I have received the unlined robe that you kindly sent me.

In a country called Abandoning the Old they cast old people aside, and in the land of Japan these days they do the same with votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

Since this country was formed there have been the seven reigns of the heavenly deities and the five reigns of the earthly deities, and the hundred reigns of human sovereigns. Ninety sovereigns have reigned since the time of Emperor Jimmu [the first human sovereign]. In the reign of Emperor Kimmie [the twenty-ninth human sovereign], Buddhism was introduced to Japan, and since then sixty sovereigns have reigned in more than seven hundred years. During that time there have been those who murdered their fathers and mothers, those who acted as enemies of the state, mountain bandits, and pirates at sea, in numbers too great to reckon. But never have I heard of one hated to such a degree as is Nichiren, because he is a votary of the Lotus Sutra!

Those others were perhaps hated by the rulers but not by the common people, hated by priests but not by laypersons, hated by men but not by women, or hated by foolish people but not by the wise. But in my case, I am more hated by the common people than by the rulers, more hated by priests and nuns than by ordinary men and women, by the wise rather than by the foolish, by good persons rather than by evil ones. Never in past times has a person such as I been heard of, nor do I think one will ever be found in ages to come.

Hence, for a period of more than twenty years, from the time I was thirty-two up to the present, when I am fifty-four, I have been expelled from temples or driven out of various places, have had my relatives harassed, have been subject to night attack, confronted in battle, and countless times showered with abuse. I have been beaten, wounded in the hand, and my disciples have been killed. I have nearly been beheaded and twice have been condemned to exile. In these twenty and more years I have known not an hour, not an instant of peace or safety. Yoritomo fought against his enemies for seven years, but still there were intervals in the hostilities. Yoriyoshi engaged in battle for twelve years, but his trials could hardly have been greater than mine.

Volume four of the Lotus Sutra states, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, [how much more will this be so after his passing?]" And in volume five we read, "It [the Lotus Sutra] will face much hostility in the world and be dif-
REGARDING AN UNLINED ROBE

ficult to believe.” The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai in all likelihood did not fully read and live these passages in the sutra, for in his time all the people of the world believed in and accepted the Lotus Sutra. And the same is true of the Great Teacher Dengyō as well, for the times did not yet fit the words of the sutra “how much more will this be so after his passing?” If I, Nichiren, had not appeared in this country of Japan, then the golden words of the Buddha would have seemed to be false, the testimony of their accuracy by Many Treasures Buddha would have been meaningless, and the words of the Buddhas of the ten directions would have been a lie. In the 2,220 and more years since the passing of the Buddha, no one in the lands of India, China, or Japan has experienced the truth of the words that the Lotus Sutra “will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe” as I have. If I had not appeared, these words of the Buddha would have been spoken in vain.

And being such a person, like Su Wu, I eat snow in order to sustain my life, or like Li Ling, wear a coat of straw to get through the days. In my mountain forest, when the trees bear no fruit, I spend two or three days without eating; when my deerskin garment is worn out, I go naked for three or four months. Yet for such a person, whom you have never even met, out of pity you send this robe to clothe my body—what profound kindness! When I don this robe, take my place before the Buddha, and recite the Lotus Sutra, then all the 69,384 characters that make up the sacred text, each individual character one by one, becomes a golden Buddha. Though the robe is only one, it clothes each and every one of the 69,384 Buddhas. And because that is so, the husband and wife who presented me with this robe will be visited by these Buddhas, who will regard the couple as their supporters and watch over and protect them. For this husband and wife in their present existence they will be a prayer, a treasure; and when the husband and wife are on the point of death, they will be a moon, a sun, a path, a bridge, a father, a mother, an ox or a horse, a palanquin, a carriage, a lotus, a mountain, coming to greet and convey them to the pure land of Eagle Peak. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo!

Nichiren

The eighth month of the first year of Kenji [1275], cyclical sign kinoto-i

This letter should always be read together with the wife of Tōshirō.

Background

This letter was written in the eighth month of 1275, a little more than one year after Nichiren Daishonin went to live at Mount Minobu. He had received a gift of a light, warm-weather garment from a married couple, followers whom he had never met. Their names are not known, but the postscript of this letter suggests that they must have been living in Kamakura because in another letter written in 1272 to Nichigen-nyo, the wife of Shijō Kingo, the Daishonin wrote, “I hope you will read this letter over and over again together with Tōshirō’s wife” (I, p. 315). Tōshirō and his wife lived in Kamakura.

This letter conveys the Daishonin’s
compassion as he assures the recipients that all the Buddhas are certain to respond to their sincerity, and that they are sure to attain Buddhahood themselves. Their offering was a simple garment, but it was woven and sewn by the couple. In the gift the Daishonin perceived their very hearts and faith.

Notes

1. The story of a country called Abandoning the Old appears in the Miscellaneous Treasury Sutra.
2. Minamoto no Yoriyoshi (988–1075), a leader of the imperial army who attacked and killed Abe no Sadatō when the latter led his forces to challenge imperial rule. This fighting lasted twelve years, from 1051 to 1062.
3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
5. Su Wu (140–60 B.C.E.) was a minister of Emperor Wu of the Former Han dynasty. He was captured and imprisoned by the nomadic Hsiung-nu tribes living north of China when he visited them as the emperor's envoy. Emperor Wu's successor, Emperor Chao, demanded Su Wu's release, but his captors falsely reported that he had already died. Then one of Su Wu's retainers instructed the new emperor's envoy to tell the nomads that the emperor had shot down a wild goose near the capital and found a letter tied to its leg reporting that Su Wu was still alive. Finally, the chief of the nomads was compelled to return Su Wu nineteen years after his imprisonment.
6. Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.E.) was a military commander who led Chinese forces in an attack on the Hsiung-nu tribes and was taken prisoner by them.