

The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra



I HAVE carefully read your letter, in which you described the recent skirmish with powerful enemies. So they have finally attacked you. It is a matter of rejoicing that your usual prudence and courage, as well as your firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, enabled you to survive unharmed.

When one comes to the end of one's good fortune, no strategy whatsoever avails. When one's karmic rewards are exhausted, even one's retainers no longer follow one. You survived because you still have both good fortune and rewards. Moreover, in the "Entrustment" chapter,¹ the heavenly gods and benevolent deities pledged to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. Of all the guardian deities in heaven, it is the gods of the sun and moon who visibly protect us. How can we doubt their protection? The heavenly deity Marichi in particular stands in service before the god of the sun. When the god of the sun protects the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, how could the honorable one of heaven Marichi, who is his vassal, possibly abandon them? The "Introduction" chapter of the sutra reads, "[At that time Shakra with his followers, twenty thousand sons of gods, also attended.] There were also the sons of gods Rare Moon, Pervading Fragrance, Jeweled Glow, and the four heavenly kings, along with their followers, ten

thousand sons of gods." Marichi must be among the thirty thousand sons of gods who were present at the ceremony. Otherwise, this deity could only abide in hell.

You must have escaped death because of this deity's protection. Marichi gave you skill in swordsmanship, while I, Nichiren, have bestowed on you the five characters of the title of the Lotus Sutra. There can be no doubt that Marichi protects those who embrace the Lotus Sutra. Marichi also upholds the Lotus Sutra and helps all living beings. Even the words "Those who join the battle are all in the front lines"² derive from the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by the passage "If they should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law."³ Therefore, you must summon up the great power of faith more than ever. Do not blame the heavenly gods if you exhaust your good fortune and lose their protection.

Masakado was renowned as a brave general who had mastered the art of war, yet he was defeated by the armies under the emperor's command. Even Fan K'uai and Chang Liang had their failures. It is the heart that is important. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will

be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. "All others who bear you enmity or malice will likewise be wiped out."⁴ These golden words will never prove false. The heart of strategy and swordsmanship derives from the Mystic Law. Have profound

faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-third day of the tenth month

Reply to Shijo Kingo



Background

In the tenth month of the second year of Koan (1279), this letter was written in reply to a letter to Nichiren Daishonin from Shijo Kingo, informing him that Kingo had been ambushed by enemies among his fellow samurai, but

had managed to escape unharmed.

The Daishonin teaches Kingo that faith must always come first, before any other tactic or strategy, and that faith in the Mystic Law is the ultimate factor that determines victory or defeat.

Notes

1. Possibly a reference to a passage in the "Entrustment" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which reads: "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded."

2. A quote from the fourth-century Taoist work *Pao-p'u Tzu*. Chinese soldiers believed that reciting this phrase while drawing four vertical and five horizontal lines in the air with their fingers would protect them from harm. This practice later spread

to Japan and was widely adopted among the samurai of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Here the Daishonin indicates that the heavenly gods and benevolent deities form ranks to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in all their activities.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 19.

4. Ibid., chap. 23. In the sutra, the sentence reads in the past tense. It was changed here to fit the context of this letter.