I HAVE written out the prose section
of the “Expedient Means” chapter for you. You should recite it to-
gether with the verse portion of the “Life Span” chapter, which I sent you
earlier.

The characters of this sutra are all
without exception living Buddhas of
perfect enlightenment. But because we
have the eyes of ordinary people, we
see them as characters. For instance,
hungry spirits perceive the Ganges Riv-
er as fire, human beings perceive it as
water, and heavenly beings perceive it as
amrita. Though the water is the same,
it appears differently according to one’s
karmic reward from the past.

The blind cannot see the characters
of this sutra. To the eyes of ordinary
people, they look like characters. Per-
sons of the two vehicles perceive them
as the void. Bodhisattvas look on them
as innumerable doctrines. Buddhas rec-
ognize each character as a golden
Shakyamuni. This is what is meant by
the passage that says, “[If one can up-
hold this sutra], one will be uphold-
ing the Buddha’s body.” Those who
practice with distorted views, how-
ever, are destroying this most precious
sutra. You should simply be careful
that, without differing thoughts, you
single-mindedly aspire to the pure land
of Eagle Peak. A passage in the Six
Paramitas Sutra\(^2\) says to become the
master of your mind rather than let
your mind master you. I will explain in
detail when I see you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third month in the twelfth year
of Bun’ei (1275)

To the lay priest Soya

Background

This letter was written at Minobu to
Soya Kyoshin, a believer who lived in
Soya Village of Katsushika District in
Shimosa Province. Soya Kyoshin con-
verted to the Daishonin’s teachings
around 1260 and became one of the
leading believers in the area, together
with Toki Jonin and Ota Jonyo. Later,
he took the tonsure, and the Daishonin
gave him the Buddhist name Horen
Nichirai.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin
urges Soya Kyoshin to recite both a portion of the “Expedient Means” chapter and the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter, the two key chapters of the Lotus Sutra, in his daily prayers. He also states that each character of the Lotus Sutra is in fact a living Buddha of supreme enlightenment. Therefore, to uphold and recite this sutra is to uphold the body of the Buddha—that is, to attain Buddhahood in one’s present form.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.
2. A sutra translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Prajna of the T’ang dynasty. It explains in detail the six kinds of practices, or “perfections” (Skt paramita), that bodhisattvas must carry out in order to attain enlightenment.