

The Mongol Envoys



I CAN hardly express my joy at learning of your safe return from Kamakura. And I have received your news about the beheading of the Mongol envoys. It is indeed a pity that, while the priests of the Nembutsu, True Word, Zen, and Precepts schools, who are the enemies of our country, did not have their heads cut off, the innocent Mongol envoys have been beheaded.¹ Those who are unaware of the particulars of the matter will no doubt think that I say this out of conceit because my prophecy has been fulfilled.² Yet during this period of more than twenty years, this is what I have been privately lamenting about day and night to my disciples, and what I have publicly declared time and again.

Among all grave matters, the ruin of the nation is gravest. The Sovereign Kings Sutra states, "Among all disasters, nothing surpasses the extreme gravity of losing the nation's sovereign status." This passage means that, among all evils, the worst is to become ruler, govern wrongfully, and have one's nation defeated by a foreign land. The Golden Light Sutra also states, "Because evil people are respected and favored and good people are subjected to punishment, marauders will appear from other regions, and the people of the country will meet with death and disorder." This passage means that, when

a person becomes the ruler of a state, and values evil people while attaching blame to good ones, that country will surely be defeated by another land. The fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "They will be respected and revered by the world as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers."³ While explaining the appearance of the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, this passage is saying that the ruler of the country will revere those who firmly uphold the two hundred and fifty precepts, and who appear to be like Mahakashyapa and Shariputra, and will attempt to destroy the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Now what is known as a teaching of importance is nothing special. One who can, in accordance with the time, discern without the slightest error what is important both for oneself and for the country is a person of wisdom. The Buddha is called worthy of respect because he ponders the past and knows the future. Nothing surpasses the wisdom of knowing the three existences. Although they were not Buddhas, because sages and worthies such as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai, and Dengyo, though not nearly to the same degree as the Buddha, generally understood the affairs of the three existences, their names have been passed on into the future.

Ultimately, all phenomena are contained within one's life, down to the last particle of dust. The nine mountains and the eight seas are encompassed in one's body, and the sun, moon, and myriad stars are found in one's life. We, however, are like a blind person who is incapable of seeing the images reflected in a mirror, or like an infant who has no fear of water or fire. The teachings such as those of the non-Buddhist writings and those of the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana Buddhist scriptures all partially explain the phenomena inherent in one's life. They do not explain them as the Lotus Sutra does. Thus, among the sutras, there are both superior and inferior, and among people also, sages and worthies may be distinguished. Since there is too much to go into concerning the teaching, I will stop here.

I deeply appreciate your sending a messenger so quickly after your return from Kamakura. And in addition, you sent me various offerings, which I am very glad to have received. While all the people in Japan lament, I, Nichiren, and my followers rejoice amid the grieving. Since we live in this country,

we cannot possibly escape an attack from the Mongol forces, but because the heavenly gods know that we have been persecuted for the sake of our country, we can rejoice that we will surely be saved in our next life. Moreover, you have become indebted to the Mongol empire in your present life. Had this situation not arisen, as this year marks the thirteenth anniversary of the death of the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, the commemorative hunt would no doubt have been held on your estate. And you would be in Tsukushi like Lord Hojo Rokuro.⁴ This runs contrary to the wishes of you and your clan. You are not being punished by others. From another point of view, could it not be that you have been saved due to the protection of the Lotus Sutra? Yours is a serious misunderstanding. Though so joyful a thing as this has occurred, and though I would have liked to go and congratulate you in person, others would hear of it and think it strange, so I have refrained.

I responded immediately.

Nichiren

Reply to Nishiyama



Background

This letter was written in the first year of Kenji (1275) to the lay priest Nishiyama, who lived in Nishiyama Village in Suruga Province. Nishiyama had just returned from a tour of duty in Kamakura and had reported this in a letter to the Daishonin at Minobu. He had also written that five Mongol envoys who had come demanding that Japan pay tribute to the Mongol empire had

been beheaded at Tatsunokuchi. Nishiyama had also written that because of the imminent threat of a Mongol invasion a hunt scheduled to be held on his estate in honor of the late Hojo Tokiyori had been canceled, and that he had not been ordered to participate in the defense of Kyushu. The Daishonin's letter is his reply to this report by Nishiyama.

Notes

1. This statement suggests that the cause of the foreign invasion is the actions of these priests who slandered the Lotus Sutra and its votary to the rulers and misled the nation.

2. This refers to the Daishonin's prophecy in 1260, that, if Japan's rulers continued to support the followers of erroneous teachings, the nation would be invaded by a foreign power.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

4. Hojo Rokuro possibly refers to Hojo Tokisada (d. 1289), a younger brother of Hojo Tokiyori, the fifth Kamakura regent, who is referred to in the preceding sentence as the lay priest of Saimyo-ji. Tokisada was sent south to Tsukushi, the southern island of Kyushu, to aid in the defense against the Mongols and is said to have died there.