

The Birth of Tsukimaro



I UNDERSTAND that your baby has been born. Congratulations! In particular, today is the eighth day of the month. Not only have you had your baby, but on such an auspicious day! The fulfillment of your wish is now complete, just like the tide at the high watermark or the blossoming of flowers in a spring meadow. Thus, I have wasted no time in giving her a name. Please call her Tsukimaro.

What is more, Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, the sovereign deity of this country, was born on the eighth day of the fourth month. Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings in this saha world, was also born on the eighth day of the fourth month. Though the month is different, your baby girl was also born on the eighth day. She could well be the reincarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha or Hachiman. Since I am an ordinary man, I have no way of knowing for certain, but I am convinced that the reason for this auspicious birth is that I gave you the protective agent.¹ How happy you, her parents, must be! In celebration, you have kindly sent me rice cakes, sake, and one thousand coins. I have also reported this to the object of devotion and the ten demon daughters.

When the Buddha was born in this world, there were thirty-two auspicious

phenomena,² as is recorded in a work called *The Record of Wonders in the Book of Chou*. Immediately following his birth, Shakyamuni Buddha took seven steps, opened his mouth, and uttered the words, expressed in sixteen characters, "Throughout heaven and earth, I alone am worthy of respect. The three-fold world is a place of suffering from which I will save all living beings." Tsukimaro must have chanted Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with her very first cry at birth. The Lotus Sutra speaks of "the true aspect of all phenomena."³ T'ien-t'ai said, "Voices do the Buddha's work."⁴ This is also what I think. The deaf cannot hear the thunder, and the blind cannot see the light of the sun and moon. But I am quite certain that the ten demon daughters must be together side by side, giving the baby her first bath and watching over her growth.

Let me heartily congratulate you. I can imagine your joy. I have respectfully reported this to the ten demon daughters and to the Sun Goddess. I am too excited to write any more. I will be writing you again.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

Reply to Shijo Kingo

Background

This letter was written at Kamakura on the eighth day of the fifth month in the eighth year of Bun'ei (1271) to Shijo Kingo and his wife, Nichigen-nyo. It is Nichiren Daishonin's reply to the report that Kingo had sent concerning the birth of the couple's first child and their request that the Daishonin name the baby.

On the preceding day Nichigen-nyo had received from the Daishonin a pro-

TECTIVE agent to ensure a safe delivery and a short letter of encouragement. That letter is entitled *Easy Delivery of a Fortune Child* (p. 186). Nichigen-nyo gave birth the next day, the day of the present letter, to a baby girl. The Daishonin named the child Tsukimaro, or Full Moon. The couple's second daughter was born in the autumn of 1272. The Daishonin named her Kyo'o, or Sutra King.

Notes

1. The use of a protective agent was common practice among the Buddhist schools of feudal Japan. Generally the agent took the form of the figure or words of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or deities written on paper or wood. One then either placed this item somewhere in one's home, attached it to one's person, or, if it was made of paper, ingested it. The protective agent also sometimes took the form of powdered herbs that were to be dissolved in water and

drunk. What formula the Daishonin used for his protective agent is unknown.

2. Good omens, mentioned in the Sutra of the Buddha's Marvelous Deeds in Previous Lifetimes, that occurred when Shakyamuni Buddha made his appearance in this world.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

4. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*.