

On Persecutions Befalling the Sage



NOW, in the second year of Koan (1279), cyclical sign *tsuchinoto-u*, it has been twenty-seven years since I first proclaimed this teaching at Seicho-ji temple. It was at the hour of the horse [noon] on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kencho (1253), cyclical sign *mizunoto-ushi*, on the southern side of the image hall in the Shobutsu-bo of Seicho-ji temple in Tojo Village. Tojo is now a district, but was then a part of Nagasa District of Awa Province. Here is located what was once the second, but is now the country's most important center founded by Minamoto no Yoritomo, the general of the right, to supply provisions for the shrine of the Sun Goddess. The Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai took about thirty years, and the Great Teacher Dengyo, some twenty years. I have spoken repeatedly of the indescribable persecutions they suffered during those years. For me it took twenty-seven years, and the great persecutions I faced during this period are well known to you all.

The Lotus Sutra reads, "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?"¹ The Thus Come One Shakyamuni suffered innumerable persecutions: For ninety days

he was forced to eat horse fodder; a huge boulder was dropped on him, and though it missed him, his toe was injured and bled; a group of eight monks led by Sunakshatra, in their conduct appearing to be the Buddha's disciples, but in spirit siding with the non-Buddhist teachers, watched every moment of the day and night for a chance to kill him; King Virudhaka killed countless members of the Shakya clan; and King Ajatashatru had innumerable disciples of the Buddha trampled to death by mad elephants and subjected the Buddha to a series of severe trials. Such are the minor persecutions that correspond to the time "when the Thus Come One is in the world."

Neither Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai, nor Dengyo encountered any of the still greater persecutions that the Buddha had predicted would occur "after his passing." If one were to say that they were not votaries of the Lotus Sutra, how could they not have been? On the other hand, if one were to say that they were its votaries, without their having shed any blood—as the Buddha did—and even more so, without trials greater than the Buddha's, it would be as if the sutra passages were empty, and the Buddha's teachings would have already become great lies.

In these twenty-seven years, how-

ever, Nichiren was exiled to the province of Izu on the twelfth day of the fifth month in the first year of Kocho (1261), cyclical sign *kanoto-tori*, and was wounded on the forehead and had his left hand broken on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in the first year of Bun'ei (1264), cyclical sign *kinoe-ne*. He was led to the place of execution on the twelfth day of the ninth month in the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271), cyclical sign *kanoto-hitsuji*, and in the end was exiled to the province of Sado. In addition, countless numbers of disciples have been murdered or wounded, banished or heavily fined. I do not know whether these trials equal or surpass those of the Buddha. Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyo, however, cannot compare with me in what they suffered. Had it not been for the advent of Nichiren in the Latter Day of the Law, the Buddha would have been a teller of great lies, and the testimony given by Many Treasures and by the Buddhas of the ten directions would have been false. In the 2,230 and more years since the Buddha's passing, Nichiren is the only person in the entire land of Jambudvīpa who has fulfilled the Buddha's words.

In the past, and in the present Latter Day of the Law, the rulers, high ministers, and people who despise the votaries of the Lotus Sutra seem to be free from punishment at first, but eventually they are all doomed to fall. The same is true in the case of Nichiren. There seemed at first to be no signs of protection for me. The gods who vowed to protect the Lotus Sutra, however—Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings—by now have realized in terror that if they leave their oath to the Buddha unfulfilled, as they have done for these twenty-seven years, they will fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. Consequently each of them is now striving to carry out

his vow. The deaths of Ota Chikamasa, Nagasaki Jiro Hyoe-no-jo Tokitsuna, and Daishin-bo,² who were all thrown from their horses, can be seen as punishment for their treachery against the Lotus Sutra. There are four kinds of punishment: general and individual, conspicuous and inconspicuous. The epidemics and famines that have attacked Japan, as well as the strife within the ruling clan and the foreign invasion, are general punishment. Epidemics are a form of inconspicuous punishment. The deaths of Ota and the others are both conspicuous and individual.

Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion king and never succumb to threats from anyone. The lion king fears no other beast, nor do its cubs. Slanderers are like barking foxes, but Nichiren's followers are like roaring lions. The lay priest of Saimyo-ji, now deceased, and the present ruler³ permitted my return from my exiles when they found that I was innocent of the accusations against me. The present ruler shall no longer take action on any charge without confirming its truth. You may rest assured that nothing, not even a person possessed by a powerful demon, can harm Nichiren, because Brahma, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the Sun Goddess, and Hachiman are safeguarding him. Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage.

We common mortals are so foolish that we do not fear either the warnings in the sutras and treatises, or those things that seem somewhat removed from us. When Hei no Saemon and Akitajo-no-suke,⁴ in their anger, wreak havoc upon us, you must demonstrate a firm resolve. Men are now being sent to Tsukushi [to fight the Mongols]; consider yourselves in the same position as those who are on their way or are already at the fortifications. So

far our believers have not experienced sorrows of that sort. The warriors in Tsukushi, however, now face a dreadful fate, and if they are killed in battle, they are doomed to fall into hell. Although at present we are encountering the severe trials of persecution, in our next life we will become Buddhas. Our present tribulations are like moxibustion; at the time, it is painful, but because it has beneficial aftereffects, the pain is not really pain.

Urge on, but do not frighten, the ones from Atsuhara who are ignorant of Buddhism. Tell them to be prepared for the worst, and not to expect good times, but take the bad times for granted. If they complain of hunger, tell them about the sufferings of the world of hungry spirits. If they grumble that they are cold, tell them of the eight cold hells. If they say they are frightened, explain to them that a pheasant sighted by a hawk, or a mouse stalked by a cat, is as desperate as they are. I have been repeating these things in detail day after day, month after month, year after year. Yet with the lay nun of Nagoe, Sho-bo, Noto-bo, Sammi-bo,⁵ and the like, who are cowardly, unreasoning, greedy, and doubting, my words have no more effect than pour-

ing water on lacquer ware or slicing through air.

There was something very strange about Sammi-bo. Nevertheless, I was concerned that any admonition would be taken by the ignorant as mere jealousy of his wisdom, and so I refrained from speaking out. In time his wicked ambition led to treachery and, finally, to his doom. If I had scolded him more strictly, he might have been saved. I have not mentioned this before because no one would have understood it. Even now the ignorant will say that I am speaking ill of the deceased. Nevertheless, I mention it so that others can use it as their mirror. I am sure that our opponents and the renegades are frightened by the fate of Sammi-bo.

If there is an attempt to take up arms and persecute my followers on the pretense that people are uneasy about us, please write to me immediately.⁶

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The first day of the tenth month

To my followers

This letter should be kept by Saburo Saemon.⁷



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu on the first day of the tenth month of the second year of Koan (1279) to his followers in general. It reviews some of the outstanding incidents in his life. But more importantly, it contains the sole allusion to his inscription of the object of devotion for all humanity as the purpose of his life, a task that he accomplished on the twelfth day of the same month.

Around 1275, propagation efforts in

the Fuji area began to produce significant results under the leadership of Nikko Shonin. There were a number of converts among both priests and laity, but as the number of new believers increased, so did official pressures. In Atsuhara, a village in Fuji District of Suruga Province, believers were subjected to a series of threats and harassments known collectively as the Atsuhara Persecution. Twenty believers, all farmers, were arrested on the twenty-

first day of the ninth month, 1279, on false charges, and three of them were later beheaded. In spite of these persecutions, not one of the twenty farmers abandoned their faith.

Seeing that his followers were now ready to give their lives if necessary to protect the Law, the Daishonin realized that the time had come to fulfill the purpose of his life, as is described in the first paragraph: "For me it took twenty-seven years." "It" here means the reason for his appearance in the world—that is, the inscription of the object of devotion for the sake of all humankind.

Next, details concerning the persecutions encountered by Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren Daishonin are presented. The important prophecies in the Lotus Sutra for the Latter Day of the Law are also outlined.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
2. Ota Chikamasa, Nagasaki Jiro Hyoe-no-jo Tokitsuna, and Daishin-bo were followers of the Daishonin, but they renounced their faith and plotted against other believers during the Atsuhara Persecution.
3. The lay priest of Saimyo-ji refers to Hojo Tokiyori (1227–1263), the retired fifth regent of the Kamakura government, and the present ruler, to Hojo Tokimune (1251–1284), the eighth regent.
4. Akitajo-no-suke is another name for Adachi Yasumori (1231–1285), the leader of an influential clan under the Hojo regency who vied with Hei no Saemon for power.

The types of ill effects suffered by slanderers are explained to show the impact of the strict law of cause and effect on individuals and on society. The Daishonin states that the miserable fate of several treacherous disciples, as well as the crisis facing Japan at the time, is retribution for hostility shown toward the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

At the same time the Daishonin tells his disciples that they must now "summon up the courage of a lion king." Furthermore, he urges believers in the Atsuhara area to be prepared for the worst.

In the last section, the Daishonin cites the example of Sammi-bo, one of his earliest disciples, who was highly esteemed for his debating skill and great learning, but forsook his faith and died a tragic death during the Atsuhara Persecution.

5. The lay nun of Nagoe, Sho-bo, Noto-bo, and Sammi-bo were disciples of the Daishonin who renounced their faith.

6. The original language here is compact and abbreviated. Another possible translation of this sentence is: "As society becomes more chaotic, if any of my followers are dispatched to fight, please send me their names immediately."

7. Saburo Saemon is another name for Shijo Kingo, a samurai and follower of the Daishonin. Kingo's full name and title are Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo Yorimoto.