

A Warning against Begrudging One's Fief



YOUR letter dated the twenty-fifth of last month arrived at the hour of the cock (5:00–7:00 P.M.) on the twenty-seventh of the same month. On reading the official letter [ordering you to submit a written oath renouncing your faith in the Lotus Sutra] and your pledge not to write such an oath, I felt that it was as rare and as fragrant as seeing the udumbara plant in bloom and smelling the budding red sandalwood.

Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, and Mahakashyapa were great arhats who had acquired the three insights and the six transcendental powers. Moreover, they were bodhisattvas who, because of the Lotus Sutra, had attained the first stage of development and the first stage of security, that is, the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena. Yet even they deemed themselves unable to endure the great persecutions that would attend the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the saha world in the Latter Day of the Law, and declined to accept the task. How then is it possible for ordinary people in the latter age, who have not yet eradicated the three categories of illusion, to become votaries of this sutra?

Even though I myself have been able to withstand attacks with sticks of wood or tiles and stones, vilification,

and persecution by the authorities, how could people such as lay believers, who have wives and children, and are ignorant of Buddhism, possibly do the same? Perhaps they would have done better never to have believed in the first place. If they are unable to carry through with their faith to the end, and uphold it only for a short while, they will be mocked by others. So thinking, I felt pity for you. But during the repeated persecutions I suffered and throughout my two sentences of exile, you have demonstrated your resolve. Though that has been wondrous enough, I have no words sufficient to praise you for having written a pledge to carry through with your faith in the Lotus Sutra, in spite of your lord's threats and at the cost of your two fiefs.

The Buddha wondered whether even bodhisattvas like Universal Worthy and Manjushri could undertake the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age, and he therefore entrusted the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo to Superior Practices and the other three leaders of bodhisattvas who had sprung up from the earth as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds. Now, pondering the meaning of this matter, I wonder if Bodhisattva Superior Practices has taken possession of your body in order to assist me along the way. Or could it be

the design of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings?

The fact that those retainers who resent you are growing more presumptuous is definitely the result of the scheming of the priests Ryokan and Ryuzo. Should you write an oath discrediting your faith, they would only become more arrogant, and they would mention it to everyone they meet. Then my disciples in Kamakura would be hounded until not a single one remained.

It is the nature of ordinary people not to know what awaits them in the future. Those who have a full understanding of this are called worthies or sages. Passing over examples from the past, I will cite one from the present. The lord of Musashi¹ gave up both his domains and became a lay priest. I hear that ultimately he abandoned many estates, forsook his sons and daughters as well as his wife, and secluded himself from the world. You have neither sons nor reliable brothers. You have only your two fiefs. This life is like a dream. One cannot be sure that one will live until tomorrow. However wretched a beggar you might become, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra. Since it will be the same in any event, do not betray grief. Just as you have written in your letter, you must act and speak without the least servility. If you try to curry favor, the situation will only worsen. Even if your fiefs should be confiscated or you yourself driven out, you must think that it is due to the workings of the ten demon daughters, and wholeheartedly entrust yourself to them.

Had I not been exiled, but remained in Kamakura, I would certainly have been killed in the battle.² In like manner, since remaining in your lord's service will likely be to your detriment, this may well be the design of Shakyamuni Buddha.

I have written a petition³ on your behalf. Although there are several priests

there [in Kamakura], as they are too unreliable, I was thinking of sending Sammi-bo. However, since he has still not recovered from his illness, I am sending this other priest⁴ in his stead. Have either Daigaku Saburo, Taki no Taro, or Toki⁵ make a clean copy of it when he has time, and present it to your lord. If you can do that, the matter will be resolved. You need not be in a great hurry; rather, make preparations quietly within your lord's clan. As for the others, let them clamor against you far and wide. Then, if you submit the petition, it may spread throughout Kamakura, and perhaps even reach the regent himself. This would be misfortune changing into fortune.

I explained the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to you before. Matters of minor importance arise from good, but when it comes to a matter of great importance, great disaster without fail changes into great fortune. When people read this petition, their errors will surely come to light. You have only to speak briefly. Say rebukingly, "I will neither leave my lord's clan nor return my fief of my own accord. If my lord should confiscate it, I will regard it as an offering to the Lotus Sutra and a blessing."

You must in no way behave in a servile fashion toward the magistrate.⁶ Tell him, "These fiefs were not bestowed upon me by my lord. They were awarded to me because I saved his life with the medicine of the Lotus Sutra when he was seriously ill. If he takes them from me, his illness will surely return. At that time, even if he should apologize to me, I will not accept it." Having said so, take your leave in an abrupt manner.

Avoid all gatherings. Maintain a strict guard at night. Be on good terms with the night watchmen⁷ and make use of them. You should always be in company with them. If you are not ousted this time, the chances are nine to one that your fellow samurai will

make an attempt on your life. No matter what, be sure not to die a shameful death.

Nichiren

The seventh month in the third year of Kenji (1277), cyclical sign *hinoto-ushi*

Reply to Shijo Kingo



Background

This letter was written at Minobu, when the Daishonin was fifty-six years old, and sent to Shijo Kingo in Kamakura. Kingo served the Ema family, a branch of the ruling Hojo clan, and was well versed in both medicine and the martial arts.

In the sixth month of 1277, Shijo Kingo attended a religious debate at Kuwagayatsu in Kamakura at which Sammi-bo, a disciple of the Daishonin, defeated Ryuzo-bo, a protégé of Ryo-kan. Other retainers of Lord Ema, jealous of Kingo, reported falsely to the lord that Kingo had forcibly disrupted the debate. As a result, Lord Ema threatened to confiscate Kingo's fief. When Kingo received an official letter from Lord Ema after the Kuwagayatsu Debate ordering him to write an oath forsaking his faith in the Lotus Sutra, he sent the letter to the Daishonin at Minobu, along with a letter of his own in which he pledged never to write such an oath.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the pres-

ent letter in reply to encourage Kingo and also sent him a petition addressed to Lord Ema in which he defended Kingo and praised the faithful service that he had rendered his lord. This petition is entitled *The Letter of Petition from Yorimoto*. (Yorimoto was part of Shijo Kingo's full name.) Not long after that, Lord Ema fell ill. Eventually, he had no choice but to ask Kingo for help. He recovered under Kingo's treatment and thereafter placed renewed trust in him. Later, Shijo Kingo received from him an estate three times larger than the one he already held.

In this letter, the Daishonin states, "However wretched a beggar you might become, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra," and defines a basic attitude in faith: No matter what social position one occupies or adversity one faces, it is vital to continue in faith, never compromising one's integrity as a votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Notes

1. Hojo Yoshimasa (1242–1281). He held various positions in the Kamakura government and in 1276 became cosigner to the regent Hojo Tokimune. "Both his domains" refers here to Suruga and Musashi provinces.

2. Reference is probably to the conflict that broke out in the second month of 1272 between the regent Hojo Tokimune and his elder half brother Hojo Tokisuke.

3. The petition, known as *The Letter of Petition from Yorimoto*, that the Daishonin

wrote to Lord Ema on Shijo Kingo's behalf in the sixth month of 1277. The petition was apparently never submitted to Lord Ema.

4. The identity of "this other priest" is unknown.

5. Daigaku Saburo (1202–1286), also called Hiki Yoshimoto, was an official teacher of Confucianism for the Kamakura shogunate. He is said to have converted to the Daishonin's teachings upon reading a draft of *On Establishing the Correct Teaching*

for the Peace of the Land. Taki no Taro is also said to have been a teacher of Confucianism, but little is known about him except that he was a follower of the Daishonin. Toki, or Toki Jonin, served as a retainer to Lord Chiba, the constable of Shimosa Province, and was one of the Daishonin's leading disciples in Shimosa. He was a man of considerable learning, and the Daishonin entrusted him with many of his most important works.

6. The magistrate was an administrative official who carried out the orders of his superior. In this case, the official who would have been assigned to carry out Lord Ema's orders.

7. The night watchmen are thought to have been Shijo Kingo's escorts, who lived in his residence. Their estates had been confiscated because of their belief in the Daishonin's teachings. One opinion has it that they were Shijo Kingo's younger brothers.