

Reply to Jibu-bo



I HAVE received one *to* of polished rice, some myoga¹ buds, and one package of ginger.

People who present the Buddha with the cherry blossoms of spring, the crimson leaves of autumn, the clear water of summer, and the snow of winter all become Buddhas. How then could one who makes the Lotus Sutra an offering of rice, which sustains the life of the emperor and which to the common people is more valuable than jewels, possibly fail to become a Buddha?

In society, what people value are the words of the ruler and the words of their parents. One who disregards the instructions of one's parents is guilty of a lack of filial piety and will be abandoned by heaven. One who fails to do the bidding of the ruler of the country is a violator of the royal command and will have one's life taken away. Cherishing the desire for enlightenment from inconceivably distant kalpas in the past, we have done such things as abandoning our countries, our wives and children, or our own lives for the sake of attaining enlightenment in future existences. When we thus draw near to achieving Buddhahood, and when we encounter the scripture entitled the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law that is the single vehicle, the devil king of the sixth heaven, lord of the threefold

world, reasons: "If these persons should become Buddhas, I will suffer loss on two counts. First of all, if they free themselves from the threefold world, they will escape my control. Second, if they become Buddhas, their parents and siblings will also depart from the saha world. How can I stop this from happening?"

He then produces various emanations and with these takes possession of our parents, enters the body of the ruler of our country, or becomes a respected priest, exhorting us to commit evil acts, making threats, or resorting to flattery. Or else he becomes a high-ranking priest, a great priest, a learned priest, or someone who upholds the precepts, and, with the Flower Garland or Agama sutras or the Nembutsu or True Word teachings, attempts to turn us away from the Lotus Sutra, using deception to prevent us from becoming Buddhas.

The fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra states that, when the Latter Day of the Law arrives, a great demon will first enter the bodies of the sovereign, ministers, and common people, and curse or strike and wound the votary of the Lotus Sutra. If this fails, he will appear as an immeasurable multitude of priests who, employing all the other sutras, attempt to win the votary over. If this does not succeed, he will become a

great priest who upholds the two hundred and fifty precepts and the three thousand rules of conduct, and wheedle the sovereign and deceive his wife so that the votary is exiled or an attempt is made on his life.²

We may also refer to the detailed descriptions in the “Never Disparaging” chapter of the seventh volume, the “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the fourth volume, and the “Simile and Parable” chapter of the second volume, as well as in the forty-volume Nirvana Sutra and in the Protection Sutra, which differ not in the least from the conditions of the present time. In addition, the events in the area of Kajima in Suruga Province,³ especially as they affected you personally, must have brought these things to mind. In a way that bears no comparison with other matters, disobeying the prohibitions that one’s parents or the sovereign may put forward regarding the Lotus Sutra will in fact constitute filial piety toward one’s parents and accord with the prayers of the sovereign [for peace].

Furthermore, Japan is an unusual country, a country that respects the gods and honors the Buddhas. Nevertheless, because everyone from the sovereign on down to the common people hates Nichiren for propagating the Lotus Sutra, though they may revere all the gods and make offerings to all the Buddhas, these meritorious acts only turn into great evil. This is like moxibustion causing the outbreak of virulent boils, or medicine turning into poison. The prayers they offer to all the Buddhas and gods turn into

faults, and the country itself is about to become the possession of foreign countries. Moreover, for some time I have been telling people that the time will come when those of high standing will all suffer agonies that are a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times worse than those suffered by the Heike clan at the time of their destruction.⁴

By considering the magnitude of the punishment suffered by those who harbor enmity toward the Lotus Sutra, we can understand the magnitude of the benefits obtained by devoting oneself to it. For example, if one murders one’s parents, then no matter how many causes for great good one may create, one’s efforts will not be acceptable to heaven. But if one kills an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, even if that enemy should be one’s father or mother, this great crime will turn into a cause for great good.⁵ Even if one should be an archenemy of all the Buddhas of the three existences and the ten directions, if one believes in a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddhas will not abandon one. With this in mind, please carefully consider the nature of this matter. Because the messenger is in a hurry, I cannot write in detail, but I will write to you again.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-second day of the eighth month.

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Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the eighth month of the fourth year of Koan (1281) and sent to a disciple

named Jibu-bo Nichii, originally a Tendai priest at Shijuku-in temple in Suruga Province. Jibu-bo took faith in

the Daishonin's teachings and studied under Nichiji, one of the Daishonin's senior disciples.

Although the Atsuhara Persecution had ended almost two years before this letter was written, it is conceivable that the believers who were connected with this persecution were still being harassed by the authorities. The Daishonin explains that, when one approaches enlightenment, the devil king of the sixth heaven will enter the bodies of

the ruler of the country and of one's parents to thwart one's practice.

From the fifth to the seventh month of 1281, Japan was invaded by the Mongol forces, precipitating a deep crisis in the country. The Daishonin has this fact in mind when he says, "Though they [the Japanese] may revere all the gods and make offerings to all the Buddhas, these meritorious acts only turn into great evil."

Notes

1. A perennial grass plant belonging to the ginger family, whose buds and flower stems are both edible and fragrant.

2. This statement from the sutra's fifth volume is found in chapter 13 of the Lotus Sutra.

3. Exactly what "events" are referred to here is unclear, but it may indicate the Atsuhara Persecution, which occurred two years earlier. Kajima, like the village of Atsuhara, was located in Fuji District of Suruga Province.

4. In 1180 Minamoto no Yoritomo led a revolt against the powerful Heike, or Taira, clan. In the five-year struggle that ensued, Yoritomo's forces crushed the Taira and established a warrior government in Kama-

kura to rule Japan. All the major Taira leaders, including Taira no Kiyomori, died or were killed during this period, and the clan never again achieved prominence.

5. It is plainly evident from the body of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, and from the fact that he personally took pains to avoid harming any living thing, that he placed ultimate value on life. This statement, then, is clearly not to be taken as an exhortation to murder the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, but rather as a tool of emphasis and contrast. It may also be seen as an expression of the Buddhist spirit to do battle with and conquer the evil or darkness inherent within life.