

The Treasure of a Filial Child



I WAS deeply grieved to hear the news about the wife of the lay priest of Ko.¹ Please tell her that I think very fondly of her.

I have received your various gifts of fifteen hundred coins, laver, seaweed, and dried rice, and have respectfully reported this in the presence of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra says, “If there are those who hear the Law, then not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood.”² Although this passage consists of but ten characters, to read even a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra is to read without omission all the sacred teachings preached by the Thus Come One Shakyamuni during his lifetime. Therefore, the Great Teacher Miao-lo says, “If, in propagating the Lotus Sutra, one is to interpret even one of its doctrines, one must take into consideration all the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings and master them from beginning to end.”³

By “beginning” he means the Flower Garland Sutra, and by “end” he means the Nirvana Sutra. The Flower Garland Sutra was preached at the time when the Buddha had first attained the way, when the great bodhisattvas Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merits, and others, responding to the request of a bodhisattva called Moon of Deliverance, preached in the Buddha’s pres-

ence. I do not know in what form this sutra may exist in India, in the dragon king’s palace,⁴ or in the Tushita heaven, but it has been brought to Japan in a sixty-volume version, an eighty-volume version, and a forty-volume version.⁵ In the case of the last of the teachings, the Nirvana Sutra, I again do not know in what form it may exist in India or in the dragon king’s palace, but in our country it exists in a forty-volume version, a thirty-six-volume version, a six-volume version, and a two-volume version.⁶

In addition to these sutras, there are the Agama sutras, the Correct and Equal sutras, and the Wisdom sutras, which run to five thousand or seven thousand volumes. But even though we may not see or hear of any of these various sutras, if we read so much as a single word or phrase of the Lotus Sutra, it is just as though we were reading every word of all these various sutras.

It is like the two characters that compose the name for India, Gasshi,⁷ or the name for Japan, Nihon. The two characters that make up the name Gasshi encompass the five regions of India, the sixteen great states, the five hundred middle-sized states, the ten thousand small states, and the countless smaller states like scattered grains of millet, all with their great land areas,

great mountains, their plants and trees, and their people and animals. Or it is like a mirror, which may be only one inch, two inches, three inches, four inches, or five inches in size, but which can reflect the image of a person, whether that person is one foot or five feet tall, or of a mountain, whether it is ten feet, twenty feet, a hundred feet, or a thousand feet high.

Thus when we read the above passage from the Lotus Sutra, we know that all people who hear the sutra will, without a single exception, attain Buddhahood.

All living beings in the nine worlds and the six paths differ from one another in their minds. For example, two persons, three persons, a hundred, or a thousand people all may have faces about a foot in length, but no two look exactly alike. Their minds differ, and therefore so do their faces. How much greater still is the difference between the minds of two persons, of ten persons, and of all the living beings in the six paths and the nine worlds! So it is that some love the cherry blossoms and some love the moon, some prefer sour things and some prefer bitter, some like little things and some favor big. People have varied tastes. Some prefer good and some prefer evil. There are many kinds of people.

But though they differ from one another in such ways, once they enter into the Lotus Sutra, they all become like a single person in body and a single person in mind. This is just like the myriad different rivers that, when they flow into the ocean, all take on a uniformly salty flavor, or like the many kinds of birds that, when they approach Mount Sumeru, all assume the same [golden] hue. Thus Devadatta, who had committed three cardinal sins, and Rahula, who observed all of the two hundred and fifty precepts, both alike became Buddhas. And both King Wonderful Adornment, who held erro-

neous views, and Shariputra, who held correct views, equally received predictions that they would attain Buddhahood. This is because, in the words of the passage quoted earlier, "not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood."

In the Amida and other sutras expounded during the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life, Shariputra is said to have achieved great merit by reciting the name of Amida Buddha a million times in the space of seven days.⁸ But since these sutras were repudiated as teachings belonging to the period when the Buddha had "not yet revealed the truth,"⁹ such recitation is in fact as meaningless as if one were to boil water for seven days and then throw it into the ocean.

Lady Vaidehi,¹⁰ by reading the Meditation Sutra, was able to reach the stage known as the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena. But since the Buddha cast this sutra aside when he said that he would now "honestly discard expedient means,"¹¹ unless Lady Vaidehi were to believe in the Lotus Sutra, she must revert to her former status as an ordinary woman.

One's acts of great good are nothing to rely on. If one fails to encounter the Lotus Sutra, of what avail can they be? Nor should one lament having committed acts of great evil. For if only one practices the one vehicle, then one can follow in the footsteps of Devadatta [in attaining Buddhahood]. All this is because the sutra passage that declares, "not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood," was not spoken in vain.

Some may wonder where the spirit of the late Abutsu-bo may be at this moment. But by using the clear mirror of the Lotus Sutra to reflect his image, I, Nichiren, can see him among the assembly on Eagle Peak, seated within the treasure tower of Many Treasures Buddha and facing toward the east.¹²

If what I say is not true, then it is no error of mine. Rather the tongue of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, who said, "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth";¹³ along with the tongue of Many Treasures Buddha, who declared, "The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law . . . all that you [Shakyamuni] have expounded is the truth";¹⁴ as well as the tongues of all the various Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, in four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands,¹⁵ who are as numerous as hemp or rice plants, as stars or stalks of bamboo, lined up side by side with never a gap between them, and who, without a single exception, extended their long broad tongues up to the palace of the great heavenly king Brahma—all these tongues, I say, will in one moment rot away like a whale that has died and decayed, or like a heap of sardines that have rotted. All the Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, in the worlds of the ten directions will be guilty of the offense of speaking great falsehoods; the earth of the pure land of Tranquil Light, which is made of gold and emeralds, will suddenly split open, and all these Buddhas will, like Devadatta, plunge headlong into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. Or, as happened to the nun Dharma Lotus Fragrance,¹⁶ fierce flames will shoot out of their bodies because of the great lies they have told, and the flower garden of the Lotus Treasury World, a Land of Actual Reward, will in one instant be reduced to a place of ashes. But how could such things be possible?

If the late Abutsu-bo alone were not admitted to the pure land of Tranquil Light, then all these Buddhas would fall into a realm of great suffering. Leaving all else aside, you should consider things in this light. On this basis, you may judge the truth or falsehood of the Buddha's words.

A man is like a pillar, a woman like the crossbeam. A man is like the legs of a person, a woman like the trunk. A man is like the wings of a bird, a woman like the body. If the wings and the body become separated, then how can the bird fly? And if the pillar topples, then the crossbeam will surely fall to the ground.

A home without a man is like a person without a soul. With whom can you discuss matters of business, and though you may have good things to eat, with whom can you share them? Merely to be separated from your husband for a day or two is cause for uneasiness. Yet you were parted from your husband on the twenty-first day of the third month of last year, and passed the remainder of the year without seeing his return. Now it is already the seventh month of this year. Even though he himself does not return, why does he not send you some word?

The cherry blossoms, once scattered, have again come into bloom, and the fruit, once fallen, has formed again on the trees. The spring breezes are unchanged, and the scenes of autumn are just as they were last year. How is it that, in this one matter alone, things should be so different from what they were, never to be the same again?

The moon sets and rises again; the clouds disperse and then gather once more. Even heaven must regret and earth lament that this man has gone away and will never come again. You yourself must feel the same. Rely upon the Lotus Sutra as nourishment for your journey, and quickly, quickly set out for the pure land of Eagle Peak so that you can meet him there!

There is a sutra passage that says that children are one's enemies. "People in this world commit many sins because of their children,"¹⁷ it states. Although the birds known as the crested hawk and the eagle raise their young with compassion, the young turn around and

eat their parents. And the bird known as the owl, after it is hatched, invariably devours its mother. Such is the case among the lowly creatures.

Even among human beings, King Virudhaka seized the throne from his father, whom he resented, and King Ajatashatru murdered his father. An Lu-shan killed his foster mother, and An Ch'ing-hsü killed his father, An Lu-shan. An Ch'ing-hsü was killed by Shih Shih-ming [who was like a son to him], and Shih Shih-ming was in turn killed by his son, Shih Ch'ao-i.¹⁸ Thus there is good reason why children are spoken of as enemies. The monk named Sunakshatra was a son of Shakyamuni Buddha. But he conspired with a follower of the non-Buddhist teaching who was called Painfully Acquired, and attempted time and again to kill his father, the Buddha.

There is also a sutra passage that says that children are a treasure. It states: "Because of the blessings their sons and daughters accumulate through religious practice, a great bright light appears, illuminating the realm of hell, and the parents suffering in hell are thereby able to awaken a believing mind."¹⁹ But even if the Buddha had not taught [that children are a treasure], you could tell as much simply from the evidence before your eyes.

In India there was once a great ruler, the king of the country called Parthia.²⁰ This king was inordinately fond of horses and horse-raising. In time, he became so expert in raising them that he could not only turn a worthless horse into an outstanding one, but could also transform an ox into a horse. Eventually, he even turned people into horses and rode them. The citizens of his own state were so grieved at this that he began to turn only people from other lands into horses. Thus, when a traveling merchant came to his kingdom from another country, he gave the merchant a potion to drink, trans-

formed him into a horse, and tied him up in the royal stables.

Even under ordinary circumstances the merchant yearned for his homeland and in particular thought longingly of his wife and child. Thus he found his present lot very difficult to bear. But since the king would not allow him to go home, he could not do so. Indeed, even had it been possible, what could he have done there in his present form? So all he could do was bewail his fate morning and evening.

This man had a son who, when his father failed to return at the expected time, began to wonder if he had been killed or had perhaps fallen ill. Feeling that, as a son, he must find out what had happened to his father, he set out on a journey to do so. His mother lamented, protesting that her husband had already gone off to another land and failed to return, and that, if she were now to be abandoned by her only son as well, she did not know how she could carry on. But the son was so deeply concerned about his father that he nevertheless set off for the country of Parthia in search of him.

Upon his arrival, he put up for the night at a small lodging. The master of the house said: "How sad! You are still so young, and I can see from your face and bearing that you are a person of distinction. I had a son once, but he went off to another country and perhaps has died there. At least I do not know what has become of him. When I think of the fate of my own son, I can scarcely bear to look at you. I say this because here in this country we have a cause for great sorrow. The king of this country is so inordinately fond of horses that he ventures to make use of a strange kind of plant. If he feeds one of the narrow leaves of this plant to a person, the person turns into a horse. And if he feeds one of the broad leaves of the plant to a horse, the horse turns into a person. Not long ago

a merchant came here from another country. The king fed him some of this plant, turned him into a horse, and is secretly keeping him confined in the first of the royal stables.”

When the son heard this, he thought that his father must have been transformed into a horse, and he asked, “What color is this horse’s coat?”

The master of the house replied, “The horse is chestnut, with white dappling on the shoulders.”

After the son had learned all these things, he contrived to approach the royal palace, where he was able to steal some of the broad leaves of the strange plant. When he fed these to the horse that his father had become, his father changed back into his original human form.

The king of the country, marveling at what had happened, handed the father over to the son, since the latter had shown himself to be such a model of filial concern. After that he never again turned people into horses.

Who but a son would have gone to such lengths to search for his father? The Venerable Maudgalyayana saved his mother from the sufferings of the world of hungry spirits, and the brothers Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye persuaded their father to give up his erroneous views. This is why it is said that a good child is a parent’s treasure.

Now the late Abutsu-bo was an inhabitant of a wild and distant island in the northern sea of Japan. Nevertheless, he was anxious about his future existence, so he took religious vows and aspired to happiness in the next life. When he encountered the exile Nichiren, he embraced the Lotus Sutra, and in the spring of last year he became a Buddha. When the fox of Mount Shita encountered the Buddha’s teaching, he grew dissatisfied with life, longed for death, and was reborn as the god Shakra.²¹

In the same way, the Honorable Abutsu grew weary of his existence in this impure world, and so he became a Buddha.

His son, Tokuro Moritsuna, has followed in his footsteps and become a wholehearted votary of the Lotus Sutra. Last year, on the second day of the seventh month, he appeared here at Mount Minobu in Hakiri in the province of Kai, having journeyed a thousand *ri*²² over mountains and seas with his father’s ashes hung around his neck, and deposited them at the place dedicated to the practice of the Lotus Sutra. And this year, on the first day of the seventh month, he came again to Mount Minobu to pay respects at his father’s grave. Surely, there is no treasure greater than a child, no treasure greater than a child! Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Nichiren

The second day of the seventh month

Reply to the wife of the late Abutsu-bo

POSTSCRIPT:²³ I am sending a priestly robe of dyed silk. Please inform Bungo-bo.²⁴ The teachings of the Lotus Sutra are already spreading throughout the country of Japan. Bungo-bo should undertake to propagate them in the Hokuriku region,²⁵ but he cannot do so unless he becomes well learned. Tell him to make haste and come here no later than the fifteenth day of the ninth month.

Please send me the various sacred texts as soon as possible by way of Tamba-bo,²⁶ as you did with the daily records. Please send Yamabushi-bo²⁷ here to me as I instructed earlier. I am delighted to hear that you have been treating him with such kindness.

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu in the seventh month of the third year of Koan (1280) to the lay nun Sennichi, who lived on Sado Island. Sennichi was the wife of Abutsu-bo Nitto-ku, who had passed away the year before.

Abutsu-bo had originally been a Nembutsu believer, but soon after encountering the Daishonin, together with his wife, became his sincere follower and helped provide him with food and supplies during his stay on Sado.

After the Daishonin was pardoned from his exile and had taken up his residence at Minobu, Abutsu-bo, despite his advanced age, made at least three journeys to see him. He died on the twenty-first day of the third month, 1279, at the age of ninety-one. His son, Tokuro Moritsuna, visited the Daishonin at Minobu later that year with his father's ashes and laid them to rest there.

The lay nun Sennichi was concerned about the privations of the Daishonin's life at Minobu, and in 1280 sent Tokuro with various offerings for him. Tokuro arrived at Minobu on the first day

of the seventh month, and Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the lay nun in acknowledgment of her sincere offerings, entrusting it to her son on his return journey.

In the beginning portion, the Daishonin declares that to read even one phrase of the Lotus Sutra is equivalent to reading all the teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime. He assures the lay nun Sennichi that all persons who embrace the Lotus Sutra will attain Buddhahood, and therefore, in the light of the "clear mirror of the Lotus Sutra," there can be no doubt that her late husband, Abutsu-bo, has attained Buddhahood as well.

In the remaining portion of the letter, the Daishonin encourages the lay nun in the face of her loneliness following her husband's death, and also praises the filial devotion of her son, Tokuro. Especially touched by Tokuro's two visits to Minobu for his father's sake, the Daishonin concludes his letter by exclaiming, "Surely, there is no treasure greater than a child, no treasure greater than a child!"

Notes

1. No definite information is available as to the exact nature of the news concerning the wife of the lay priest of Ko, but it is clear that she had experienced some suffering, and that the Daishonin wished to console her. Ko means a provincial office and its location. The lay priest of Ko was so called because he lived in the provincial capital of Sado.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2. This passage, in the Chinese text, consists of ten characters.

3. *The Annotations on "The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra."*

4. A legendary palace located under the sea, which was filled with great treasures and beautiful ornaments. It is said that Nagarjuna obtained the Flower Garland Sutra here.

5. There are three Chinese versions of

the Flower Garland Sutra, translated respectively by Buddhahadra of the Eastern Chin dynasty, Shikshananda of the T'ang dynasty, and Prajna of the same dynasty.

6. There are four Chinese versions of the Mahayana Nirvana Sutra, translated respectively by Dharmaraksha of the Northern Liang dynasty; by Hui-kuan, Hui-yen, and Hsieh Ling-yün of the Liu Sung dynasty; by Fa-hsien and Buddhahadra of the Eastern Chin dynasty; and by Jnanabhadra and Hui-ning of the T'ang dynasty.

7. Gasshi (Chin Yüeh-chih) was a name for India used in China and Japan. In the latter part of the third century B.C.E., a Central Asian tribe called the Yüeh-chih ruled a part of India. Since Buddhism was brought to China via this territory, the name came to be applied to India itself.

8. In the Amida Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha, addressing Shariputra as the representative of the assembly, taught that one can obtain the blessing of rebirth in the Pure Land by meditating single-mindedly upon the name of Amida Buddha for seven days. *The Treatise on the Pure Land*, written by Vasubandhu, interprets this to mean reciting the name of Amida Buddha a million times in seven days.

9. Immeasurable Meanings Sutra.

10. Vaidehi was the wife of King Bimbisara of Magadha and the mother of Ajatashatru. According to the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra, when Ajatashatru killed his father and confined Vaidehi to the interior of the palace, she faced Eagle Peak where Shakyamuni was preaching and prayed to him. Out of compassion, he appeared in her chamber and taught her how to reach the Pure Land of Amida Buddha.

11. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

12. According to ancient Indian custom, kings and high dignitaries were seated facing east. One may assume, therefore, that, when Shakyamuni Buddha began to preach the Lotus Sutra on Eagle Peak, he sat facing east, and his disciples were facing west, toward him. Later, the treasure tower emerged from beneath the earth, facing west in the presence of Shakyamuni, and ascended into space. Shakyamuni then seated himself beside Many Treasures Buddha, who was inside the tower. Thus Shakyamuni was facing west during the Ceremony in the Air, and the rest of the assembly were facing east. "Facing toward the east" in the text would mean that Abutsu-bo is seated within the treasure tower, facing the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

14. *Ibid.*, chap. II.

15. According to T'ien-t'ai's *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, Shakyamuni's emanations gathered in the four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of lands that he had purified in order to accommodate them.

16. According to the Shurangama Sutra, raging flames emanated from every part of the body of the nun Dharma Lotus Fragrance, because of the offense of speaking great falsehoods, and she fell into the hell of incessant suffering.

17. Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra.

18. An Lu-shan (705-757) was a regional commander during the T'ang dynasty. He won power at court through the patronage of Hsüan-tsung's favorite consort, Yang Kuei-fei, who adopted him as her legal son. Later he contended with Yang Kuei-fei's brother for control of the central government and led a rebellion in 755, capturing the capital. The fleeing emperor Hsüan-tsung was forced by his discontented soldiers to order the execution of Yang Kuei-fei and her brother, who were blamed for the catastrophe. An Lu-shan was eventually killed by his own son, An Ch'ing-hsü, in the course of a succession dispute concerning the imperial family. Shih Shih-ming was one of the leaders of the An Lu-shan rebellion, and after killing An Ch'ing-hsü, was in turn killed by his own son, Shih Ch'ao-i.

19. Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra. The Daishonin slightly modifies the wording of the original.

20. Parthia was an ancient kingdom extending from northwestern India to Persia. Founded in 248 B.C.E., it fell in C.E. 226. The story of the king who turned people into horses appears in *A Collection of Treasures*, written by Taira no Yasuyori during the Jisho era (1177-1181).

21. This story appears in *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."* Chased by a lion, a fox accidentally fell into a dry well and remained there for three days. On the brink of starvation, he resolved to dedicate himself to the Buddhist Law and recited a verse expressing his desire to expiate his past offenses. When the fox's voice reached the god Shakra on the summit of Mount Sumeru, Shakra rescued him and asked him to preach the Law to him and the other heavenly gods.

22. "A thousand ri" is not intended as an exact figure but simply indicates a great distance.

23. On the original manuscript, probably having run out of space, the Daishonin inserted this postscript at the beginning of the letter. In preparing the translation, we have moved it to the end, following a more recent editing of the Japanese manuscript.

24. Bungo-bo was a disciple of the Daishonin who seems to have instructed Abutsu-bo and other followers in the province of Sado.

25. The area including Sado and the six

mainland provinces bordering on the Sea of Japan.

26. Tamba-bo was a disciple of the Daishonin. He is said to have taken part in the Daishonin's funeral procession and was among those who served in the rotation

system for attending the Daishonin's grave. He lived at Myoko-ji temple in Kazusa Province.

27. Yamabushi-bo was one of the Daishonin's disciples on Sado Island, probably under the patronage of Abutsu-bo.