

The Day before Yesterday



I WAS very pleased to have an opportunity to meet with you the day before yesterday.

Is there a person alive in the world today who does not wonder what his or her next existence will be like? The sole reason for the Buddha's advent in this world was to bring salvation to living beings. Ever since I, Nichiren, became a priest, I have studied the various doctrines of Buddhism. I have come to understand the true intention of the Buddhas, and from early in my studies have realized the great key to release from the sufferings of birth and death. That key is the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law.

Reverence for this one vehicle teaching has brought prosperity to the three lands [of India, China, and Japan]. Who could doubt a fact that is so plain before the eyes? And yet, because so many have turned their backs on the correct path and insist upon following the road of erroneous doctrines, the sages have abandoned the nation, the benevolent deities seethe with anger, the seven disasters occur one after another, and the area within the four seas knows no peace.

In our present age, all submit to the authority of the Kanto region¹ and everyone honors the way of the region. And since I myself was born in this land, how could I fail to be concerned

for the fate of the nation? Therefore I wrote my work entitled *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, and through the offices of the lay priest Yadoya,² had it brought before the late lay priest of Saimyō-ji.

In recent times the so-called dog barbarians³ have roiled the waves; barbarian foes are eyeing our nation. The predictions that I made years ago have in recent days come true. [In China long ago] T'ai-kung Wang undertook to invade the Yin realm because the Earl of the West had treated him with due courtesy, and Chang Liang weighed how to overthrow the Ch'in dynasty because he was moved by the sincerity of the king of Han.⁴ These men were both fitted to the age and gained proper recognition. Thus within the tents of command they were able to devise strategies that assured victory a thousand miles away.

A person who can foretell the future is known as a sage minister, the highest of the six upright ones.⁵ A person who propagates the Lotus Sutra is a votary of the Buddhas. And I make bold to declare that, opening the texts delivered on Eagle Peak and in the grove of sal trees,⁶ I have come to understand the intentions of the web-footed king,⁷ he who bore a knot of flesh.⁸ Furthermore, what I predicted with regard to the future has now for the most part

been verified. Although I may be no match for the wise men of past ages, among men of this latter age, my kind is rarely to be found.

One who understands the Law and shows oneself concerned for the welfare of the nation should by rights be most warmly welcomed. Due, however, to the slanderous reports and petitions of those who espouse false doctrines and false teachings, though I have for long cherished sentiments of the utmost loyalty, I have not as yet been able to achieve my meager hopes. Moreover, as a result of the displeasure you manifested at our recent meeting, I am now most distressed to think that my aims may be all the more difficult to accomplish.

If I may presume to state my thoughts, unless one climbs Mount T'ai,⁹ one cannot know the height of the sky; unless one descends into the deep valleys, one cannot understand the depth of the earth. That you may understand my own intentions, I have submitted to you a copy of my work

On Establishing the Correct Teaching. The ideas expressed therein are but one hair from the hides of nine oxen, and I have by no means fulfilled my humble aims.

At present, you, sir, are the veritable pillar and crossbeam of the realm. How, then, can you fail to make use of true talent when it exists in the nation? You must as soon as possible put into motion wise strategies to fend off these foreign enemies. You must insure the safety of the nation, for in doing so you will be fulfilling your obligations of loyalty and those of filial piety.

I do not offer these words simply for my own sake, but for the sake of the ruler, for the sake of the Buddhas, for the sake of the gods, and for the sake of all living beings.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twelfth day of the ninth month
in the eighth year of Bun'ei [1271]

Respectfully presented to Hei no
Saemon



Background

Nichiren Daishonin addressed this letter to Hei no Saemon, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs of the Kamakura government. Written on the twelfth day of the ninth month in 1271, its title, appended at a later time, is taken from the first sentence "I was very pleased to have an opportunity to meet with you the day before yesterday." This is a reference to the Daishonin's appearance before Hei no Saemon on the tenth of the same month. On that day Hei no Saemon had interrogated the Daishonin about various complaints against him brought by Ryōkan of Gokuraku-ji temple and the leading priests of several Buddhist

schools. At that time the Daishonin requested that he be provided an opportunity to debate his accusers in public, and warned that failing to hold such a debate and siding with them in persecuting him would invite ruin to the nation. In *The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra*, the Daishonin writes, "Hearing this, the magistrate Hei no Saemon, forgetting all the dignity of his rank, became wild with rage..." (I, p. 765).

On the very day the present letter was written, Hei no Saemon led a large party of soldiers to seize the Daishonin, thus initiating the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the abortive attempt to execute

the Daishonin at Tatsunokuchi beach near Kamakura. Whether this letter had reached Hei no Saemon, sparking further rage that led to the Daishonin's arrest, or whether it arrived after the arrest, is unknown. It seems, though, that the plan to inflict punishment on the Daishonin may already have been in place, as might be concluded from this statement in *Actions of the Votary*: "Under these circumstances, at the regent's supreme council my guilt could scarcely be denied" (I, p. 765).

In this letter the Daishonin indicates that he has awakened to the key that is found in Buddhism to emancipation from the sufferings of birth and death, and that key is the Lotus Sutra. It is slander of the Lotus Sutra, he suggests, that has left the people without peace or security. It was to clarify this basic cause for the disasters attacking the country that, eleven years earlier, he submitted his treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* to the lay priest of Saimyō-ji tem-

ple, Hōjō Tokiyori, who then held the reins of national power. And now, with an invasion by the Mongol forces looming on the horizon, his prophecy of "invasion by foreign lands" made in that treatise was about to come true.

Citing stories from Chinese history, the Daishonin alludes to the motives of generals who responded to the sincerity of others, and points out that because he has foreseen the future, he should be regarded as a sage, as well as a votary of the Buddhas. Nevertheless, hatred and jealousy toward him has prevented Hei no Saemon and others from heeding his advice, and thus his sincere intentions for the nation have been hard to fulfill. As the person responsible for safeguarding the nation, Hei no Saemon should heed his predictions, the Daishonin asserts. He adds, in closing, that he offers these words not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of the nation and of Buddhism.

Notes

1. Indicates the Kamakura shogunate.
2. Yadoya Mitsunori, a ranking official close to Hōjō Tokiyori, the fifth regent of the Kamakura shogunate, who was also known as the lay priest of Saimyō-ji.
3. "Dog barbarians" was a Chinese term for a nomadic people who inhabited the northwestern part of China in the period of the Chou dynasty (c. 1100–256 B.C.E.). In Japan, it came to be applied to the Mongols.
4. "The Earl of the West" refers to King Wen of the Chou dynasty, and "the king of Han" to Emperor Kao-tsu (247–195 B.C.E.), or Liu Pang.
5. "The six upright ones" refers to the six types of ministers set forth by Confucianism as a standard. The other five are a virtuous minister, loyal minister, wise min-

ister, chaste minister, and straightforward minister.

6. "The texts delivered on Eagle Peak" refers to the Lotus Sutra, and that delivered in the grove of sal trees to the Nirvana Sutra.

7. "The web-footed king" refers to a Buddha. Webbed feet are one of a Buddha's thirty-two features.

8. "He who bore a knot of flesh" refers to a Buddha. A knot of flesh is one of a Buddha's thirty-two features.

9. The foremost of the five sacred mountains of China; located in Shantung (Pyn Shandong) Province, eastern China. From ancient times, Chinese emperors performed rituals on this mountain to offer their prayers to Heaven.