

On the Offering of a Mud Pie



I HAVE received two containers of clear sake, one basket of mandarin oranges, ten blocks of konnyaku,¹ one basket of taros, one bundle of burdock root, and the various other gifts that you sent.

The two little boys Virtue Victorious and Invincible presented an offering of a mud pie to the Buddha, and as a result they were reborn as the great king Ashoka, ruler of one third of the continent of Jambudvīpa [and as his consort]. Bodhisattva Learned Youth presented five lotus blossoms as an offering to Fixed Light Buddha and thereby attained Buddhahood, becoming Shakyamuni, our present lord of teachings.

The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: “If there is someone who seeks the Buddha way and for the space of a kalpa presses palms together in my presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these praises of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable blessings. And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra, one’s good fortune will be even greater.”²

The point of this passage is that one will gain greater blessings by giving alms to the votary of the Lotus Sutra, who in the evil world of the latter age is so intensely hated, than by giving alms to the Buddha for a whole medium kalpa. And if you should wonder

who is making such a wild statement, it is none other than Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, himself. Whether you doubt or believe him is up to you.

The tongue of the Buddha can cover his whole face, can cover an entire major world system, or can reach up to the highest heaven of the world of form.³ From far, far distant kalpas in the past down to the present, he has never once spoken a word of falsehood. Thus, as a certain sutra tells us, “Though Mount Sumeru may topple, though the great earth may turn upside down, the Buddha will never speak an untruth.”⁴

Though the sun may rise in the west or the tides may cease to ebb and flow, the words of the Buddha will never be in error. And moreover, this Lotus Sutra surpasses all the other sutras, and Many Treasures Buddha and the other Buddhas all extended their tongues up to the Brahma heaven, testifying that not one word, not one letter of it is false.

What is more, although your late father was a warrior, he had an abiding faith in the Lotus Sutra, and thus—you were only a child at the time—I know that he ended his life in the frame of mind of a true believer. And now you have succeeded him and likewise are firm in your faith in this sutra. Though

his spirit is hidden now in the grasses, I am sure he must be very pleased. And how happy he would be if only he were still alive!

Persons who uphold this sutra, though they may be strangers to one another, will meet on Eagle Peak. And how much more certain is it that you and your late father, because you both have faith in the Lotus Sutra, will be reborn there together!

Others may live to fifty or sixty and still have their fathers with them to share the gray-haired years. But in your case you lost your father at a very early age, and hence were deprived of his instruction and guidance. When I think of what this must have meant for you, I cannot restrain my tears.

I, Nichiren, had profound hopes of aiding the country of Japan, but the people of Japan, high and low alike, all seemingly bent on the destruction of the nation, not only did not heed my advice, but again and again treated me with animosity. Powerless to do otherwise, I retired to this mountain forest. And now word has come of an attack by the forces of the great kingdom of the Mongols. I am deeply grieved, pondering how things might have been had they only listened to my advice. When I think that they must all suffer as the people of Iki and Tsushima have suffered, my tears flow without end.

The Nembutsu school of Buddhism is an evil doctrine that will destroy the nation. In this present conflict, it seems that many of the warriors have committed suicide. That benighted teacher of doctrine known as Shan-tao propagated the practice of the Nembutsu, and in the end committed suicide himself. It appears, therefore, that if one keeps on repeating the Nembutsu this will foster a desire to commit suicide.

The Zen school is an invention of the heavenly devil, and its priests of the present time who are concerned with observance of the precepts are

his followers. It calls itself a "separate transmission outside the sutras," which means that it acknowledges neither gods nor Buddhas, an evil doctrine that has gone mad.

The True Word school is based upon a sutra of inferior worth, but it deceptively claims that the sutra is superior even to the Lotus Sutra. It has thus attracted many followers, including men with the status of great teacher or administrator of priests, who now fill the entire land of Japan and to whom everyone from the highest and most exalted on down bow their heads. This situation reflects an error of the first magnitude, but one which from early times until the present has gone undetected. Only the Great Teacher Dengyō was aware of it, but he did not write of it in detail. I, however, have some understanding of the matter.

The attack suffered by the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa at the hands of the grand minister of state and lay priest [Taira no Kiyomori]; the Retired Emperor of Oki's defeat by the Kamakura shogunate⁵—these were both brought about by the evil True Word doctrine. And after this doctrine was introduced to China, Emperor Hsüan-tsung lost his throne.⁶ This evil doctrine in time made its way down to Kamakura, where it is now enjoying popularity due to the work of the administrators of priests, teachers of Dharma seal rank,⁷ and others. If these persons are allowed to offer prayers for victory in the present conflict, then a battle that should have lasted for a hundred days will end in defeat in a mere ten days, and a ten-day battle will be over in a single day.

This is not something I state now for the first time. For the past twenty years or more⁸ I have never spared my voice in shouting it out loud. Well, so be it, so be it!

This letter deals with matters of great importance, so you should ask

someone to read this letter and listen carefully. Though others may slander us, we are teachers of the Law who take no heed of such a thing.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The eleventh day of the eleventh month in the eleventh year of Bun'ei [1274], cyclical sign *kinoe-inu*
Reply to Nanjō Shichirō Jirō



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu to Nanjō Tokimitsu on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1274. Tokimitsu was only sixteen at the time. His family was called Nanjō because their feudal estate was in Nanjō in the province of Izu. The Daishonin also refers to Tokimitsu by the family name of Ueno because, like his late father, he was the steward of Ueno Village in the province of Suruga.

In this letter, the Daishonin expresses his appreciation to Tokimitsu for the offerings he had made by citing the story of the boys Virtue Victorious and Invincible, and that of the bodhisattva Learned Youth. Tokimitsu's offerings, because they were given to the votary of the Lotus Sutra, will bring far greater fortune than these, the Daishonin confirms, citing the sutra.

Next, he recognizes that Tokimitsu shares the strong faith of his late father, Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō. Hyōe Shichirō, an official in the Kamakura shogunate, had become a believer in the Daishonin's teachings while in Kamakura. He died in 1265 when Tokimitsu was only seven.

The Daishonin went to visit his tomb in Ueno Village in the same year and apparently first met Tokimitsu on that occasion. When Tokimitsu's elder

brother, Shichirō Tarō, passed away in the eighth month of 1274, he assumed the duties of steward of Ueno, though still only in his teens.

The Daishonin briefly summarizes how each of three preeminent schools of Buddhism in Japan are contributing to the misfortunes of the nation and the people. In particular, should the rulers rely on prayers based on the True Word doctrine for victory over the Mongols, he says, this will only serve to hasten defeat.

Only a short time before this letter was written the Mongol forces had attacked Japan, overrunning the islands of Iki and Tsushima, and driving back defenders on the main southern island of Kyushu. The night after the Mongols landed, on the twentieth day of the tenth month, a severe storm destroyed more than half their fleet and they were forced to retreat. It seems that this news had yet to reach the Daishonin in Minobu at the time of this letter. But from the sentence "When I think that they must all suffer as the people of Iki and Tsushima have suffered, my tears flow without end," it appears that the tragic fate of the people of these islands was generally known. Fear of defeat by the overwhelming power of the Mongol Empire gripped the country.

Notes

1. A jellylike food made from the root of the konnyaku plant. It is believed to

eliminate poisonous substances from the body.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

3. The long broad tongue is one of a Buddha's thirty-two features and symbolizes the truth of his words. The highest of the eighteen heavens of the world of form is also known as the Akanishtha heaven or the Summit of Being Heaven.

4. Source unknown.

5. The Retired Emperor Goshirakawa (1127-1192) and the Retired Emperor of Oki, or the ex-emperor Gotoba (1180-1239), relied on the prayers based on the True Word doctrine to overturn the Taira forces and the Kamakura shogunate, respectively, but they suffered defeat.

6. In 716 when Shan-wu-wei transmit-

ted his True Word doctrines to China from India, Emperor Hsüan-tsung welcomed him and respected the doctrines more highly than the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai and Flower Garland schools.

7. Probably a reference to the Dharma Seal Kaga who was the superintendent of the Amida Hall of Ōkura, Kamakura, and one of the most learned priests of the True Word school.

8. Twenty years or more, from the fourth month of 1253, when Nichiren Daishonin first proclaimed this teaching at Seichō-ji temple, until the time of this writing, the eleventh month of 1274.