SADATŌ was beaten in twelve years. Masakado was overcome in eight. The devil king of the sixth heaven has roused the ten kinds of troops\(^1\) and, in the midst of the sea of the sufferings of birth and death, is at war with the votary of the Lotus Sutra to stop him from taking possession of and to wrest away from him this impure land where both ordinary people and sages dwell.

It has been twenty or more years now since I found myself in that situation and began the great battle. Not once have I thought of retreat. Among my disciples and followers, however, those who are cowards have for the most part either given in or retreated at heart.

I am at a loss to say how moved I am that though you, the lay nun, have little knowledge of Buddhist doctrines and are faint-hearted, until now you have never retreated.

Not only that, but you have sent one of your servants, whom you could well employ for yourself, to assist me. Surely Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and all the emanation Buddhas in the ten directions must be aware of this.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The nineteenth day of the ninth month

I would like Ben\(^2\) to read this to the lay nun.

There is much to say, but I will stop here. I have a word for Ben. You must hold the annual lecture on the doctrines of the Great Teacher Tʻien-tʻai.\(^3\) I have taken out and sent the painted image of the great teacher. Saburō Sae-mon-no-jō\(^4\) has it with him. From among the texts, keep with you the two-volume Epilogue to the Nirvana Sutra,\(^5\) the fifth volume of The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra and its commentary, and the excerpts from the first volume of A Collection of Orally Transmitted Teachings.\(^6\)

Background

In this letter written from Sado Island on the nineteenth day of the ninth month in 1273, Nichiren Daishonin praises a lay nun in Kamakura for her firm faith. Though her exact identity is unknown, one account suggests that
she was the lay nun Myōichi, the mother of Ben, also known as Nishhō. The Daishonin explains to her that he has not faltered an instant in his fight of over twenty years with the devil king of the sixth heaven. He expresses his admiration that though the lay nun has little knowledge of Buddhist doctrines, her faith has nevertheless been unwaver. And he expresses his appreciation for her sending one of her own servants to assist him in his dwelling in exile. In the postscript to the letter, the Daishonin instructs Nishhō to hold the annual lecture on the doctrines of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai and asks him to keep with him certain Buddhist texts.

Notes

1. The ten kinds of troops represent ten kinds of hindrances. The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom lists them as (i) greed, (2) care and worry, (3) hunger and thirst, (4) love of pleasure, (5) drowsiness and languor, (6) fear, (7) doubt and regret, (8) anger, (9) preoccupation with wealth and fame, and (10) arrogance and contempt for others.

2. Nishhō, a disciple later designated by Nichiren Daishonin as one of the six senior priests.

3. Lectures held annually on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the anniversary of T’ien-t’ai’s death.

4. Shōjō Kingo, a samurai and loyal follower of the Daishonin who lived in Kamakura.

5. A seventh-century Chinese translation by Jñānabhadra and Hui-ning, in which Shakyamuni Buddha describes the practice his disciples should carry out after his death. The text also describes the cremation of the Buddha’s body and the distribution of his ashes. Fragments of the Sanskrit sutra on which this translation was based are extant.

6. Having perhaps run out of space, the Daishonin inserted this paragraph at the beginning of the letter, which is where it appears in Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshū. Based on recent scholarship suggesting that it may be a sort of postscript, we have moved it to the end.