

## The Proof of the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren, the votary of the Lotus Sutra



HOW does the mirror of the Lotus Sutra portray the people who, in the evil world of the latter age, believe in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra just as they are set forth in the sutra? Shakyamuni Buddha has left us words from his golden mouth revealing that such people have already made offerings to a hundred thousand million Buddhas in their past existences.<sup>1</sup> But ordinary people in the latter age might well doubt the words spoken by just one Buddha. With this in mind, Many Treasures Buddha came expressly all the way from his World of Treasure Purity, many lands to the east. Facing Shakyamuni Buddha, he gave his words of testimony about the Lotus Sutra, saying, "All that you have expounded is the truth!"<sup>2</sup> If this is so, then there can be no room for doubt about the matter. Nevertheless, Shakyamuni Buddha may have felt that ordinary people in the latter age would still be skeptical. Hence he summoned the Buddhas of the ten directions to come and join him in the magnificent act of extending their long broad tongues, which had told nothing but the truth for countless kalpas, until they projected into the sky as high as Mount Sumeru.

Since this is the case, when ordinary people in the latter age believe in even one or two words of the Lotus Sutra, they are embracing the teaching to which the Buddhas of the ten direc-

tions have given credence. I wonder what karma we created in the past to have been born as such persons, and I am filled with joy. The words of Shakyamuni that I referred to above indicate that the blessings that come from having made offerings to a hundred thousand million Buddhas are so great that, even if one has believed in teachings other than the Lotus Sutra and as a result of this slander been born poor and lowly, one is still able to believe in this sutra in this lifetime. A T'ien-t'ai [school's] commentary states, "It is like the case of a person who falls to the ground, but who then pushes himself up from the ground and rises to his feet again."<sup>3</sup> One who has fallen to the ground recovers and rises up from the ground. Those who slander the Lotus Sutra will fall to the ground of the three evil paths, or of the human and heavenly realms, but in the end, through the help of the Lotus Sutra, they will attain Buddhahood.

Now since you, Ueno Shichiro Jiro, are an ordinary person in the latter age and were born to a warrior family, you should by rights be called an evil man,<sup>4</sup> and yet your heart is that of a good man. I say this for a reason. Everyone, from the ruler on down to the common people, refuses to take faith in my teachings. They inflict harm on the few who do embrace them,

heavily taxing or confiscating their estates and fields, or even in some cases putting them to death. So it is a difficult thing to believe in my teachings, and yet both your mother and your deceased father dared to accept them. Now you have succeeded your father as his heir, and without any prompting from others, you too have wholeheartedly embraced these teachings. Many people, both high and low, have admonished or threatened you, but you have refused to give up your faith. Since you now appear certain to attain Buddhahood, perhaps the heavenly devil and evil spirits<sup>5</sup> are using illness to try to intimidate you. Life in this world is limited. Never be even the least bit afraid!

And you demons, by making this man suffer, are you trying to swallow a

sword point first, or embrace a raging fire, or become the archenemy of the Buddhas of the ten directions in the three existences? How terrible this will be for you! Should you not cure this man's illness immediately, act rather as his protectors, and escape from the grievous sufferings that are the lot of demons? If you fail to do so, will you not have your heads broken into seven pieces in this life<sup>6</sup> and fall into the great hell of incessant suffering in your next life! Consider it deeply. Consider it. If you ignore my words, you will certainly regret it later.

The twenty-eighth day of the second month in the fifth year of Koan (1282)

Delivered by Hoki-bo.<sup>7</sup>



## Background

This letter was written at Minobu to Nanjo Shichiro Jiro, commonly known as Nanjo Tokimitsu, in the second month, 1282, when Nichiren Daishonin himself was seriously ill.

When he was in his teens, Tokimitsu had assumed his deceased father's duties as steward of the Ueno district, which covered a vast area on one side of Mount Fuji. Particularly during the Atsuhara Persecution, Tokimitsu had made many sacrifices in order to defend the Daishonin's followers who lived in his domains. For his courage, the Daishonin had honored him by naming him "Ueno the Worthy" in a letter written on the sixth day of the eleventh month, 1279, and entitled *The Dragon Gate*.

On first hearing of Tokimitsu's grave illness, the Daishonin had apparently asked a disciple to write a letter of encouragement on his behalf since he

himself was too ill to write. Deeply concerned, however, about the youthful believer, he forced himself to take up his writing brush and sent this letter through Nikko Shonin to help Tokimitsu overcome his illness.

The Daishonin declares that Tokimitsu is a person who, according to the Lotus Sutra, has made offerings to a hundred thousand million Buddhas in his past existences. He then strictly warns the demons causing Tokimitsu's illness that, if they do not cure him, they will suffer in the great Avichi hell.

The letter is traditionally called *The Proof of the Lotus Sutra* because it points out that all the Buddhas gave credence to the truth of the Lotus Sutra. However, it is also known as *Prayer for a Return to Life from Fatal Illness* because Tokimitsu was then battling a serious illness.

**Notes**

1. This is mentioned in the “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.
2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 11.
3. Miao-lo’s *Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.”*
4. The Daishonin says this because the work of a warrior involves killing.
5. The original word for evil spirits is “gedo,” which literally means “out of the

- way” and usually indicates heretics and non-Buddhists. Here the word means something or someone that brings about disasters. Hence the expression “evil spirits.”
6. Reference is to a passage in the “Dharani” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.
  7. Hoki-bo is another name for Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin’s closest disciple and his successor.