

## The Two Kinds of Faith



I HAVE received your offerings of yams, skewer-dried persimmons, parched rice, chestnuts, bamboo shoots, and bamboo containers of vinegar.

There was once a ruler in India named Ashoka the Great. He reigned over a quarter of the land of Jambudvīpa and, accompanied by the dragon kings,<sup>1</sup> controlled the rain at his will. He even used demons to do his bidding. At first he was a merciless ruler, but later he converted to Buddhism. He made offerings to sixty thousand monks each day and erected eighty-four thousand stone stupas. On inquiring into the previous lifetime of this great sovereign, we find that in the days of Shakyamuni Buddha there were two little boys called Virtue Victorious and Invincible who once offered the Buddha a mud pie. Because of this act of sincerity, the boy Virtue Victorious was reborn within one hundred years as King Ashoka.

The Buddha is of course respectable, but when compared with the Lotus Sutra he is like a firefly beside the sun or moon. The superiority of the Lotus Sutra to Shakyamuni Buddha is as great as the distance from heaven to earth. Presenting offerings to the Buddha produces benefits like that. How much more so is this true of the Lotus Sutra? If such a marvelous reward was brought about by the mere offering

of a mud pie, how much more will come about as a result of all your various gifts! He suffered no shortage of food, but now we are in a land where hunger prevails. Therefore how could Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the ten demon daughters possibly fail to protect you?

Today there are people who have faith in the Lotus Sutra. The belief of some is like fire while that of others is like water. When the former listen to the teachings, their passion flares up like fire, but as time goes on, they tend to discard their faith. To have faith like water means to believe continuously without ever regressing. Since you visit me constantly, regardless of the difficulties, your belief is comparable to flowing water. It is worthy of great respect!

Is it true that there is illness in your family? If so, it cannot be the work of demons. Probably the ten demon daughters are testing the strength of your faith. No demon worthy of the name would even think of troubling a votary of the sutra and having its head broken.<sup>2</sup> Persist in your faith with the firm conviction that both Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra are free from any falsehood.

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The twenty-fifth day of the second  
month

Reply [to Ueno]



## Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu to Nanjo Tokimitsu, the steward of Ueno Village in Suruga Province, in the second month of the fourth year of Kenji (1278). The previous year had been a time of turmoil. A serious drought had devastated crops, and the resulting famine brought countless hardships. In addition, an epidemic had swept the area, causing many deaths. At the same time, the threat of a second

invasion by Mongol forces contributed to a general feeling of unease.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin expresses his gratitude for Nanjo's offerings and praises him for his deep sincerity. He introduces the concept of the two kinds of faith: faith like ephemeral fire and faith like ever-flowing water. The Daishonin lauds Nanjo's faith as being like the latter.

## Notes

1. Dragons are one of the eight kinds of nonhuman beings that protect Buddhism. Not only are they believed to bring rain, but also they are said to have supernatural powers and the ability to bring about miraculous phenomena.

2. "No demon worthy of the name . . ." refers to the episode in the "Dharani" chapter of the Lotus Sutra where the ten

demon daughters and others promise the Buddha that they will protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra from decline or harm. They also declare, "If there are those who . . . trouble and disrupt the preachers of the Law, their heads will split into seven pieces like the branches of the arjaka tree." Thus no demon would think of troubling a votary of the Lotus Sutra.