

The Unmatched Blessings of the Law



I HAVE received a hundred bamboo shoots, followed afterward by an additional twenty.

The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law reads: “Even if a person were to fill the whole major world system with the seven treasures as an offering to the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas and arhats, the benefits gained by such a person cannot match those gained by accepting and upholding this Lotus Sutra, even just one four-line verse of it! The latter brings the most numerous blessings of all.”¹ The tenth volume of *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* states: “The statement that offering the seven kinds of treasures to the four types of sages² cannot equal upholding one verse [of the Lotus Sutra] indicates that the Law is the teacher of these sages. Nothing surpasses the Law in its ability to cause birth, nurturing, maturity, and prosperity. Therefore, the person is insignificant while the Law is supreme.” The tenth volume of *The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra”* comments: “It is similar to the case of parents, who invariably protect their children through these four functions. To conceive a desire to seek the way through the power of the Law is to be born. To follow the Law from beginning to end is to be nurtured. To harvest the supreme fruit of Buddha-

hood is to reach maturity. To appear in various forms in the phenomenal world for the salvation of others is to prosper. Although these four stages differ from one another, they all take the Law as their basis.”

What the Lotus Sutra, T’ien-t’ai, and Miao-lo intend to say is that the act of accepting and upholding or protecting and embracing one verse of the Lotus Sutra surpasses the act of making offerings to all living beings, of making offerings to arhats, or even of filling the entire major world system with the seven kinds of treasures as an offering to all Buddhas.

The sutra reads, “[The benefits gained by such a person] cannot match those gained by accepting and upholding this Lotus Sutra, even just one four-line verse of it! The latter brings the most numerous blessings of all.” T’ien-t’ai states, “The person is insignificant while the Law is supreme.” Miao-lo says, “Although these four stages differ from one another, they all take the Law as their basis.” If we compare all the living beings of the nine worlds with the Buddha, then the good fortune of all living beings is as light as a single strand of hair, while the good fortune of the Buddha is as heavy as a huge mountain. And if the good fortune of all Buddhas is as light as Brahma’s featherweight robe,³ then the good fortune of one character

of the Lotus Sutra is as weighty as the earth. The person in the phrase "the person is insignificant" is the Buddha; the Law that is supreme is the Lotus Sutra.

All the sutras preceding the Lotus Sutra and all the treatises based on them praise the blessings bestowed by the Buddha, and so are like the Buddha himself. The Lotus Sutra extols the blessings bestowed by the sutra, and therefore is like the father and mother of the Buddha. The inferiority of the Flower Garland, Mahavairochana, and other sutras to the Lotus Sutra is like the difference in weight between a single strand of hair and a huge mountain, or between a featherweight robe and the earth. If we compare the lowest-ranking votary of the Lotus Sutra to the highest-ranking priests of the Flower Garland and True Word schools, the superiority of the former is like that of Shakra when compared to a monkey, or like that of a lion when compared to a hare.

When a subject declares himself king, it invariably costs him his life. When the practitioners of the other sutras claim to surpass the votary of the Lotus Sutra, the country will surely be ruined, and such persons will certainly fall into hell. When not confronted by enemies, one is free to speak as falsely and act as foolishly as one pleases. To illustrate, it is said that, before Sadamori and Yoriyoshi⁴ appeared, Masakado and Sadato were able to govern their lands, and their wives and children were safe and secure. Without an opposing force to prevent them from doing so, the dew evaporates up into the sky and the rain falls to the earth. A strong wind, however, will blow the rain back into the sky, and the sunrise will bring the dew down to earth. Likewise, before Dengyo appeared, the six schools, including the Flower Gar-

land school, were like the dew [rising into the sky]. The True Word school is the same; therefore, you should understand that, once a strong enemy appears and attacks that school fiercely with the Lotus Sutra, the chief priest of Mount Hiei and the priests of To-ji and Omuro will all be like the dew at sunrise.

In the more than twenty-two hundred years since the Buddha's passing, no one has yet fully explained and spread the Lotus Sutra exactly as the sutra teaches. This is not to say that T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo did not understand the truth of the sutra. But since the proper time had not yet arrived, and the capacity of the people was not suitable, they passed away without writing fully about it. Those who become Nichiren's disciples, however, can understand it without difficulty.

In the entire land of Jambudvipa, there has never before been a hall or pagoda that produced the image of Shakyamuni Buddha of the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.⁵ How could such an image fail to appear now? An explanation would be lengthy, so I will stop here.

You have sent me 120 bamboo shoots, and the Lotus Sutra has appeared after over two thousand years. I have spoken of this matter because, while your gift may seem to be insignificant, your sincerity is indeed profound. Moreover, at the present time, because of farmwork and the building of the shrine, people have no spare time. Because your seeking mind is nonetheless so strong, I am certain that the Law has manifested itself to you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The eleventh day of the fifth month
Reply to Nishiyama

Background

This letter was written in the fifth month of the second year of Koan (1279) and sent in response to a gift of bamboo shoots received from a follower called the lay priest Nishiyama, who lived in the village of Nishiyama in Fuji District of Suruga Province. It appears that Nishiyama occasionally visited the Daishonin at Minobu, bringing gifts with him. A total of six extant letters are addressed to him, including this one, *Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain*, and *The Mongol Envoys*. It is generally thought that Nishiyama was the same person as Ouchi Tasaburo Taira no Yasukiyo, the steward of Nishiyama

Village, but another explanation holds that he was in fact a relative of this man.

Though this letter is quite short, it contains some important teachings. First, the Daishonin extols the benefits to be gained by upholding just one verse of the Lotus Sutra, explaining that they are superior even to those that accrue to one who presents the Buddha with enough of the seven kinds of treasures to fill an entire major world system. He then notes that he is propagating an unsurpassed Law that no one before him has spread.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

2. The four types of sages refer to the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and arhats.

3. Featherweight robe is the translation of the expression of “three-*shu* robe.” This expression often appears in Buddhist scriptures to indicate the robe of a heavenly being. *Shu* is a unit of weight, and three *shu* equals approximately one-tenth of an ounce.

4. Taira no Sadamori (n.d.) killed his

cousin Taira no Masakado (d. 940), when the latter rebelled against the imperial court. Minamoto no Yoriyoshi (n.d.), one of the leaders of the imperial army, defeated and killed Abe no Sadato (1019–1062), when he challenged imperial rule.

5. Here Shakyamuni Buddha of the “Life Span” chapter indicates Nam-myohorenge-kyo, or the Law implicit in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter.