

General Stone Tiger



ON the twenty-second of this month I received all that you sent me from Shinano—three thousand coins, a sack of polished rice, fifty slabs of rice cake, one large and one small bamboo container of sake, five strings of dried persimmons, and ten pomegranates, as well as the list of items you enclosed with these offerings.

A sovereign is supported by the people, and they in turn live under his protection. Clothes protect us from a change of temperature, and food sustains us, just as oil keeps a fire burning and water enables fish to live. Birds nest high in the trees in fear that human beings will harm them, but they come down to feed and are caught in snares. Fish dwelling in the depths of the water fear that it is too shallow and dig holes to hide in, yet lured by bait, they take the hook. No treasure possessed by human beings is more precious than food and drink, clothing and medicine.

I am not as healthy as others, and in addition, 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. My sickness grew worse again, too, but you gave me various medicines and a quilted robe. Thanks to your remedies, I improved steadily; I have now recov-

ered and feel much better than before. *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice* by Bodhisattva Maitreya and *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* by Bodhisattva Nagarjuna both state that, if one's illness is caused by fixed karma, even excellent medicine will turn to poison, but that, if one believes in the Lotus Sutra, poison will change into medicine. Although unworthy, I propagate the Lotus Sutra; hence heavenly devils have competed to deprive me of food. Understanding this, I have no complaint, but I believe that I survived this time only because Shakyamuni Buddha entered your body to help me.

So much for that. I was extremely concerned about your journey home last time, and I am overjoyed to hear that you have arrived safely in Kamakura. Such was my anxiety that I asked everyone who came here from Kamakura about you. One said that he had met you at Yumoto, another that he had encountered you farther on at Kozu, and when a third told me that he had seen you in Kamakura, I felt greatly relieved. From now on, you must not come to visit me in person unless absolutely necessary. When you have something urgent to tell me, send a messenger. Indeed, I was deeply worried about your last trip. An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack. If you should

have to travel, do not begrudge the cost of a horse. Make sure that you ride a good horse. Bring along your best men to defend you against a surprise attack, and ride a horse that can easily carry you in your armor.

In the eighth volume of *Great Concentration and Insight* and in the eighth volume of *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight"* it says, "The stronger one's faith, the greater the protection of the gods." This means that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one's faith. The Lotus Sutra is a fine sword, but its might depends on the one who wields it.

Among those who propagate this sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, who compares with Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Wonderful Sound, Manjushri, and Medicine King? Persons of the two vehicles [such as Shariputra] had destroyed all the illusions of thought and desire, thus freeing themselves from the six paths. Bodhisattvas [such as Perceiver of the World's Sounds] had eradicated forty-one of the forty-two levels of ignorance and were like the moon on the fourteenth night before it reaches fullness. Nevertheless, Shakyamuni Bud-

dha refused to entrust the mission of propagation to any of these people and gave it instead to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Thus these bodhisattvas are the ones who had thoroughly forged their resolve.

The mighty warrior General Li Kuang, whose mother had been devoured by a tiger, shot an arrow at the stone he believed was the tiger. The arrow penetrated the stone all the way up to its feathers. But once he realized it was only a stone, he was unable to pierce it again. Later he came to be known as General Stone Tiger. This story applies to you. Though enemies lurk in wait for you, your resolute faith in the Lotus Sutra has forestalled great dangers before they could begin. Realizing this, you must strengthen your faith more than ever. It is impossible to say all I want to in one letter.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-second day of the intercalary tenth month in the first year of Koan (1278), cyclical sign *tsuchinoe-tora*

Reply to Shijo Saemon



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the intercalary tenth month of 1278 to Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon, commonly called Shijo Kingo. Kingo was accomplished in both the practice of medicine and the martial arts. For nearly the entire first half of 1278, Nichiren Daishonin had suffered from debilitating and chronic diarrhea. Evidently Kingo had sent the Daishonin various medicines that had helped alleviate his illness.

In the fall of 1277 a virulent epi-

demic swept Japan, and Kingo's lord became violently ill. Despite the lord's deep-seated antagonism toward the Daishonin's teachings, he turned to Kingo for help. Lord Ema was most grateful for Kingo's ministrations and rewarded him with an estate three times larger than the one he already had. Yet the Daishonin warns Kingo to be constantly on guard and to take particularly great care to protect himself from attack while traveling.