

No Safety in the Threefold World



I HAVE received the various articles you sent me. Concerned about my life in the mountains, you had your messenger make his way through the snow to call on me. Your sincerity has no doubt been recognized by the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters.

The Nirvana Sutra states, "Human life runs its course more swiftly than a mountain stream; the person here today will not likely be here tomorrow." The Maya Sutra reads, "Imagine, for instance, a flock of sheep being driven by a chandala to the slaughterhouse. Human life is exactly the same; step by step one approaches the place of death." The Lotus Sutra states, "There is no safety in the threefold world; it is like a burning house, replete with a multitude of sufferings, truly to be feared."¹

In these passages from the sutras, our compassionate father, the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, admonishes us, the ordinary people of the latter age; it is his warning to us, his ignorant children. Nevertheless, the people do not awaken for even one instant; nor do they conceive a desire to attain the way for even a single moment. In order to decorate their bodies, which, if abandoned in the fields, would be stripped naked overnight, they spend their time striving to pile up articles of clothing.

When their lives come to an end,

within three days their bodies will turn into water that washes away, into dust that mixes with the earth, and into smoke that rises up into the sky, leaving no trace behind. Nevertheless, they seek to nurture these bodies and to amass great wealth.

This principle has been known since ancient times, but today the situation is pitiable. The country of Japan has been visited by continuous famine for the last several years, and supplies of food and clothing are exhausted. The domestic animals have all been consumed, and persons who eat human flesh are appearing. They tear flesh from the bodies of the dead, children, and the sick, mix it with fish or deer meat, and sell it. People purchase this mixture and eat it. Thus, this country has unwittingly become an abode of great evil demons.

Moreover, from the spring of last year through the middle of the second month of this year, epidemics have spread throughout the country. In five families out of ten, in fifty households out of a hundred, all the members have died from disease. Others have escaped illness but are suffering from great spiritual distress, and thus are in even greater agony than those who are ill. Even the people who managed to survive have lost the children who used to follow them as closely as shadows, or

the spouses from whom they had been as inseparable as a pair of eyes, or the parents upon whom they had relied as they would upon heaven and earth. For them, what meaning does life hold? How could sensible people not abhor this world? The Buddha taught that there is no safety in the threefold world, but the current state of affairs seems excessively tragic.

Although I myself am only an ordinary person, I informed the ruler that the Buddha had left behind teachings predicting such a situation. However, he did not heed my admonitions, but rather began to persecute me even more harshly, so there was nothing further I could do. This country has already become a slanderer of the Law, and by turning into an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, it has also made itself an enemy of the Buddhas and the gods of the three existences and the ten directions.

Please consider deeply. No matter what grave crimes I, Nichiren, have been charged with, I am a votary of the Lotus Sutra. No matter what grave crimes a person who chants *Namu Amida Butsu* may be guilty of, it cannot be denied that he is a follower of the *Nembutsu*. Because I chant *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* with my own mouth, I have been reviled, struck, exiled, and had my life threatened. However, in spite of all this, I have continued to exhort others to do like-

wise. Am I not then a votary of the Lotus Sutra?

In the Lotus Sutra, it is stipulated that those who bear a grudge against its votary are destined to fall into the Avichi hell. The fourth volume states that the offense of harboring malice toward a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age is graver than that of reviling the Buddha for an entire medium kalpa.² The seventh volume teaches that people who disparage the votary will suffer in the Avichi hell for a thousand kalpas.³ The fifth volume states that after the Buddha's passing, when the Latter Day of the Law arrives, a votary of the Lotus Sutra will certainly appear, and that at that time, in that country, an immeasurably great multitude of monks who either uphold or violate the precepts will gather and denounce the votary to the ruler of the country, causing him to be banished and ruined.⁴

These passages from the sutra all coincide precisely with what has happened to me. I am therefore convinced that I will attain Buddhahood in the future. I will speak in more detail when we meet.

Nichiren

The thirteenth day of the second month in the fourth year of Kenji (1278), cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-tora*

Reply to Matsuno



Background

This letter was written from snow-bound Minobu and addressed to the lay priest Matsuno Rokuro Saemon, a follower who lived in the village of Matsuno in Ihara District of Suruga Province.

Matsuno, Nanjo Tokimitsu's grand-

father, apparently was diligent in his practice. From the several letters addressed to him, the first of which was written in the second month of 1276, it is clear that he sent frequent gifts to the Daishonin. In these letters, the Daishonin often touched on the subjects

of death, the pure land of Eagle Peak, and enlightenment. This indicates that Matsuno was probably advanced in years, and reflects the Daishonin's desire to refute any attachment Matsuno may have had to the Nembutsu doctrine of rebirth in Amida's Pure Land, a concept that was prevalent in society at the time.

In this letter, the Daishonin first stresses the transience of life and the futility of pursuing only material wealth.

Next he graphically describes the famine and disease that plagued Japan at that time, citing the country's failure to heed his warnings regarding the causes of these catastrophes and its persecution of him instead. He notes that the persecutions to which he has been subjected accord exactly with the predictions of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, he asserts, there can be no doubt that he will attain Buddhahood.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, chap. 10.

3. *Ibid.*, chap. 20.
4. *Ibid.*, chap. 13.