

Reply to Tokimitsu



I HAVE received the horseload of polished wheat and the ginger that you sent me.

While he was still living a secular life, Aniruddha, the son of King Dronodana, was a descendant of the wheel-turning king who was the true ruler of India, a grandson of King Simhahanu, and a nephew of King Shuddhodana, as well as an heir to King Dronodana. He was a person of noble descent known throughout the whole land. Moreover, his house was visited by twelve thousand people each day: six thousand came to borrow from the wealth of his family, and the other six thousand came to pay back what they owed. Not only was he this wealthy, but he later became foremost in divine insight, and the Buddha prophesied in the Lotus Sutra that he would become the Thus Come One Universal Brightness.¹

If we examine what great goodness Aniruddha performed in past existences, we find that a long time ago there was a hunter who supported himself by capturing beasts in the mountains.² He also raised millet for food, but since he lived in a time of famine, there was almost nothing to eat. As he was eating the single bowl of millet that was his only food, a sage, a pratyekabuddha named Rida, appeared and begged him for it, saying, "I have not eaten for seven days. Let me have your food."

The hunter replied, "I have put it in a vessel defiled by a common person of the secular world, and moreover I have tainted the food by starting to eat it"; but the sage said, "Just let me have it. If I do not eat now, I shall die." Though ashamed of its unworthiness, the hunter offered him the food. After eating the millet, the sage returned the bowl to the hunter, having left just one grain of millet. This millet turned into a wild boar. The wild boar changed into gold and the gold was transformed into a corpse. The corpse then changed into a man made of gold. Whenever the hunter pulled off one of the golden man's fingers and sold it, a new finger would appear in its place. Thus, for ninety-one kalpas the hunter was reborn as a wealthy man, and in his present existence he was called Aniruddha and became a disciple of the Buddha. Although it was a paltry amount of millet, because it sustained the life of a sage in a famished country, he received a wonderful reward.

The Venerable Mahakashyapa was the worthiest of all the Buddha's disciples. In terms of lineage, he was the son of the wealthy Nyagrodha of the kingdom of Magadha. The floor of his house was covered with one thousand straw mats, each seven feet thick. Even those mats of lesser quality were each worth a thousand *ryo* of gold. The

household assets included 999 plows, each worth a thousand *ryo* of gold, and sixty storehouses, each with 340 *koku* of gold inside. Such was the immensity of his wealth. His wife had a gold-colored body, which shed light to a distance of sixteen *ri*. Her beauty exceeded even that of Lady Soto'ori Hime of Japan and surpassed even that of Lady Li of China. This husband and wife conceived a desire to seek the way and became disciples of the Buddha. In the Lotus Sutra, it was predicted that the husband would become the Thus Come One Light Bright.³ If we were to inquire into the past existences of these two people, we would find that, because one had offered a bowl of wheat to a pratyekabuddha, he was later born as the Venerable Mahakashyapa. The other was a poor woman who had a sculptor of Buddhist images [Mahakashyapa in a previous existence] beat a gold coin of hers into gilding for a statue of the Buddha Vipashyin,⁴ and who later became this person's wife.⁵

Although I, Nichiren, am not a sage, I have become known as the defender of the Lotus Sutra. For this, not only have I been hated and assailed by the ruler of the country, but my disciples and even those who visit me have been

reviled or struck, or have had their fiefs confiscated, or have been driven from their dwellings. Because they live under such a ruler, even people with seeking minds do not visit me. This has been the case for some time, but this year, in particular, because of epidemics and famine, very few people have come to visit.

Just as I was thinking that, even if I remained free from illness, I would surely die of starvation, the wheat that you sent arrived. It is more wonderful than gold and more precious than jewels. Rida's millet changed into a golden man. How, then, could Tokimitsu's wheat fail to turn into the characters of the Lotus Sutra? These characters of the Lotus Sutra will become Shakyamuni Buddha and then a pair of wings for your deceased father, flying and soaring to the pure land of Eagle Peak. On returning, they will cover your body and protect you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

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

Reply to Ueno



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Nanjo Tokimitsu in 1278, while he was living at Minobu. It was written in response to an offering of wheat and ginger that Tokimitsu had sent him. From the contents of the numerous letters the Daishonin wrote to him, it is evident that Tokimitsu sent offerings every month.

During the year of this letter, Japan had been plagued by epidemics and famine. The Daishonin describes the

situation in a number of letters. In the intercalary tenth month of 1278, he spoke of this in a letter to Shijo Kingo: "I dwell in this remote mountain forest. This year was especially difficult, with widespread epidemics and famine in spring and summer, which worsened in autumn and winter" (p. 952).

In praising Tokimitsu's gift, the Daishonin cites the examples of Aniruddha and Mahakashyapa, two of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples, as well as that

of Mahakashyapa's wife, to illustrate the preciousness of sincere offerings, espe-

cially those made in times of famine and rampant disease.

Notes

1. The prophecy was made in the "Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

2. A slightly different version of this story is related in the Storehouse of Various Treasures Sutra.

3. This prediction appears in the "Bestowal of Prophecy" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

4. Vipashyin is the first of the seven Buddhas of the past (Shakyamuni and the six Buddhas said to have preceded him). The seven Buddhas are discussed in the Long Agama Sutra.

5. The story of the meritorious deeds of Mahakashyapa and his wife in their previous existences is found in *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.