

Roots of Good Fortune



I HAVE received the various gifts that you were kind enough to send.

The roots of good fortune are not determined by whether one's offerings are large or small. Depending upon the country, the person, and the time, the merit gained will differ in various ways. Suppose one dries dung, breaks it up, passes it through a sieve, and forms it to resemble a block of sandalwood. Even if one were to then carve this into the image of a woman, a heavenly goddess, or a Buddha, when it is burned, it would still give off no other fragrance but the stink of dung. Similarly, if one kills or robs others and takes from them the first fruits of the harvest, then even if one should offer one's gains with the intent of acquiring merit and good fortune, that offering would instead become an evil deed.

The wealthy man Sudatta was the richest person in all of India. He built Jetavana Monastery as an offering and invited the Buddha there. Yet his monastery burned down, and not a trace of it remained. This rich man originally gained his wealth by catching and selling fish, thus depriving them of life, and therefore in the end this monastery disappeared.

In the same way, the donations made by people today may seem impressive, but they are offerings of fiefs won in

battle, or of wealth gained by heedlessly oppressing the people. Though these gifts appear to be great acts of devotion to the Buddha, not only will the people who offer them fail to attain Buddhahood, but their contributions will vanish without a trace.

Again, even if one does no harm to others and honestly strives to make offerings, there will be cases in which one does not attain Buddhahood. To illustrate, if one plants good seed in a bad field, the seed itself will be ruined, and one will in turn suffer loss. Even if one is sincere, if the person to whom one makes offerings is evil, those offerings will fail to produce benefit; rather, they will cause one to fall into the evil paths.

Your own offerings were not made to me, Nichiren, but to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, we must leave it to Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions [to fathom the greatness of] the resulting benefits.

I have written to you about various events of this past year, but I must say that I do not recall at any time in my life such cold as we are now experiencing. The snow has fallen and piled up in great quantity. Even those with a strong resolve find it difficult to visit me. The fact that you have sent a

messenger to me here shows that yours
is certainly no ordinary sincerity!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-seventh day of the
twelfth month

Reply to the lay nun of Kubo



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu in the last month of the fourth year of Koan (1281) to the lay nun of Kubo, thanking her for the offerings that she had sent him. The lay nun was a widow who lived with her daughter in Kubo in Fuji District of Suruga Province, but little else is known about her. From the contents of the several letters addressed to her, she appears to have been a believer of pure faith who frequently sent offerings to the Daishonin.

In response to her gifts, the Daishonin compares making offerings for the sake of Buddhism to a way of

planting “good roots” or accumulating merit and good fortune. In the opening passage, he explains that the benefit gained from donations depends upon the time, the place, and the person to whom they are offered. Moreover, even a large donation, if it derives from wealth obtained by harming or exploiting others, will never produce benefit, even though offered for the sake of Buddhism. Also, the Daishonin explains that one’s sincerity in making the offerings and the virtue of the person or teaching to which they are made are vital.