

## The Wealthy Man Sudatta



I HAVE received your offering of one thousand coins. Because you have demonstrated such sincerity, I will tell you something. You must not think I am a greedy priest.

I will teach you how to become a Buddha easily. Teaching another something is the same as oiling the wheels of a cart so that they turn even though it is heavy, or as floating a boat on water so that it moves ahead easily. The way to become a Buddha easily is nothing special. It is the same as giving water to a thirsty person in a time of drought, or as providing fire for a person freezing in the cold. Or again, it is the same as giving another something that is one of a kind, or as offering something as alms to another even at the risk of one's life.

There was once a ruler called King Golden Color.<sup>1</sup> For twelve years his country was besieged by a severe drought, and countless numbers of people died of starvation. In the rivers, corpses were treated as bridges, and on land, skeletons were regarded as burial mounds. At that time, King Golden Color aroused a great aspiration to save others and distributed a vast quantity of alms. He gave away everything he could, until a mere five measures of rice remained in his storehouse. When his ministers informed him that this would provide him with food for a sin-

gle day, the great king took up the five measures of rice and let each of his starving subjects have, for example, one or two grains, or three or four grains. Then he looked up to the heavens and raised his voice, crying out that he would take the pain of all the people's hunger and thirst on himself and die of starvation. The heavenly gods heard him and instantly sent down the sweet rain of immortality. All those people whose bodies this rain touched or whose faces it fell upon became satiated with food, and in the space of a moment, the inhabitants of the entire country revived.

In India there was a wealthy man called Sudatta. Seven times he became poor, and seven times he became a wealthy man. During his last period of poverty, when all the people had fled or perished and only he and his wife remained, they had five measures of rice that would nourish them for five days. At that time, five people—Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, Ananda, Rahula, and Shakyamuni Buddha—came one after another to beg for the five measures of rice, which Sudatta gave them. From that day on, Sudatta was the wealthiest man in all India, and he built Jetavana Monastery. From this, you should understand all things.

Just as a monkey resembles a man and a rice cake resembles the moon,

you already resemble the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Because you so earnestly protected my followers in Atsuhara, the people of this country consider you to be like Masakado of the Shohei era or Sadato of the Tengi era. This is solely because you have devoted your life to the Lotus Sutra. The heavenly gods do not in the least regard you as a man who has betrayed his lord. In addition, having had numerous public works forcibly assigned to your little village, you yourself lack the horse you should be riding, and your wife and children lack the clothing they should be wearing. Your feeling anxious that the votary of the Lotus Sutra was probably being assailed by snow amidst the moun-

tains and in want of food, and sending me one thousand coins even in such circumstances, is exactly like the poor woman giving a begging monk the single garment that she and her husband wore, or like Rida giving the millet in his jar to a pratyekabuddha.<sup>2</sup> How admirable, how noble! I will speak to you in more detail later.

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month in the third year of Koan (1280)

Reply to Ueno



## Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the winter of 1280 and sent to Nanjo Tokimitsu, the young steward of Ueno Village in Suruga Province. Since Nichiren Daishonin had come to live in Minobu, Tokimitsu had been particularly close to Nikko Shonin, supporting his propagation efforts in the Fuji area. During the Atsuhara Persecution, he used his influence to protect other believers, sheltering some in his own home and negotiating for the release of others who had been imprisoned. The Daishonin honored him for his courage by calling him “Ueno the Worthy,”

though the young man was barely twenty at the time.

This letter was written just over a year after the worst period of the Atsuhara Persecution. The authorities in Kamakura, in retaliation for Tokimitsu’s support of the Daishonin’s followers, had imposed heavy punitive taxes on his estate and demanded that he supply men for unpaid labor. Despite his own destitution, however, Tokimitsu’s first concern was for the Daishonin, and he somehow managed to send him one thousand coins. Deeply touched, the Daishonin wrote him this response.

## Notes

1. King Golden Color refers to Shakyamuni Buddha in a previous existence. The King Golden Color Sutra tells a slightly different version of the story, in which the king gives his last measure of rice as alms to a pratyekabuddha. Then, clothing, food, and other treasures rain down from the heavens, and the people are relieved of their suffering.

2. As the Storehouse of Various Treasures Sutra tells the story, a certain wealthy man has two sons, Rida and Arida. At the time of his death, rather than dividing his wealth between them, he admonishes them to help each other. Eventually the elder brother, Rida, falls on hard times and takes religious vows, becoming a pratyekabuddha. The younger brother, Arida, also

loses his fortune and is compelled to eke out a living selling firewood. One day, observing a pratyekabuddha with an empty almsbowl, he offers him a meal without realizing that this is his elder brother. As a result of this good deed, he is reborn first as

the heavenly king Shakra, then as a wheel-turning king, and finally as one of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples. Though the text refers to Rida, the Daishonin may have meant Arida.