

## The Teaching That Accords with the Buddha's Mind



**Y**OU have kindly sent me three *koku* of rice. I immediately placed it as an offering before the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, the single vehicle, and chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo just once. I have done this so that your beloved son may “assuredly and without doubt”<sup>1</sup> be escorted to the pure land of Eagle Peak.

The nature of cause and effect is like the relationship of flower to fruit. Or it is like the case of a single flame, no bigger than the light of a firefly, which, when applied to a thousand-*ri* plain of dried grass, in the space of an instant burns first one blade of grass, then two, then ten, a hundred, a thousand, and ten thousand, so that the grass and trees over an area of ten or twenty *cho* are consumed all at once. A dragon who places one small drop of water in its claws and ascends to the heavens can cause rain to fall upon the major world system. When performed as an offering to the Lotus Sutra, even a small act of goodness produces benefits that are equal in magnitude to these.

One hundred years after the passing of the Buddha, there was a ruler in India known as Ashoka the Great, who reigned over one quarter of the eighty-four thousand states that make up the continent of Jambudvīpa. He was attended by the dragon kings and summoned the demons to serve him, and,

with sixty thousand arhats as his teachers, he vowed to erect eighty-four thousand stone stupas and make offerings of a hundred thousand million gold pieces to the Buddha. Such was the stature of this great ruler. But if we inquire as to what meritorious deeds from past existences allowed him to achieve such greatness, we find that he had done no more than offer a single mud pie to Shakyamuni Buddha.<sup>2</sup>

Shakyamuni Buddha had an uncle named King Dronodana, and this king's son was known as Aniruddha. This prince was born with a bowl in his hand, and the bowl had rice in it. When the rice was eaten, more rice appeared in the bowl and kept on appearing, so that there was never a time when the bowl was empty of rice. As a result, when he was a child, the prince was given the name At Will, and through the power of the Lotus Sutra he became a Buddha known as the Thus Come One Universal Brightness.<sup>3</sup> If we inquire what cause from a previous existence brought all this about, we find that it was because, in a time of famine, he offered a meal of millet to a monk who was a pratyekabuddha.<sup>4</sup>

If one can gain benefits such as these even from making an offering to a pratyekabuddha, then the benefits gained by giving alms to the votary of the Lotus Sutra are infinitely greater,

exceeding even those gained by making offerings to countless Buddhas.

Nichiren is an inhabitant of the country of Japan. Within the seven-thousand-yojana area that constitutes the southern continent of Jambudvīpa, there are eighty-four thousand states. Among these, there are sixteen great states, five hundred middle-sized states, ten thousand small states, and countless smaller states scattered about like grains of millet. India is a major country, comprising five regions. In the midst of the ocean to the east of it there is a little island, which is the country of Japan. Japan is situated over a hundred thousand *ri* to the east of the central region of India.

During the thousand years following the passing of the Buddha, known as the Former Day of the Law, Buddhism remained within the confines of India and was not transmitted to other countries. But after the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law had ended and the world was fifteen years into the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was transmitted to the land of China. Three hundred years after it was introduced to China, it was transmitted to the Korean kingdom of Paekche. And after it had been in Paekche for a hundred years and 1,415 years had elapsed since the passing of the Buddha, a bronze-gilt statue of Shakyamuni Buddha and copies of various scriptures were for the first time introduced to Japan in the reign of the thirtieth human sovereign, Emperor Kimmei.

Since that time, over seven hundred years have passed. The great collection of scriptures that has reached Japan during this period has increased to more than five thousand or seven thousand volumes, and the number of schools has grown to eight, nine, and then ten. In the country of Japan there are sixty-six provinces and two islands, over three thousand shrines dedicated to the gods, and over ten thousand

Buddhist temples. Half the men and women of the country are priests and nuns, and the Buddhist teachings flourish here in a manner that surpasses that of China and India.

But within the world of Buddhist teachings, various controversies have arisen. The adherents of the Pure Land school look upon Amida Buddha as their object of devotion, and the adherents of the True Word school worship the Thus Come One Mahāvairocana, while the people of the Zen school, ignoring both sutras and Buddhas, take Bodhidharma as their object of devotion. As for the adherents of the other schools, they for the most part are influenced by and follow the Nembutsu proponents and the True Word advocates. And though they do not necessarily regard either of these schools as superior, they are swayed by the more powerful and influenced by the larger of the two, and hence take Amida Buddha as their principal object of devotion.

Rejecting Shakyamuni Buddha, who is the sovereign, teacher, and parent of our present world, they pray to escape to another world that is located a hundred thousand million worlds away and that belongs to Amida Buddha, a complete stranger. This Amida Buddha is neither our parent nor our sovereign nor our teacher, but merely a figure who, in a certain sutra, made forty-eight false vows. And yet foolish persons, believing these vows to be true, madly clang out a rhythm on bells and dance and leap about, reciting the name of Amida Buddha. But though they abandon the world of their parent in disgust, the messengers whom Amida Buddha has promised to send to welcome them do not appear, and they lose their way in the sky while in an intermediate state between death and rebirth. The karma that comes from slandering the Law pulls them downward, plunging them into the prison of

the three evil paths, where the fearful demon wardens of hell pounce upon them with delight, binding them and subjecting them to endless torments.

When, based on the sutras, I speak in general terms of such matters, only I, of all the 4,994,828 men and women in Japan, am thought strange, and the other 4,994,827 persons all regard me as their enemy. Strangely enough, they do not follow Shakyamuni, who is their sovereign, teacher, and parent. What is more, they curse and strike me, drive me away, and, by resorting to slander, cause me to be sentenced to exile or execution. It is the way of the world that the poor fawn upon the rich, the lowly revere the noble, and the few follow the many. So even those persons who chanced to put their faith in the Lotus Sutra are intimidated by society and fear others, and many of them fall into hell. This is most pitiful.

But, perhaps because of Nichiren's ignorant outlook or some past karma, when I read the statements that "the Lotus is the foremost,"<sup>5</sup> that "among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand,"<sup>6</sup> and that "I am the only person who can rescue and protect others,"<sup>7</sup> I take them to be the golden words of the Thus Come One himself. They are not my own words at all.

The people of today, however, believe the pronouncements of their own teachers to be the golden words of the Thus Come One. Thus they place such pronouncements on the same level as the Lotus Sutra, considering the two to be of equal authority; or they regard these teachings as superior to the Lotus Sutra; or they reason that though their teacher's pronouncements are inferior they are well suited to the capacity of the people.

One should understand that, of the sacred teachings of the Thus Come

One, there are those that are preached "in accordance with the minds of others," and those that are preached "in accordance with the Thus Come One's own mind." Thus, when a parent yields to the will of his or her child, that is a case of the former. But when the child complies with the will of the parent, that is the latter. All the other sutras are examples of preaching in accordance with the minds of others, because, when expounding them, the Buddha adjusted himself to the minds of all other living beings. But the Lotus Sutra is an example of preaching in accordance with the Buddha's own mind, because in it the Buddha had all living beings comply with his own mind.

The various other sutras represent the teachings of the Buddha, but if one puts faith in them, then one is simply following the minds of ordinary people and will never be able to attain Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra is both the teaching of the Buddha and the embodiment of the Buddha wisdom. If one puts sincere faith in each character and brushstroke in it, then one will become a Buddha in one's present form. For example, a piece of white paper becomes black when dipped in black ink, and black lacquer turns white when white liquid is poured into it. Just as poison turns into medicine, so do ordinary individuals change into Buddhas. Accordingly we call it the wonderful Law.

And yet the people of today, of both high and low station, look with contempt upon Shakyamuni Buddha, their father in the present world, and instead revere Amida or Mahavairocana, strangers with whom they have no connection at all. In doing so, are they not lacking in filial piety? Are they not slanderers of the Law? When I say this, however, all the people of Japan join together in reviling me. And it is quite natural that they should, for the crooked piece of wood hates the

straightness of the inking line that marks it for cutting, and the dishonest man is not pleased with the honest administration of government.

During the reigns of the ninety-one human sovereigns of our country, there have been twenty-six persons who committed treason. Among them were men such as Prince Oyama and Oishi no Omaru, as well as Masakado, Sumitomo, and the Evil Minister of the Left.<sup>8</sup> When these men concealed themselves in the mountain forests of Yoshino or of the Totsu River, or went into hiding in the waters around Tsukushi and Chinzei, the warriors in every nearby village and the natives of every island in the region set out to attack them. But the distinguished sages, as well as the priests, nuns, and women of the various mountains, temples, and shrines, did not regard them as their particular enemies. In the case of myself, however, men and women of high and low station, as well as nuns, priests, and distinguished sages, all look upon me as their particular enemy.

The reason is this: All people are concerned about their next lifetime, but the priests and nuns, who would appear to ponder more deeply about this than other men and women, in fact set aside the matter of rebirth in the pure land and merely act as guides in helping people get through this present lifetime. Wise persons and sages are also given to insisting that they are correct and superior to others, that they are heirs to the teachings of a certain founder, and that they have legitimate claim to a certain domain. They place great emphasis upon fame and personal gain, and give little thought to any kind of serious search for the way.

And so, when I, neither hesitating to speak out nor fearing others, tell them frankly that they are ignorant persons who have misunderstood the true meaning of the Buddhist teachings, and that they are slanderers of the Law;

when I deliver a sharp rebuke to them, mindful of the Thus Come One's golden words "You should realize that that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching"<sup>9</sup> and trusting in the passage of scripture that reads, "We will be envoys of the World-Honored One, facing the assembly without fear";<sup>10</sup> when I do this, censuring those who "suppose they have attained what they have not attained, being proud and boastful in heart,"<sup>11</sup> then how can they fail to turn upon me with hatred and jealousy?

Thus, throughout the seven reigns of the heavenly deities, the five reigns of the earthly deities, and the more than ninety reigns of the human sovereigns of Japan, no one can match me in the degree to which, for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, I am detested by the three types of enemies. It was no ordinary connection that led you to visit such a man, one who is hated by all persons of both high and low station. Perhaps it is because you were my parent in a previous existence or my brother sometime in the past that you were moved to visit me. Or perhaps it is because you established profound ties with the Lotus Sutra in the past, and the seeds that will lead you to become a Buddha have matured in this present age, that busy as you are in your capacity as a lay member of society you have found time from your public duties to give thought to me.

In addition, your journey from the province of Totomi to Mount Minobu here in the district of Hakiri in Kai Province is over three hundred *ri*, and the lodgings along the way must have been wretched. Ascending the ridges, you came out into the light of the sun or the moon, but descending into the ravines, you must have felt as though you were entering a pit. The currents in the rivers are as swift as an arrow, and the large stones carried along in them prevent men and horses from

crossing. Boats are as perilous as scraps of paper cast on the water. The men one encounters on such a journey are rough woodcutters, and the women are like female mountain demons. The trail is as narrow as a rope, and the trees are as dense as grass. What ties from past existences could have led you to pay me a visit in such a place as this? Shakyamuni Buddha must have led you by the hand, with Shakra as the horse you rode on, Brahma as your companion, and the sun and moon acting as your eyes along the way. Thank you,

thank you for your extraordinary efforts!

There are many other things I would like to say, but I have caught a cold and am feeling quite miserable, so I will end here.

Nichiren

The second day of the fifth month in the second year of Koan (1279), cyclical sign *tsuchinoto-u*

Reply to Niike



## Background

This letter, written at Minobu in the fifth month of 1279, was a message of thanks for the rice that a follower named Niike Saemon-no-jo had sent the Daishonin as an offering for the repose of his deceased son.

The details of Niike's life are not well known, though it is generally assumed that he lived in the village of Niike in Iwata District of Totomi Province and was a samurai who served the Kamakura shogunate. It also appears that he and his wife, the lay nun Niike, took faith in the Daishonin's teachings at the urging of Nikko Shonin, and that Nikko Shonin stayed at his residence for a short time during the Atsuhara Persecution.

At the beginning of this letter, the Daishonin uses the examples of King Ashoka and Aniruddha to illustrate the great benefits that accrue to one who makes offerings to the Lotus Sutra. Next, he traces the transmission of Buddhism from India through China

and Korea to Japan, noting that Japan has become a slanderous country because all its people take Amida Buddha as their object of devotion and persecute the Daishonin when he attempts to correct their mistaken views.

The Daishonin then differentiates between those teachings wherein the Buddha speaks according to the varying capacities of the people and those teachings in which, irrespective of people's capacities, the Buddha reveals his enlightenment directly. He equates the former to those teachings of the Buddha expounded before the Lotus Sutra, and the latter to the Lotus Sutra. In conclusion, the Daishonin praises Niike for making the difficult and dangerous journey to visit him, even though he is hated throughout the country for his persistent criticism of the priests of erroneous schools, and assures his disciple that their connection must accordingly be truly profound.

## Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 21. The full passage reads: "Therefore a person of wisdom, hearing how keen are the benefits to be gained, after I have passed into extinction,

should accept and uphold this sutra. Such a person assuredly and without doubt will attain the Buddha way."

2. According to *The Story of King Asho-*

*ka*, Ashoka made this offering to Shakyamuni Buddha as a sign of his respect in a previous existence, when he was a child named Virtue Victorious.

3. His enlightenment is prophesied in the "Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

4. This story is described in detail on p. 925.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, chap. 3. "But now this three-fold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others." This passage, including the section quoted in the text, refers to the three virtues—sovereign, teacher, and parent—of the Buddha.

8. The Evil Minister of the Left refers to Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120–1156). A leading scholar and minister of the left, who, under the patronage of the Retired Emperor Toba, wielded great influence. He was called "Evil Minister of the Left" because of the excessively cruel and unforgiving attitude he displayed in the administration of his duties. He died of wounds sustained during an unsuccessful coup attempt led by him, known as the Hogen Disturbance.

9. Nirvana Sutra. The full passage reads: "If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him, or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching."

10. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

11. *Ibid.*