A Disease Passed on to One's Children

It is nothing special. Now that you have offered your prayer, be resolved that in the end, things will turn out exactly that way.

I was fond of the lay priest Kawano, and now that he has passed away, I see him in you. As such is the case, what need is there for me to feel empty? Indeed, though, that is the way I feel.

In the world now, however, everyone says that he is familiar with the Lotus Sutra. That is why practitioners of the Lotus Sutra abound. But let us discuss the sutra known as the Lotus in terms of a disease that is passed on to one's children.

Concerning the disease that is passed on to one's children, though it may be rare for children to resemble their parents in every particular, this kind of disease will most certainly be passed on to them. For example, a mother dog's way of barking is passed on to her pup, and a mother cat's movements are passed on to her kitten, which then catches mice in just such a manner as the mother.

Japan is made up of sixty-six provinces and two islands. Within its boundaries lie 11,037 temples dedicated to Buddhas. The priests and nuns residing on their grounds number three thousand, ten thousand, one thousand one hundred, ten, or one person. But they all trace their roots to the Great Teacher Kōbō, the Great Teacher Jikaku, and the Great Teacher Chishō: they are the disciples of these three great teachers. The chief priest of Mount Hiei, the supervisors of Tō-ji, Omuro, and the seven major temples of Nara, the chief official of Onjō-ji, and the superintendents of temples and shrines such as Izu, Hakone, Nikkō, and Jikō, are all in the lineage of these three great teachers.

These people are bound to see the Lotus Sutra just as the three great teachers did. In the ranking the three great teachers established based on the differences between the Lotus Sutra and all the other sutras, the Great Teacher Kōbō ranked the Lotus Sutra third, and Jikaku and Chishō ranked it second. And Kōbō regarded it as a childish theory. And now, as well, their followers see it in just this way.

But could my view of the matter be in error? Shakyamuni Buddha declared, "The Lotus is the foremost," and Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas of the ten directions testified, "All that you [Shakyamuni Buddha] have expounded is the truth!" This is as different from what the three great teachers said as fire is from water. As long as the people who inherit their teachings follow in their footsteps and make the rice paddies and fields on their estates
their own, however much they may engage in doctrinal disputes, I can only think that because of the errors of the three great teachers, it will be hard to escape the blame.

But since I am a person of little influence, people refuse to accept it when I speak in this way. And so, though the people of Japan now all insist that they read the sutra, they never seem to accept what I say. But enough of this. I was worried about how you were doing since I had had no word from you, so I was delighted to see your messenger. I am overjoyed to hear that you have recovered from your illness. I look forward to receiving further news from you.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The seventeenth day of the ninth month

Reply to the lay priest Yagenta

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in 1274 to the lay priest Hōjō Yagenta in Kamakura. Yagenta had written that he had recovered from an illness and this is the Daishonin’s reply. He explains that though many people claim to believe in the Lotus Sutra, their interpretations of the sutra are mistaken because they follow the doctrines of the priests Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō. Kōbō had asserted that the Lotus Sutra is third in rank among the sutras, and Jikaku and Chishō put it second. These erroneous views, declares the Daishonin, like a disease that is passed from parent to child, have infected all those in the lineage of these three priests. Thus such followers refuse to accept the Daishonin’s teaching that the Lotus Sutra is supreme, although this is the teaching of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and all the Buddhas of the ten directions. In closing, the Daishonin expresses his delight that Yagenta has fully recovered his health.

Notes

1. A follower of the Daishonin, said to have been imprisoned at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271.
2. The two islands were Iki and Tsushima, located off the coast of Kyushu in southern Japan.
3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
4. Ibid., chap. 11.