

The Source of Aniruddha's Good Fortune



ON the second day of the fifth month I received the horseload of taros, well-dried like stone, which you sent from Ueno in Fuji to Mount Minobu.

Among the Buddha's disciples was one called Aniruddha, who was known as the foremost in divine insight and was counted as one of the Buddha's ten major disciples. He stood shoulder to shoulder with Mahākāshyapa, Shāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and Ānanda. When we inquire into his origins, we find that he was a son of King Dronodana, the second son of King Simhahanu, and that he was a cousin of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. He had three names: the first was Free from Poverty, the second was At Will, and the third was No Need to Hunt. Each reflected a wondrous happening.

In a time of famine in the past there lived a respectable pratyekabuddha called the Venerable Rida. For seven days in this time of famine Rida was unable to eat. But finally he successfully begged a hunter in a mountain village for the meal of millet in his bowl. Because of this, the hunter became a wealthy man in that very life. Then, over the course of ninety-one kalpas, he experienced enjoyment in both the world of heavenly beings and the world of humans, and finally he was reborn as a son of King Dronodana.

He never lacked for food in his golden vessels and finally became an arhat. His vision could penetrate the vast major world system in an instant. Thus did he excel. In the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra he received from the Buddha a prediction that he would become the Thus Come One Universal Brightness. The Great Teacher Miao-lo commented on this matter, saying, "A meal of millet is a trifling thing. But because the donor gave all that he possessed, and because the recipient was a superior being, the donor was able to obtain marvelous recompense."¹ This statement means that though the meal of millet may have been insignificant, the donor was reborn as a person of such extraordinary fortune because he gave when he had nothing else to save a virtuous person from starving.

This valley in Minobu is full of stones so there is nothing like what you have sent me. Moreover, because it is summer, the people have no time to spare. Also, they are all involved in the building project. Nevertheless, you have taken pains to consider my welfare here in the mountain village and send me offerings. In the end, though, is it not that you grieve over the loss of your father and for his sake have made offerings to Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra? No doubt

you were motivated by your determination to perform your filial duties with devotion.

Without such resolve, the king Brahmā, the lord Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings would be unable to carry out their vow to make the home of the upholder of the correct teaching their own dwelling. Even a person who seems worthless strives so as not to go against his promise. How then can these gods go back on the promise that they made to the Buddha?

And if this is indeed the case, when those who are vital to your interests try to prevent you from upholding your faith, or you are faced with great obsta-

cles, you must believe that the king Brahmā and the others will without fail fulfill their vow, and strengthen your faith more than ever.

In that event, your late father will surely attain Buddhahood. And if that happens, he will no doubt come and keep you from harm. At such a time, things will go just as you wish. If people try to hinder your faith, I urge you strongly to feel joy.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third day of the fifth month

Reply to Ueno



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the third day of the fifth month in 1275 to express his thanks to Nanjō Tokimitsu for his offering of a horse-load of taros. Referring to Aniruddha, one of the Buddha's ten major disciples, the Daishonin explains his extraordinary good fortune as stemming from his actions in a past lifetime, when he saved a virtuous person from starvation by giving him his own meal.

The Daishonin compares Tokimitsu's offering to this act and praises the firmness of his resolve, saying that it also reflects his attention to his filial duties for his deceased father's sake. The strength of this resolve itself will give rise to the protection of the benevolent gods, says the Daishonin, and will likewise give rise to obstacles. The solution, urges the Daishonin, is ever-increasing faith and a sense of joy.

Note

1. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."*