

The Farther the Source, the Longer the Stream



I HAVE received one thousand coins and respectfully reported in the presence of the Lotus Sutra that this is an offering from Yorimoto.¹ I believe that, from afar, Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, and, close at hand, the gods of the sun and moon in their heavenly palaces will certainly watch over you.

If someone excels in this world, then even those who are regarded as worthies and sages, to say nothing of ordinary people, will all become jealous and bear grudges against that person. Three thousand court ladies harbored jealousy against Wang Chao-chün, the favorite of the emperor of the Han dynasty. Shakra's consorts, who numbered ninety-nine million nayuta, all envied Kaushika.² Minister Fujiwara no Saneyori bore a grudge against Imperial Prince Kaneakira, and Fujiwara no Tokihira, jealous of Sugawara no Michizane, spoke falsely of him to the emperor, causing him to be exiled.³

Consider your own situation in light of these examples. [Your lord] the lay priest Ema's domain used to be vast, but has now diminished. He has many sons who could succeed him, and there are also many retainers who have long served him. His retainers must be possessed by growing envy, just as fish become agitated when the water of

their pond decreases, or as birds vie with one another to secure branches when autumn winds begin to blow. Moreover, since you have disobeyed your lord and gone against his wishes from time to time, the calumnies made to him against you must have been all the more numerous. However, even though you have been forced to relinquish your fief time and again, in your letter you said that he has now conferred an estate upon you. This is indeed wondrous. This is precisely what is meant by the statement that unseen virtue brings about visible reward. It must have happened because of your profound sincerity in trying to lead your lord to faith in the Lotus Sutra.

King Ajatashatru, though once the Buddha's enemy, came to take faith in the Lotus Sutra at the urging of his minister Jivaka, so that he was able to prolong his life and continue his rule. King Wonderful Adornment corrected his mistaken views at the exhortation of his two sons.⁴ The same is true in your case. Lord Ema has now softened probably as a result of your admonishment. This is solely because of your deep faith in the Lotus Sutra.

The deeper the roots, the more luxuriant the branches. The farther the source, the longer the stream. All sutras other than the Lotus Sutra have shallow roots and short streams, while the Lo-

tus Sutra has deep roots and a distant source. That is why the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai stated that the Lotus Sutra would survive and spread even in the evil latter age.

Many people have taken faith in this teaching. But because great persecutions, both official and otherwise, have repeatedly befallen me, though they followed me for a year or two, all of them later either abandoned their faith or turned against the Lotus Sutra. Or if they have not given way in their practice, they have done so in their heart. Or if they have not given way in their heart, they have done so in their practice.

Shakyamuni Buddha, the heir to King Shuddhodana, was a great king who reigned over Jambudvipa's 84,210 countries. All kings of this land bowed to him, and he had a hundred thousand million servants. Nevertheless, he left the palace of King Shuddhodana at the age of nineteen and entered Mount Dandaka, where he was to carry out ascetic practices for twelve years. At that time he was attended by five men:⁵ Ajnata Kaundinya, Ashvajit, Bhadraka, Dashabala Kashyapa, and Prince Kolita. Of these five, however, two left Shakyamuni during the sixth year, while the remaining three deserted him in the next six years. Alone, Shakyamuni continued his practice and became the Buddha.

The Lotus Sutra is even more difficult to believe in than Shakyamuni, and therefore the sutra itself states that it is "the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand."⁶ Moreover, in the Latter Day of the Law, persecutions are far more frequent and intense than in the lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha. The sutra states that a votary who perseveres despite these adversities will gain benefits greater than those obtained by offering alms to the Buddha for the space of an entire kalpa.

It is now some 2,230 years since the Buddha's passing. Those who spread Buddhism in India for more than a thousand years thereafter are recorded in history without omission, and those who disseminated Buddhism in China for a thousand years and in Japan for seven hundred are also clearly listed. Very few of them, however, met persecutions as terrible as those of the Buddha. Many described themselves as sages or worthies, but not one has ever experienced the sutra's prediction: "[Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world], how much more will this be so after his passing?"⁷ Bodhisattva Nagarjuna, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyo met great persecutions for the sake of Buddhism, but none as great as those the Buddha describes in the sutra. This is because they were born before the time when the Lotus Sutra is to be spread.

We have now already entered "the last five-hundred-year period," or the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. This time period is like the sun at the summer solstice on the fifteenth day of the fifth month, or the harvest moon on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo were born too early to see it; those born after will regret that they came too late.

The main force of the enemy⁸ has already been defeated, and the remainder is no match for me. Now is the very time that the Buddha predicted: "the last five-hundred-year period," or the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, and the age indicated by the passage, "How much more will this be so after his passing?" If the Buddha's words are not false, a sage must certainly have appeared in the land of Jambudvipa. According to the sutras, the greatest war the land has ever seen will break out as a sign of this sage's advent, and since such a war⁹ has already

occurred, the sage must already have appeared in Jambudvīpa. The appearance of a legendary beast called ch'i-lin told Chinese contemporaries that Confucius was a sage, and there is no doubt that the resounding of a village shrine heralds a sage's coming. When the Buddha made his advent in this world, the growth of sandalwood trees informed his contemporaries that he was a sage. Lao Tzu was recognized as a sage because at birth the sole of one foot was marked with the Chinese character "two" and the other with the character "five."¹⁰

Then how does one recognize the sage of the Lotus Sutra in this latter age? The sutra states that one who "can preach this sutra"¹¹ or who "can uphold this sutra"¹² is "the envoy of the Thus Come One."¹³ In other words, one who embraces the eight volumes, or a single volume, chapter, or verse, of the Lotus Sutra, or who chants the daimoku, is the Thus Come One's emissary. Also, one who perseveres through great persecutions and embraces the sutra from beginning to end is the Thus Come One's emissary.

Since I am but a common mortal, my mind may not be that of the Thus Come One's envoy. However, since I have incurred the hatred of the three powerful enemies and been exiled twice, I am like the Thus Come One's envoy. Though my mind is steeped in

the three poisons and my body is that of a common mortal, because my mouth chants Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō, I am like the Thus Come One's envoy. If I seek an example in the past, I may be likened to Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. If I look at the present, I have been living the sutra's description of persecution "with swords and staves, tiles and stones."¹⁴ In the future, I will doubtless proceed to the place of enlightenment, and those who have sustained me will also dwell together in the pure land of Eagle Peak. I have many other things to tell you, but I will stop here and leave the rest for you to conclude.

The ailing acolyte has recovered, which makes me very happy. Acharya Daishin¹⁵ died exactly as you foresaw. Everyone here praises you, saying that even a latter-day Jivaka would be no match for you. I think they may well be right. We have been telling each other that your predictions about Sammi-bo and Soshiro¹⁶ have come true exactly, just as two tallies match precisely. I entrust my life to you and will consult no other physician.

Nichiren

The fifteenth day of the ninth month in the first year of Koan (1278), cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-tora*

To Shijo Kingo



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the ninth month, 1278, to Shijo Kingo, a staunch follower who was well versed in both medicine and the martial arts. In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin states, "Even though you have been forced to relinquish your fief time and again, in your letter you said that he

[Lord Ema] has now conferred an estate upon you." In a letter addressed to Kingo the next month, the Daishonin states, "So your lord has granted you new fiefs! I cannot think it to be true; it is so marvelous that I wonder if it is a dream" (p. 945). It is reasonable to assume, then, that Shijo Kingo first

reported to the Daishonin an informal notice from his lord Ema and next conveyed the official announcement. This is why the Daishonin expresses his unreserved joy in the letter of the tenth month.

Lord Ema had for several years disapproved of Kingo's belief and, prompted by false accusations made against Kingo by jealous colleagues, eventually ordered him either to abandon his faith in the Daishonin's teaching or move to a remote province. In 1277, however, Ema fell ill, and Kingo's treatment effected a cure. Ema renewed his trust in him and, the next year, bestowed upon him a far larger fief than the one he already had.

Delighted with Kingo's victory, Ni-

chiren Daishonin says that unseen virtue brings about visible reward, meaning that Kingo's sincere faith and effort to lead his lord to faith in the Lotus Sutra were rewarded in this manner. He also describes the merit of the Lotus Sutra with the words, "The farther the source, the longer the stream." Hence the title of this letter. He says, "In the future, I will doubtless proceed to the place of enlightenment, and those who have sustained me will also dwell together in the pure land of Eagle Peak." The Daishonin implies that he is "the envoy of the Thus Come One" referred to in the Lotus Sutra, and that those who support him will attain Buddhahood.

Notes

1. Yorimoto is Shijo Kingo's given name. His full name and title are Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo Yorimoto. Kingo denotes his official position Saemon-no-jo.

2. Kaushika is the name of Shakra when he was once a Brahman, according to *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, but in this context it would seem to indicate his wife.

3. Fujiwara no Saneyori (900–970), a court official, was apparently disappointed in his hopes that his son Yoritada would be appointed minister of the left, and so he bore a grudge against Imperial Prince Kaneakira, the son of the sixtieth emperor Daigo, who achieved that position. Though Fujiwara no Tokihira (871–909) was minister of the left and ranked above the minister of the right, he became jealous of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), another adviser of Emperor Uda, when Michizane was appointed minister of the right, since Michizane was a man of superior learning and character. Tokihira falsely accused him to the emperor, and as a result Michizane was demoted and sent to the westernmost part of Japan, where he died in despair. Michizane was deified after his death, and a shrine, Kitano Shrine in Kyoto, was dedicated to him. The Japanese persons, whose names appear in the text and are mentioned

here, are referred to in the Japanese text by their titles, except Michizane, who is referred to by his posthumous title.

4. A reference to chapter 27 of the Lotus Sutra. The two sons are Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye.

5. The five men are known as the five ascetics. Prince Kolita is better known as Mahanama.

6. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

7. Ibid.

8. "The main force of the enemy" refers here to the doctrines of the influential schools of the day, the True Word, Nembutsu, Zen, and Precepts. These doctrines were refuted by Nichiren Daishonin on the basis of the Lotus Sutra.

9. This refers to the vast campaign of conquest then being waged by the Mongol empire. The better part of the Eurasian continent was under either the rule or direct influence of the empire, which had been founded by Genghis Khan. His grandson Khubilai Khan launched massive naval attacks against Japan in 1274 and 1281, but did not succeed.

10. According to ancient Chinese legend, when a sage is born, the sole of one foot is marked with the character "two" and the other with the character "five." This is mentioned in *Records of the Historian*.

11. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.
12. Ibid., chap. 17.
13. Ibid., chap. 10.
14. Ibid.
15. Daishin was a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin who was born in Shimosa Province and is thought to have been a relative of the Soya family. He taught the believers in Kamakura and took responsibility for guiding them while the Daishonin was in exile on Sado Island.
16. Soshiro was probably a follower of the Daishonin who later turned against him.