

The Teaching for the Latter Day



I HAVE received the one *to* of polished rice, the horseload of yams, and the five blocks of konnyaku¹ that you took the trouble to send me.

First of all, the young lady, the daughter of the lay priest Ishikawa no Hyoe, often sent me letters, and in one that reached me on the night of the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the third month, she wrote, "When I observe the world around me, it seems that even healthy people will be unable to survive this year. I have been ill for a long time, but my illness has suddenly worsened, and I imagine that this will be my last letter to you." Has she then passed away after all?

Most people believe that those who chant *Namu Amida Butsu* at the moment of death are sure to be reborn in the Pure Land, for those are the golden words of the Buddha. For some reason, however, the Buddha regretted and reversed his statement, saying, "[In these more than forty years], I have not yet revealed the truth,"² and "Honestly discarding expedient means, [I will preach only the unsurpassed way]."³ I have been teaching as the Buddha advocated, but all Japan has become enraged and denounced my words as groundless fabrications.

There have been other occasions when the Buddha unexpectedly reversed an earlier teaching. In the Hina-

yana sutras he taught that there is no Buddha other than himself in any of the ten directions, and that living beings do not possess the Buddha nature. But in the Mahayana sutras he taught that there are Buddhas throughout the ten directions, and that the Buddha nature exists in every living being. How can there be anyone who still uses the Hinayana sutras? Everyone has since come to believe in the Mahayana sutras.

Moreover, we find that there are even more unfathomable distinctions that Shakyamuni Buddha drew between the sutras. In the Lotus Sutra, he suddenly refuted all the other sutras that he had preached, now preached, and would preach in the future, and declared that only the Lotus was true. But his disciples would not believe him. At that time, Many Treasures Buddha came to bear witness to what Shakyamuni Buddha had said, and the Buddhas of the ten directions added their testimony to his, extending their tongues until they reached the Brahma heaven.

After Many Treasures Buddha had closed the door of the treasure tower and the other Buddhas had returned to their original lands, not even Shakyamuni Buddha himself could have denied the Lotus Sutra, whatever other sutras he might have expounded in an effort to do so, because the other Bud-

dhas had all joined in affirming its truth. That is why in the Universal Worthy and Nirvana sutras, which follow the Lotus Sutra, the Lotus Sutra is praised but never disparaged.

Nonetheless, priests like Shan-wu-wei of the True Word school and the founders of the Zen school have repudiated the Lotus Sutra, and the entire Japanese nation has now taken faith in their teachings, just like those who were deceived by the rebels Masakado and Sadato. Japan is now on the brink of ruin because it has for many years been the archenemy of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in addition, the person who denounces these errors is persecuted. Because such offenses thus accumulate one atop another, our nation will soon incur the wrath of heaven.

Perhaps because of karma from past lives, or some other reason, this woman chanted Nam-myoho-rence-kyo at the moment of her death. This is as rare as the one-eyed turtle finding a suitable hollow in a floating sandalwood log, or a thread lowered from the heavens passing through the eye of a needle on earth. How wondrous!

The sutra passages clearly show that those who believe in the Nembutsu are destined to fall into the hell of incessant suffering, but since people are not aware of this, they all think that it is my own fabrication. That is what is meant by the saying that the heavens and one's eyelashes are alike. People can see neither their own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance.⁴ If my teaching were false, surely this lay nun would not have had a correct and steadfast mind at the moment of death.

Among my disciples, those who think themselves well versed in Buddhism are the ones who make errors. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the heart of the Lotus Sutra. It is like the soul of a person. To revere another teaching as its equal is to be like a consort who is married to two emperors, or who secretly commits adultery with a minister or a humble subject. It can only be a cause for disaster.

This teaching was not propagated in the Former or Middle Day of the Law because the other sutras had not yet lost their power of benefit. Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, neither the Lotus Sutra nor the other sutras lead to enlightenment. Only Nam-myoho-rence-kyo can do so. This is not my own judgment. Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, the Buddhas of the ten directions, and the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth as numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds have so determined it. To mix other practices with this Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is a grave error. A lantern is useless when the sun rises. How can dewdrops be beneficial when the rain falls? Should one feed a newborn baby anything other than its mother's milk? No addition of other medicines is needed with a good medicine. Somehow this woman remained true to this principle, and continued to uphold her faith until the last moment of her life. How admirable, how worthy!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The first day of the fourth month in
the first year of Koan (1278)

Reply to Ueno



Background

This letter was written at Minobu to Nanjo Tokimitsu, the steward of Ueno in Suruga Province and a loyal follower of the Daishonin. Nichiren Daishonin thanks Tokimitsu for the food items he has received and expresses his distress at the news of the death of the lay priest Ishikawa no Hyoe's daughter. Ishikawa was the steward of Omosu in Fuji District in Suruga Province. His wife was an elder sister of Nanjo Toki-

mitsu, and he probably took faith in the Daishonin's teachings as a result of this relationship. Thus the daughter who had passed away was Tokimitsu's niece.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin declares that the teaching that enables people to attain Buddhahood in the Latter Day of the Law is not the Lotus Sutra itself but rather Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, which is implicit in the sutra's "Life Span" chapter.

Notes

1. A jellylike food made from the root of the konnyaku plant. It is believed to eliminate poisonous substances from the body.

2. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

4. This statement is based on a passage in *Great Concentration and Insight* that describes the ignorance of ordinary people.