

The Royal Palace



I HAVE received your fifteen hundred coins. I am pleased that you informed me in detail about the fire [that destroyed Gokuraku-ji temple]. Conflagration corresponds to the third of the seven disasters described in the Benevolent Kings Sutra and to the first of the seven disasters mentioned in the Lotus Sutra.¹

No sword can cut the air; no fire can burn water. Similarly, no fire can harm a sage, a worthy, a person of good fortune, or a person of wisdom. For example, the great city of Rajagriha in India is said to have enclosed nine hundred thousand dwellings, but huge fires broke out on seven occasions, and it was destroyed. When the king saw the people about to flee in despair, his grief knew no bounds. At that time a wise man advised him, saying: "Conflagration, as one of the seven disasters, occurs when a sage has left the country and the good fortune of the ruler has been exhausted. In this case, however, even though successive fires have destroyed the houses of the populace, they have never once engulfed the royal palace. This indicates that the fault lies not with the ruler but with the people. Therefore, if you name the entire city in which they dwell Rajagriha, 'the Royal Palace,' the god of fire will be afraid to burn their houses." The king thought this advice reason-

able and named the city Rajagriha, and fire never broke out again. This story teaches us that fire cannot destroy a person of great good fortune.

In this country, however, the shogun's palace has just burned down, a sign that the good fortune of Japan is about to be exhausted. Calamities are arising with growing frequency, probably because priests steeped in slander of the correct teaching are offering up fervent prayers in an attempt to subdue me.

A name reveals the essence of a thing. The slanderous sage, Priest Two Fires,² is the teacher of people high and low throughout Kamakura. One of the two fires was concentrated on his own grounds, reducing Gokuraku-ji [Paradise Temple] to Jigoku-ji [Hell Temple]. The other fire leaped over to devour the ruler's palace.

Furthermore, this double fire not only ravaged the country in this existence, but foretells that the teacher and his disciples throughout Japan will in their next life fall into the hell of incessant suffering, where they will burn in the Avichi flames. The ignorant priests did not heed the words of a man of great wisdom, and this disaster came about as a result. How pitiful! I have already written to you about this.

Incidentally, I have pastured the mare you gave me, and she has found a mate

and given birth to a chestnut-colored colt. What a wonderful horse! I want you to see it by all means.

I have heard a great deal about the lay nun of Nagoe here, too. I was told that someone happened to meet her and took her soundly to task for praising the doctrine of theoretical endowment.³

As for your wife's prayers, even though she does not doubt the Lotus Sutra, I suspect that her faith may be weak. I have found that even those who appear to believe just as the sutra teaches may not actually have strong faith at all, as you are already well aware. Moreover, a woman's mind is harder to understand than it is to tie up the wind. The fact that her prayers have gone unanswered is like a strong bow with a weak bowstring, or a fine sword in the hands of a coward. It is in no sense the fault of the Lotus Sutra. Explain to her thoroughly that she herself should discard the Nembutsu and the Precepts schools' teachings once and for all, and to the full extent of her ability teach others to do the same, just as you have steadfastly carried out your faith despite others' hatred. However much she may believe in the Lotus Sutra, I doubt that she feels as strongly about its enemies as she would about a courtesan.

In all worldly affairs, those who oppose their parents or disobey their ruler incur the wrath of heaven for their unfilial or disloyal conduct. But if one's parent or ruler becomes an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, then disobedience is an act of filial piety and repays one's debt of gratitude to the nation. Therefore, since I first read the Lotus Sutra, I have upheld my faith without faltering, even though my parents implored me, with their palms joined, to desist, and even though my teacher disowned me, the lord of Kamakura [the regent] twice exiled me, and I nearly had my head cut off. Because I have persevered

without fear, there are now people who think my teachings may be true. Nichiren may well be the only person in all Japan to disobey sovereign, parents, and teacher, and yet still in the end receive the protection of the heavenly gods. Watch what happens in the future. If those priests who abuse me should pray for the peace of the country, they will only hasten the nation's ruin. Finally, should the consequences become truly grave, everyone, from the ruler on down to the common people, will become a slave of the pig-tailed Mongols and have bitter regrets.

Setting aside the next life, as a warning to people in this life, I have enjoined the heavenly lords Brahma and Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings to punish those who have become enemies of the Lotus Sutra. You will see by the results of my prediction⁴ whether or not I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

When I speak in this way, the ruler and others may think I am making threats, but I in no way speak out of hatred. I speak out of the profound compassion to enable them to eradicate in this life the tortures of the hell of incessant suffering, into which they are otherwise destined to fall. The Great Teacher Chang-an said, "One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent."⁵ Nichiren, who admonishes them for their evil, is father and mother to the ruler, and the teacher of all living beings.

There is much more that I would like to say, but I will stop here. I appreciate your offerings of one horseload of polished wheat and of ginger.

Nichiren

The twelfth day of the fourth month in the first year of Kenji (1275), cyclical sign *kinoto-i*

Reply to Shijo Kingo

Background

This letter was written in reply to a report from Shijo Kingo that fires had broken out at both Gokuraku-ji temple and the palace of the shogun, the military ruler. Gokuraku-ji, a temple of the True Word Precepts school in Kamakura, burned down in the third month of 1275.

Japan at that time was in a state of upheaval. In the tenth month of 1274, the Mongols launched a massive military attack against the southern part of the country. This contributed to the extreme anxiety of the people. The Mongol threat increased as another envoy from Khubilai Khan arrived in the fourth month of 1275, demanding that Japan swear allegiance to the Mongol empire or face another attack.

Nichiren Daishonin attributes the fires in Kamakura and other calamities to the people's loss of good fortune, which he says was brought about by their slander of the correct teaching. The title of this letter is taken from

the ancient story of Rajagriha (Royal Palace), the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, India. The Daishonin cites this story, which appears in T'ien-t'ai's *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, to support his point about the necessity of good fortune.

In a play on words, the Daishonin refers to the chief priest of Gokuraku-ji, Ryokan-bo (Priest Ryokan), as Ryoka-bo (Priest Two Fires), to show that the burning of Gokuraku-ji and the shogun's palace stemmed from Ryokan's slander of the Lotus Sutra. The phrase "two fires" has two meanings. It indicates the fire that consumed both Gokuraku-ji and the palace—the centers of religion and government. And it means that Ryokan's slander not only has brought about conflagration—one of the seven disasters—in this world, but also will cause him and his followers to fall into "fire," or the state of hell, in the next.

Notes

1. Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra lists seven disasters from which one can be saved by the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds: (1) fire, (2) flood, (3) rakshasa demons, (4) attack by swords and staves, (5) attack by yaksha and other demons, (6) imprisonment, and (7) attack by bandits.

2. Reference is to Ryokan, chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple. In a play on words, the Daishonin changes the name Ryokan-bo (Priest Ryokan) to Ryoka-bo, which means Priest Two Fires.

3. T'ien-t'ai's doctrine that all of the three thousand realms theoretically exist in all beings.

4. The Daishonin's prediction of foreign invasion made in *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, which he submitted to Hojo Tokiyori in 1260. This prophecy materialized with the attack of the Mongol forces on the southern part of Japan in 1274 and their continued threats of another invasion.

5. *The Annotations on the Nirvana Sutra*.