to Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings, who inscribed an oath in the presence of the Buddha that they would not permit evil men to strike the votary of the Lotus Sutra! It would be no small matter if those who slander me were to fail to incur punishment from the heavenly deities in their present existence. Not only will those deities [who fail to punish them] be destroyed throughout past, present, and future, but even now the Buddhas are surely taking an account of their actions. And when that happens, it will be no fault of Nichiren's. Rather, by siding with those priests who slander the correct teaching, they are summoning great disaster upon themselves.

In view of all this, your sincerity in sending a gift of five strings of blue-duck coins whenever the opportunity arises truly entitles you to be known as one who propagates the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra in Japan. As first one person, then two persons, then a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, and then all the people throughout the country come to chant the daimoku, before you know it, their blessings will accrue to you. Those blessings will be like the drops of dew that gather to form the great ocean, or the specks of dust that pile up to become Mount Sumeru.

The ten demon daughters in particular have vowed to protect those who embrace the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra; it would follow that these deities

must look upon you, the Honorable Myomitsu, and your wife as a mother looks upon an only child. They will prize you as a yak cherishes its own tail, and watch over you day and night. How reassuring, how encouraging!

There is much more that I would like to say, but I do not have time to go into detail. Please explain these things carefully to your wife. I do not write these words merely to flatter.

The more gold is heated in the flames, the brighter will be its color; the more a sword is whetted, the sharper it will

become. And the more one praises the blessings of the Lotus Sutra, the more one's own blessings will increase. Bear in mind that the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra contain only a few passages elucidating the truth, but a great many words of praise.

Nichiren

The fifth day of the intercalary third month

Reply to the Honorable Kuwagayatsu Myomitsu



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the intercalary third month of the second year of Kenji (1276) and addressed to Myomitsu, a believer who lived at Kuwagayatsu in Kamakura. While detailed information about Myomitsu is not available, it appears that he and his wife frequently made offerings to the Daishonin at his small dwelling in the wilderness of Mount Minobu.

Around the time this letter was written, the number of converts was growing due to the propagation efforts led by Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's closest disciple, in Suruga and other provinces. In Kamakura as well, lay believers had become more active in propagation. However, as the number of new believers increased, so did government repression. But Myomitsu and his wife, with other followers centering around Shijo Kingo, maintained their sincere faith in the Daishonin's teachings.

In the beginning of this letter, Nichiren Daishonin stresses the Buddhist spirit of absolute reverence for life, and also the Buddhist practice of almsgiving, which sustains life. In response to the Honorable Myomitsu's sincere offering, he explains that by providing another

with sustenance one obtains three kinds of benefit. To "sustain one's own life," "bring color to one's face," and "gain strength" might be thought of as the benefits enjoyed by the recipient of such offerings. The Daishonin, however, interprets them as the blessings that accrue to the donor. He also correlates these blessings with the three bodies of a Buddha.

Next, the Daishonin briefly recounts the history of Buddhism in Japan and proclaims that, in the Latter Day of the Law, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, will without fail spread widely.

Nichiren Daishonin suggests in this letter that he is in fact fulfilling the mission of Bodhisattva Superior Practices entrusted by the Buddha, in that he has begun to chant and propagate Nam-myoho-renge-kyo before anyone else. He then declares that he alone reads the Lotus Sutra in a way that accords with the Buddha's spirit and intention. The Daishonin voices his conviction that the difficulties he has endured serve to verify the truth of the Lotus Sutra and also confirm that he is the true sage whose appearance in the

Latter Day of the Law was prophesied in the sutra.

In conclusion, the Daishonin declares that, although he alone has been chanting the daimoku, eventually the entire

nation will chant it, just as a single speck of dust gives rise to Mount Sumeru, or a single drop of water grows to form the sea.

Notes

1. At this time, coins had square holes in the center and were usually strung together in hundreds or thousands to form larger monetary units. Blue-duck coins were copper coins imported from Sung-dynasty China, with a square hole in the center that caused them to be likened to a duck's eye.

2. "An honorable monk" refers to the Indian monk Shan-wu-wei who first introduced the esoteric teachings to China. The tradition that Shan-wu-wei had visited Japan, mentioned in *A Brief History of Japan* and *The Genko Era Biographies of Eminent Priests*, is now considered apocryphal, though it may have been widely accepted in the Daishonin's time.

3. The nine schools here indicate the eight schools (Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, Precepts, Dharma Characteristics, Three Treatises, Flower Garland, Tendai, and True Word) plus the Zen or Pure Land school.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

5. The Flower Garland Sutra takes the form of preaching by Dharma Wisdom and other bodhisattvas.

6. *The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra*. Dengyo made this remark specifically with respect to Tz'u-en's *Praising the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra*, which praises the Lotus Sutra but interprets it in light of the doctrines of the Dharma Characteristics school.

7. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

8. It is said that mugwort in a field of hemp grows upright because it is held up by the surrounding hemp plants. "Wood marked for cutting with an inked line" means that wood is straightened when it is planed or cut by a carpenter along an inked line.

9. The late shogun refers to Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), founder and the first shogun of the Kamakura government.

10. *Analects*.

11. Possibly a rephrasing of a passage in the Nirvana Sutra.

12. The Daishonin was exiled to the Izu Peninsula and to Sado Island. "Once I was condemned to death" refers to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution of 1271, when the Daishonin narrowly escaped execution at Tatsunokuchi.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

14. *Ibid.*, chap. 14.

15. *Ibid.*, chap. 13. The phrase "with rocks and tiles" appears not in this chapter. It is an interpolation from the "Never Comparing" chapter.

16. In the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, the heavenly gods proclaim in open space that Shakyamuni is now preaching the Lotus Sutra in the saha world. On hearing this, all the beings in the ten directions face the saha world and, joining their palms in reverence, utter the words, "Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha! Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha!"

17. On the twelfth day of the ninth month, 1271, Hei no Saemon went to arrest the Daishonin at Matsubagayatsu, accompanied by his retainer Sho-bo and others. Sho-bo struck the Daishonin in the face with the scroll of the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra consists of eight volumes, each of which was wound around a wooden roller. The Daishonin accordingly interpreted this assault as "attacked with staves," one of the hardships predicted in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter, a chapter contained in the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra.