

The Three Kinds of Treasure



I HAVE received various articles from your messenger, including a white quilted robe and a string of coins, and the goods mentioned in Toki's letter.¹ The persimmons, pears, and fresh and dried seaweed are particularly welcome.

I am most grieved over your lord's illness. Although he has not professed faith in the Lotus Sutra, you are a member of his clan, and it is thanks to his consideration that you are able to make offerings to the sutra. Thus, these may become prayers solely for your lord's recovery. Think of a small tree under a large one, or grass by a great river. Though they do not receive rain or water directly, they nonetheless thrive, partaking of dew from the large tree or drawing moisture from the river. The same holds true with the relationship between you and your lord. To give another example, King Ajatashatru was an enemy of the Buddha. But because Jivaka, a minister in the king's court, believed in the Buddha and continually made offerings to him, the blessings accruing from his actions are said to have returned to Ajatashatru.

Buddhism teaches that, when the Buddha nature manifests itself from within, it will receive protection from without. This is one of its fundamental principles. The Lotus Sutra says, "I have profound reverence for you."² The Nirvana Sutra states, "All living beings

alike possess the Buddha nature." Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha's *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* says, "Because the true abiding Law invariably permeates one's life and exerts its influence, illusions are instantly extinguished, and the Dharma body manifests itself." Bodhisattva Maitreya's *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice* contains a similar statement. What is hidden turns into manifest virtue.

The heavenly devil knew about this from before, and he therefore possessed your colleagues, causing them to invent that preposterous lie³ in order to prevent you from making offerings to the Lotus Sutra. Since your faith is profound, however, the ten demon daughters must have come to your aid and caused your lord's illness. He does not regard you as his enemy, but since he once acted against you by giving credit to the false accusations of your colleagues, he has become seriously ill, and the malady persists.

Ryuzo-bo, whom these people count on as their pillar of strength, has already been toppled, and those who spoke falsely of you have contracted the same disease as your lord. Because Ryokan is guilty of a much graver offense, it is more than likely that he will meet with or cause a bad accident. Surely he will not escape unharmed.

As things stand now, I have a feeling

you are in danger. Your enemies are sure to make an attempt on your life. In backgammon, if two stones of the same color are placed side by side, they cannot be hit by an opposing stone. A cart, as long as it has two wheels, does not lurch all over the road. Likewise, if two men go together, an enemy hesitates to attack. Therefore, no matter what faults you may find with your younger brothers, do not let them leave you alone even for a moment.

Your face bears definite signs of a hot temper. But you should know that the heavenly gods will not protect a short-tempered person, however important they may think he or she is. If you should be killed, even though you might attain Buddhahood, your enemies would be delighted, but we would feel only grief. This would indeed be regrettable. While your foes busy themselves plotting against you, your lord places greater confidence in you than before. Therefore, although they appear to have quieted down, inwardly they are no doubt seething with hate. So you should at all times behave unobtrusively in their presence. Pay greater respect to the other retainers of the clan than you have in the past. For the time being, when the sons of members of the Hojo clan are visiting your lord, refrain from calling on him, even if he should summon you.

If the worst should happen and your lord should die, your enemies would become masterless and would have nowhere to turn, though they do not seem to consider that fact. Unreasonable as they are, when they see you report to work more and more frequently, their hearts are bound to be fired with jealousy and their breath to come in pants.

If those sons of the Hojo clan or the wives of those in power should inquire about your lord's illness, no matter who the person may be, get down on your knees, place your hands properly, and

reply thus: "His malady is entirely beyond my poor skill to cure. But no matter how often I decline, he insists that I treat him. Since I am in his service, I cannot help but do as he says." Leave your sidelocks uncombed, and refrain from wearing well-starched court dress, bright quilted robes, or other colorful clothing. Be patient, and continue in this way for the time being.

Probably you are well aware of it, but let me cite the Buddha's prediction about what the latter age will be like. In essence he states: "It will be a muddied age in which even sages will find it difficult to live. They will be like stones in a great fire, which for a while seem to endure the heat but finally char and crumble into ashes. Worthy persons will advocate the five constant virtues, but they themselves will find it hard to practice them." Thus the saying goes, "Do not remain in the seat of honor too long."

Many people have plotted to undo you, but you have avoided their intrigues and emerged victorious. Should you lose your composure now and fall into their trap, you will be, as people say, like a boatman who rows his boat with all his might only to have it capsize just before he reaches the shore, or like a person who is served no hot water at the end of his meal.

While you are in your lord's residence, if you stay in the room assigned to you, nothing will happen. But on your way to work at dawn or returning from it at dusk, your enemies are bound to be lying in wait for you. Also, be very careful in and around your house in case someone should be hiding beside the double doors, inside the family sanctuary, under the floor, or in the space above the ceiling. This time your foes will use even more cunning in their plots than before. In the end, no one will be more dependable in an emergency than the night watchmen of Egara⁴ in Kamakura. However

disagreeable it may be to you, you should associate with them amicably.

Yoshitsune found it utterly impossible to defeat the Heike until he won Shigeyoshi over to his side and in that way vanquished the rival clan.⁵ The shogun [Minamoto no Yoritomo] sought to take revenge on Osada for his father's death, but he would not behead the murderer until after he had conquered the Heike.⁶ It is even more vital for you to ally yourself with the four night watchmen. The dwellings they had earned by risking their lives were confiscated by their lord because of the Lotus Sutra, and more directly, because of Nichiren. Be considerate of those who believe in Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra, no matter what they may have done in the past. Moreover, if they frequent your house, your enemies will be afraid to attack you at night. It is not as if they were trying to avenge their father's murder; certainly they do not want their plot to come out into the open. Against those who seek to avoid the eyes of others, there are no warriors as dependable as they are. Always maintain friendly relations with them. But since you are hot-tempered by nature, you might not take my advice. In that case, it will be beyond the power of my prayers to save you.

Ryuzo-bo and your elder brother plotted evil against you. Therefore, the heavenly gods so contrived it that the situation would develop exactly as you wished. Then how can you now dare to go against the wish of the heavenly gods? Even if you had accumulated a thousand or ten thousand treasures, of what use would they be if your lord should forsake you? He already looks to you as if you were his own parent, following you as water follows the shape of its container, longing for you as a calf longs for its mother, and relying on you as an elderly person relies on his staff. Is not his regard for you

due to the aid of the Lotus Sutra? How envious your fellow retainers must be! You must hurry and talk with these four men and report to me how the matter goes. Then I will fervently pray to the heavenly gods for your protection. I have already informed them of how deeply you grieve over your deceased father and mother. They will surely receive the utmost consideration in the presence of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief.⁷ Nor could I ever forget it in any lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offense, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there. It would be as if the moon were illuminating the darkness, as if cold water were pouring into hot, as if fire were melting ice, or as if the sun were dispelling the darkness. But if you depart from my advice even slightly, do not blame me for what may happen.

The plague that is raging at present will, as you predict, strike those in the higher ranks of society at the turn of the year. This is perhaps the design of the ten demon daughters. For the time being stay calm, and observe how things develop. And do not go around lamenting to others how hard it is for you to live in this world. To do so is an act utterly unbecoming to a worthy man. If a man behaves in this way, then after he dies, his wife, overcome with sorrow at losing her husband, will tell other people about the shameful things he did, though she has no real intention of doing so. And that will in no way be her fault, but solely the result of his own reprehensible behavior.

It is rare to be born a human being. The number of those endowed with human life is as small as the amount of earth one can place on a fingernail. Life as a human being is hard to sustain—as hard as it is for the dew to remain on the grass. But it is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace. Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people. More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!

I would like to relate an incident that is customarily kept secret.⁸ In the history of Japan, there have been two emperors who were assassinated. One of them was Emperor Sushun. He was a son of Emperor Kimmei and an uncle of Prince Shotoku. One day during his reign as the thirty-third sovereign, he summoned Prince Shotoku and said, "We hear that you are a man of sacred wisdom. Examine Our physiognomy and tell Us what you see there!" The prince declined three times, but the emperor insisted that he obey the imperial command. Finally, no longer able to refuse, the prince reverently examined Sushun's physiognomy and then reported, "Your Majesty's countenance indicates that you will be assassinated."

The emperor's complexion changed color. "What evidence do you have to support such a contention?" he asked. The prince replied, "I see red veins running over your eyes. This is a sign that you will incur the enmity of others." Thereupon the emperor asked, "How can We escape this fate?" The prince said: "It is difficult to evade. But there are soldiers known as the five

constant virtues. As long as you keep these warriors on your side, you will be safe from danger. In the Buddhist scriptures these soldiers are referred to as the 'practice of forbearance,' one of the six paramitas."

For some time after that, Emperor Sushun faithfully observed the practice of forbearance. But, being irascible by nature, he violated the precept one day when one of his subjects presented him with a young wild boar. He withdrew the metal rod that was attached to his sword scabbard and stabbed the boar in the eyes with it, saying, "One of these days this is what We will do to that fellow We hate!" Prince Shotoku, who happened to be present, exclaimed, "Ah, what a fearful thing to do! Your Majesty will surely arouse the enmity of others. These very words you have spoken will be the sword that wounds you." The prince then ordered articles of value to be brought out and divided among those who had heard the emperor's remark, [hoping to buy their silence]. One of them, however, told the Great Minister Soga no Umako about the episode. Umako, believing that he was the one the emperor hated, won over Atai Goma, the son of Azumanoaya no Atai Iwai, and had him kill the emperor.⁹

Thus even a ruler on a throne must take care not to give unreserved expression to his thoughts. The worthy man Confucius held to his belief "Nine thoughts to one word,"¹⁰ which means that he reconsidered nine times before he spoke. Tan, the Duke of Chou, was so earnest in receiving callers that he would wring out his hair three times in the course of washing it, or spit out his food three times in the course of a meal [in order not to keep them waiting]. Consider this carefully so that you will have no cause to reproach me later. What is called Buddhism is found in this behavior.

The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of

teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the “Never Disparaging” chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being.

Respectfully.



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the ninth month of 1277 and addressed to Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo Yorimoto, commonly known as Shijo Kingo, in Kamakura. Sometime around 1274, Shijo Kingo had begun making efforts to convert his lord, who was named Ema, to the Daishonin’s teachings. Lord Ema, however, did not respond positively. Instead, he reduced the size of Kingo’s landholdings and threatened to send him to the remote province of Echigo. Kingo’s colleagues spread scurrilous reports about him, and Kingo was accused of fomenting trouble at a debate in the sixth month of 1277, during which the Tendai priest Ryuzo-bo was bested by the Daishonin’s disciple Sammi-bo.

Nichiren Daishonin cautions Shijo Kingo and instructs him on the best course of behavior in his trying circumstances. Later that year Lord Ema fell ill, and Kingo, applying his medical skills, helped cure him. The lord was most grateful and in 1278 restored,

The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals.

Nichiren

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

Reply to Shijo Saemon-no-jo

and later even increased, Kingo’s landholdings.

At the outset of this letter, the Daishonin tells Kingo that he should remember his debt of gratitude to his lord, and stresses the Buddhist teaching that fundamental changes within oneself inevitably result in changes in the environment. He mentions that when he was about to be executed at Tatsunokuchi Kingo vowed to die by his side. Now Kingo is undergoing a severe ordeal and the Daishonin is exerting all his powers to protect him. The Daishonin says that, since Kingo was fortunate enough to have been born human and encountered the true teaching, he should accumulate “the treasures of the heart” and win the respect of others. Finally, through historical references to Emperor Sushun and others, the Daishonin teaches Kingo that as a Buddhist he should conduct his daily life admirably and be considerate of others.

Notes

1. Toki refers to Toki Jonin, one of the Daishonin’s leading followers. He lived in Shimosa Province and served as a retainer to Lord Chiba, the constable of that province.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 20.

3. “That preposterous lie” refers to the report that Shijo Kingo’s colleagues are said to have made to Lord Ema that, in order

to embarrass the Tendai priest Ryuzo-bo, Kingo had attempted to forcibly disrupt the Kuwagayatsu Debate.

4. Egara is the name of a place in Kamakura where government buildings were located.

5. Shigeyoshi is Taguchi Shigeyoshi (n.d.), the head of a powerful family in Awa, a province on the island of Shikoku. Though he was a member of the Taira, or Heike, clan, he regularly passed information to Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), a younger half brother of Minamoto no Yoritomo, about the internal conditions of the Taira army and the weak points in their positions.

6. In 1159 Minamoto no Yoshitomo, the father of Yoritomo, led a battle against the Taira army and was defeated. Fleeing, he hid in the house of Osada Tadamune, a samurai in Owari Province in central Japan. Acting on the Taira's orders, Osada led Yoshitomo into the bath where he killed him. When Yoritomo later raised an army to fight the Taira, Tadamune and his son

sided with him, but were killed at Yoritomo's command after the fall of the Taira.

7. Reference is to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution of 1271, when the Daishonin was almost beheaded.

8. This incident is recorded in *The Chronicles of Japan*. Presumably it was not referred to openly because it involved the assassination of an emperor by one of his retainers.

9. Emperor Sushun, whose claim to rule was supported by Soga no Umako, ascended the throne in 588. But Umako had the emperor assassinated in 592 and placed his own niece on the throne as Empress Suiko. Atai Goma is also known as Azumanoaya no Atai Goma. His ancestors came to Japan from China during the reign of Emperor Ojin (late fourth to early fifth century). Goma was responsible for supervising foreign artisans. His family had great economic and political power, and was allied with the Soga clan.

10. *Analects*.