

Reply to Onichi-nyo



I HAD already received the three hundred coins that you sent by the hand of the priest Ben-bo,¹ and now you have again sent me two hundred coins.

The Buddha, being truly worthy of respect, never judges by the size of one's offerings. In the past, the boy Virtue Victorious offered a mud pie to the Buddha, and was reborn as King Ashoka and ruled over all of Jambudvīpa. A poor woman cut off her hair and sold it to buy oil [for the Buddha],² and not even the winds sweeping down from Mount Sumeru could extinguish the flame of the lamp fed by this oil. Accordingly, your offerings of two and three strings of coins are far greater even than those of the ruler of Japan, who may offer the nation and build a pagoda adorned with the seven kinds of treasures that reaches to the heaven of the thirty-three gods.

A single character of the Lotus Sutra

is like the great earth, which gives rise to all things. A single character is like the great ocean, which contains the water from all rivers. A single character is like the sun and moon, which illuminate all four continents.

This single character changes and [becomes the moon. The moon changes and] becomes a Buddha.³ Rice plants change and become seedlings. Seedlings change and become stalks. Stalks change and become rice. Rice changes and becomes a person. And a person changes and becomes a Buddha. A woman changes and becomes the single character *myō*. The character *myō* changes and becomes Shakyamuni Buddha seated on a lotus pedestal. Nam-myōho-rengo-kyō, Nam-myōho-rengo-kyō.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

To Onichi



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the third year of Koan (1280) to a woman named Onichi-nyo. Though not much is known about her, the opening passage of the letter suggests

that she had some connection with Nissho, one of the Daishonin's senior disciples.

Citing the stories about the boy Virtue Victorious and about the poor

woman who sold her hair for oil, the Daishonin first praises Onichi-nyo's offerings, which, though not large, were given with a sincere heart. He then ex-

plains the great power of Nam-myohorenge-kyo that enables all people to attain Buddhahood.

Notes

1. Ben-bo is another name for Nissho (1221-1323), the Daishonin's first convert among the priesthood, who became one of his six senior disciples.

2. This story appears in the Prophecy of Buddhahood for King Ajatashatru Sutra. The version recounted here is different in some particulars. According to the sutra, an old woman in Magadha had always desired to make an offering to the Buddha, but could not fulfill her wish because of her poverty. One day she learned that King Ajatashatru was donating a great quantity of

oil to the Buddha for lamps. Deeply impressed, she went out begging, but gained only enough money to buy oil for a single lamp. Then, though the lamps offered by King Ajatashatru all eventually went out, her lamp alone continued to burn throughout the night.

3. In the Japanese text, this passage reads, "This single character changes and becomes a Buddha." The rendering here, with the reference to the moon, reflects the original work in the Daishonin's own hand.