Letter to the Lay Priest Yadoya

I HAVE not received any letters from you since we were in touch last, which strikes me as very strange indeed.

Formerly, in the first year of the Shōka era [1257], the year with the cyclical sign hinoto-mi, on the twenty-third day of the eighth month, when the hour of the dog gives way to the hour of the boar [around 9:00 P.M.], there was a great earthquake. I, Nichiren, consulting various sutras as to why this happened, concluded that, because people put their faith in the teachings of the Nembutsu school or the Zen or other schools, the various benevolent deities who protect this nation of Japan have become angry and have brought about this disaster. If steps are not taken to remedy the situation, this nation of ours will be overthrown by a foreign nation.

I wrote a petition expressing these views and, in the second year of the Shōgen era [1260], cyclical sign kanoe-sanu, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month, I sent it to you, requesting that it be forwarded to the late lay priest of Saimyō-ji.

Since then, nine years have passed. Now I hear reports that this year an official announcement from the great Mongol Empire has been sent to Japan. If the texts of the sutras² are to be believed, this is an indication that our country will inevitably be attacked by the men of that nation.

I am convinced that, throughout the country of Japan, I, Nichiren, am the only person who can subdue these barbarians of the west,³ and I have written a treatise explaining my reasons. For the sake of the ruler, for the sake of the nation, for the sake of the gods, and for the sake of the Buddhas, I ask that you forward my views to the regent [Hōjō Tokimune] privately. I will explain the matter in detail at such time as I am granted an interview with you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-first day of the eighth month in the fifth year of Bun’ei [1268]

To the lay priest Yadoya Saemon
Background

This letter was written on the twenty-first day of the eighth month in 1268, when Nichiren Daishonin was forty-seven years old and living in Kamakura. It was addressed to the lay priest Yadoya Saemon Mitsunori, an official of the Kamakura shogunate through whose offices in 1260 the Daishonin had submitted his treatise On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land to Hōjō Tokiyori. Though retired at the time, Hōjō Tokiyori still held the reins of power in the government.

In On Establishing the Correct Teaching, the Daishonin had concluded that, if the people continue to reject the correct teaching (the Lotus Sutra) and believe in evil doctrines (in particular, that of Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land school in Japan), then of the seven disasters predicted in the sutras, the two that had not yet occurred would definitely occur. These are invasion by foreign lands and revolt within one’s own domain.

Eight years after his submission of On Establishing the Correct Teaching, on the eighteenth day of the first intercalary month of 1268, a message from the Mongol Empire arrived in Kamakura demanding that Japan pay tribute to the empire and threatening invasion should the demand be rejected. Upon receiving word of this, the Daishonin wrote this letter in which he proclaims that, because he was able to foresee the impending invasion, he alone is the person capable through the power of the Lotus Sutra of subduing the invaders and saving the nation and its people. He indicates that he would like to meet with Yadoya Mitsunori in person to discuss the details of his assertions. Two months later, having confirmed the arrival of the Mongol missive but received no reply to his letter, the Daishonin wrote again to Yadoya, saying that he had sent eleven letters and that he had informed Hei no Saemon of the eleven addressees including Yadoya. The Daishonin urged him to arrange a public debate with the leading priests of Kamakura. It is said that Yadoya later took faith in the Daishonin’s teachings.

Notes

1. The name of the era changed from Shōgen to Bunnō on the thirteenth day of the fourth month of 1260, but the Daishonin referred to the date of On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land as the second year of Shōgen instead of the first year of Bunnō. Yet the description “cyclical sign kaneo-saru” makes clear that both the second year of Shōgen and the first year of Bunnō correspond to 1260.

2. The texts of the sutras refer to the passages from the Golden Light Sutra, the Great Collection Sutra, the Benevolent Kings Sutra, and the Medicine Master Sutra that Nichiren Daishonin cited in his treatise.

3. The “barbarians of the west” is the set phrase that the Chinese used to designate the peoples living to the west of China, and the Daishonin applied it to the Mongols.