I HAVE received the two baskets of
leached persimmons¹ and the basket
of eggplants you sent. Concerning the
matter of [your husband] the lay priest's
illness, there were physicians in China
named Huang Ti and Pien Ch’üeh,² and
there were physicians in India named
Water Holder³ and Jivaka. They were
the treasures of their age and teachers
to the physicians of later times. But the
man called the Buddha was a superb
physician who far surpassed them. This
Buddha expounded the medicine of
immortality. This is the five characters
of Myoho-RENGE-KYO we have today.
Moreover, he specifically taught that
these five characters are "good medi-
cine for the ills of the people of Jambu-
dvipa."⁴

The lay priest is a man of Japan,
which lies within Jambudvipa, and fur-
thermore he suffers from bodily illness.
The sutra passage about good medi-
cine for illness is clear. In addition,
this Sutra of the Lotus is the greatest
medicine. When a wicked ruler named
King Virudhaka killed more than five
hundred women of the Buddha's clan,
the Buddha sent Ananda to Eagle Peak
for blue lotus flowers that he then
touched to the bodies of the women,
who were restored to life and after
seven days were reborn in the heaven
of the thirty-three gods. Because the
flower known as the lotus is a flower
possessing such excellent virtue, the
Buddha likened it to the Mystic Law.

Also, a person's death is not deter-
mined by illness. In our own time, the
people of Iki and Tsushima, though
not suffering from illness, were slaugh-
tered in an instant by the Mongols. It is
not certain that, because one is ill, one
will die. And could not this illness of
your husband's be the Buddha's design,
because the Vimalakirti and Nirvana
sutras both teach that sick people will
surely attain Buddhahood? Illness gives
rise to the resolve to attain the way.

Among all the diseases, the Buddha
worried that the five cardinal sins, in-
corrigible disbelief, and slander of the
Law were especially grave ones. With-
out a single exception, the people of
Japan today are afflicted with the most
serious of all illnesses, the grave illness
of major slander. I refer to the follow-
ers of the Zen, Nembutsu, and Pre-
cepts schools, and to the True Word
teachers. Because their illness is so seri-
ous, neither do they recognize it in
themselves, nor are others aware of it.
And because this illness worsens, war-
riors from throughout the four seas will
attack at any moment, and the ruler,
his ministers, and the common people
will all sink into the sea. To see this
before one's very eyes is indeed a pain-
ful thing.

In his present life, the lay priest does
not appear to have had particularly strong faith in the Lotus Sutra. But due
to the workings of his karma from the
past, he has sunk into this long illness
and now seeks the way day and night
without cease. Any minor offenses he
committed in this lifetime have proba-
bly already been eradicated, and the
great evil of slander will also be extin-
guished because he has taken faith in
the Lotus Sutra. If he were to go right
now to Eagle Peak, he would be as de-
lighted as if the sun had come out and
he were able to see in all ten directions.
He would rejoice, wondering how an
early death could be so happy a thing.
No matter what may happen on the
road between this life and the next, he
should declare himself to be a disciple
of Nichiren. Although Japan is a tiny
country, if one but announces that one
is a vassal of the lord of Sagami, people
will unaccountably fear one. I am the
most unreasonable priest in Japan, but
with regard to believing in the Lotus
Sutra, I am the foremost sage in Jam-
budvipa. My name resounds through-
out the pure lands of the ten directions,
and heaven and earth no doubt know
it. If your husband declares that he is
Nichiren’s disciple, I do not think that
evil demons of any kind can claim ig-
norance of my name.

I have no words to express my thanks
for your frequent sincere offerings.

With my deep respect.

Monkeys rely on trees, fish rely on
water, and women rely on men. Being
loath to part from your husband, you
shaved off your hair and dyed your
sleeves black. Thinking, “How could
the Buddhas of the ten directions pos-
sibly not feel compassion for me?” and
“How could the Lotus Sutra ever aban-
don me?” rely on them, rely on them!

Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the eighth
month

Reply to the lay nun Myoshin

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Background

This letter was written at Minobu to
the lay nun Myoshin. The most widely
accepted view suggests that it was writ-
ten in the first year of Koan (1278);
another view is that it was written in
the first year of Kenji (1279). Few de-
tails about Myoshin are known. One
explanation identifies her as the wife of
the lay priest Takahashi Rokuro Hyoe,
and if this is correct, she would have
been an aunt of Nikko Shonin. In any
event, she lived in Fuji District of Su-
ruga Province and was a follower of
Nichiren Daishonin.

This letter was a reply to a report
from Myoshin about her husband’s ill-
ness. The Daishonin encourages her to
view his illness as a manifestation of the
Buddha’s compassion, since it has en-
abled him to arouse a determination to
seek enlightenment—a determination
that he previously lacked. He explains
that, because of the sincerity of her
husband’s recently awakened faith, he
will certainly be able to eradicate the
bad karma of his misdeeds; and even if
he were to die now, he would experi-
ence the boundless joy of the Law that
transcends both life and death.

When her husband eventually died
of his illness, Myoshin was left with a
young child. She maintained her faith
after her husband’s death and visited
the Daishonin often at Minobu to bring
him offerings.
Notes

1. Persimmons from which the astringency has been removed by soaking them in a solution of lime or buckwheat chaff.

2. Huang Ti, or the Yellow Emperor, was one of the legendary Three Sovereigns of ancient China. According to Records of the Historian, among other major contributions to civilization, he initiated the art of medicine. Pien Ch’üeh was a physician of China’s Spring and Autumn period (770–403 B.C.E.). He learned the medical arts in boyhood and is said to have been skilled in treating virtually all forms of disease.

3. According to the Golden Light Sutra, a skilled physician who lived countless kalpas ago in the Middle Day of the Law of Treasure Excellence Buddha. When an epidemic broke out, Water Holder, then a very old man, taught the medical arts to his son, Water Carrier, enabling him to save the people.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

5. The Daishonin is referring here to Myoshin’s having become a lay nun.