

## Cloth for a Robe and an Unlined Robe



I HAVE received the cloth for a robe and the unlined robe that you sent me. A woman called the nun Bright White<sup>1</sup> was born dressed in a robe. And as she grew, this robe bit by bit became bigger. Later, when she was ordained as a nun, it served as a nun's robe. And finally, at the assembly where the Lotus Sutra was being preached, a prediction was bestowed on Bright White that, in a future existence, she would become a Buddha. Her name would be the Thus Come One Gladly Seen by All Living Beings.<sup>2</sup>

Also, those who expound the Lotus Sutra without fail possess a robe called the robe of gentleness and patience.<sup>3</sup>

Even one seed, when planted, multiplies. The dragon turns a little water into great rains, and human beings make a few sparks into a great blaze. Though there is only one unlined robe, when it is presented in offering to the Lotus Sutra, it is offered to all 69,384 characters of the sutra, each of which is a Buddha. These Buddhas have the renewal of life in the decayed seeds<sup>4</sup> as their hearts, the revelation of original enlightenment and the immeasurable life span<sup>5</sup> as their lives, the constantly abiding Buddha nature as their throats, and the wonderful practice of the single vehicle as their eyes.

The temporary forms that the Buddha manifests in response to the capacity of the people are not the true Buddha. Rather than the Buddha with thirty-two features and eighty characteristics, it is the characters of the Lotus Sutra that are the true Buddhas. Thus during the Buddha's lifetime there were people who believed in the Buddha, but never became Buddhas themselves. After the Buddha's passing, of those who believe in the Lotus Sutra "not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood."<sup>6</sup> These are the golden words of the Thus Come One.

I will have this robe made from your cloth, will wear the unlined robe as well, and will recite the Lotus Sutra. When I do so, though I am a monk without precepts, because the Lotus Sutra is a work of honest and upright golden words, it will be as if a poisonous snake were to spit up a gem, or sandalwood trees were to grow up among the eranda.<sup>7</sup>

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The twenty-eighth day of the ninth month

My reply to you

## Background

This letter was written by Nichiren Daishonin on the twenty-eighth day of the ninth month in 1275 at Minobu. It is thought that it was sent to Toki Jōnin and his wife, and particularly to the latter, in Shimōsa Province. In describing the benefits from the cloth for a robe and the unlined robe that Toki's wife sent to the Daishonin as an

offering, he assures her that she is certain to attain Buddhahood, citing the story of the nun Bright White, who received her prediction of Buddhahood in the Lotus Sutra. And it is none other than the Lotus Sutra, he emphasizes, that guarantees Buddhahood to all who believe in it.

## Notes

1. The daughter of a wealthy person in Kapilavastu, who later became a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha.

2. According to the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Gladly Seen by All Living Beings is the name that Mahāprajāpatī, the foster mother of Shakyamuni, will have when she becomes a Buddha. Thus in this letter the nun Bright White seems to be identified with Mahāprajāpatī.

3. The robe of gentleness and patience is described in the "Teacher of the Law" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This chapter says that those who wish to expound the Lotus Sutra after the Thus Come One's extinction should "enter the Thus Come One's room, put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat . . ." According to this chapter, the Thus Come

One's robe is "the mind that is gentle and forbearing." A gentle and forbearing mind enables one to uphold the Law while bearing insult with grace and equanimity. The sutra also says, "Gentleness and patience are the robe."

4. "The renewal of life in the decayed seeds" refers to the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles, a doctrine that is clarified by the Lotus Sutra.

5. This refers to the revelation in the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood in the inconceivably remote past and that his life span as a Buddha is immeasurable.

6. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

7. Buddhist scriptures describe eranda as a plant that emits a foul odor and often contrast it with the fragrant sandalwood.