

The Place of the Cluster of Blessings



I HAVE received the rice you sent from Tono'oka.¹ I used it as an offering for the service for deceased ancestors² in the seventh month of this year. Not only the priests who participated, but the assembly gathered at Eagle Peak,³ the Buddha, and the gods must surely have accepted your offering and be rejoicing. It is difficult to express in words my appreciation for your unfailing sincerity and for your frequent visits.

In any event, there can be no doubt about your enlightenment in your next life. Above all, I remember how, in the eighth year of the Bun'ei era (1271), when I incurred the wrath of the authorities and was about to be beheaded at Tatsunokuchi in the province of Sagami, you held on to the reins of my horse, accompanying me barefoot and shedding tears of grief. You were even prepared to give your life had I in fact been executed. In what lifetime could I possibly forget it?

And that is not all. Exiled to the island of Sado, buried as I was beneath snows from the northern sea and exposed to winds from the northern peaks, it hardly seemed I would survive. Cast away even by my comrades of long standing, I thought that I could no more return to my birthplace than a stone on the bottom of the ocean requiring the strength of a thousand men to move it

could float to the surface. Ordinary person that I am, I naturally longed for the people of my native village.

For you, a lay person pressed for time in your lord's service, to believe in the Lotus Sutra is itself very rare. Moreover, surmounting mountains and rivers and crossing the great blue sea, you came to visit me from afar. How could your resolve be inferior to that of the man who broke open his bones at the City of Fragrances,⁴ or of the boy who threw away his body on the Snow Mountains?⁵

Again, for my part, though there was so little chance of rising again in the world, for some reason or other I was pardoned in the spring of the eleventh year of Bun'ei and was able to return to Kamakura.

On pondering the meaning of these affairs, I believe I must now be free from the karma of past offenses. Once I was almost deprived of life. In the Kocho era I was exiled to the province of Izu, and in the Bun'ei era, to the island of Sado. Because I remonstrated repeatedly with the authorities, I have encountered one persecution after another. Yet, for that very reason, I have certainly already escaped the charge of "betraying the Buddha's teaching."⁶

However, when I desired to leave the world for this mountain forest to pursue the way, people voiced differing

opinions. Nevertheless, for reasons I had carefully considered, I came to this mountain in this province, where I have already passed seven springs and autumns.

Setting aside for now the question of my wisdom, in enduring hardship and in suffering injury as an ally of the Lotus Sutra, I surpass even the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China and excel even the Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan. This is because the time has made it so. If indeed I am a votary of the Lotus Sutra, then Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings of Eagle Peak; the Thus Come One Many Treasures of the World of Treasure Purity; the Buddhas of the ten directions who are Shakyamuni's emanations; the great bodhisattvas of the essential teaching; the great bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching; Brahma, Shakra, the dragon deities, and the ten demon daughters must all be present in this place. Where there is water, fish dwell. Where there

are woods, birds gather. On the mountain island of P'eng-lai there are many jewels, and on Mount Malaya sandalwood trees grow. There is gold in the mountains from which the river Li-shui⁷ flows. Now this place, too, is like that. It is the place of the cluster of blessings⁸ where the Buddhas and bodhisattvas dwell.

The blessings of the Lotus Sutra, which I have recited over these many years, must be vaster even than the sky. Thus, by having come here frequently year after year, it is certain that within this lifetime you will eradicate the karmic hindrances you have accumulated since the beginningless past. You should exert yourself all the more.

Nichiren

The eighth day of the tenth month

Reply to Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon, or Shijo Kingo, in the tenth month of the third year of Koan (1280) to express his thanks for an offering of rice. He also praises Kingo's unusual dedication, voicing gratitude not only for the indomitable spirit that the samurai displayed at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, when the Daishonin was nearly executed, but also for the great efforts he has made since then in visiting the Daishonin and providing him with needed supplies, both on Sado Island and at Mount Minobu.

In the latter part of the letter, the Daishonin states his conviction that, by

undergoing various hardships on the Lotus Sutra's account, he has surely freed himself from the karma of past slanders. In undergoing such persecution for the sake of the Mystic Law, he says, he surpasses even those great masters of the past, T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo. By so doing, he has shown himself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. He expresses his enlightenment as a person whose life is one with the Law by describing his dwelling in the wilderness of Mount Minobu as "the place of the cluster of blessings" where Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities gather.

Notes

1. An area located in Igara Village of Shimoina District in Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture), held in fief by Shijo Kingo.

2. The service for deceased ancestors refers to a Buddhist ceremony in which offerings are made for the repose of dead ancestors, usually held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

3. The “assembly gathered at Eagle Peak” refers to those present in the assembly where the Lotus Sutra was preached.

4. Reference is to Bodhisattva Ever Wailing, who cut his flesh and broke open his bones to sell his blood and marrow to a Brahman (actually the god Shakra in disguise) who claimed to desire them for use in a sacrifice. He sought in this way to obtain the means of making an offering to Bodhisattva Dharmodgata, who lived in the

City of Fragrances, and hearing his teaching on the perfection of wisdom.

5. The boy Snow Mountains, who offered his body to a demon to hear a Buddhist teaching.

6. Nirvana Sutra. The Daishonin refers to the passage that 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.”

7. Probably the Lishui River in present-day Chekiang Province in China.

8. “The cluster of blessings” is an expression used to translate the Sanskrit word *mandala*. In *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon* (p. 832), the Daishonin also refers to the Gohonzon in this way.