

Reply to Nanjō



I HAVE received the taros, river nori, and wasabi, each one of which shows the sincerity of each of you. It is as if a bird were cherishing its eggs, or a cow licking its calf.

Clothing enfolds one's body and food sustains one's life. Thus, is not your warmly cherishing one who recites the Lotus Sutra deep in the mountains actually cherishing Shakyamuni Buddha and sustaining the life of the Lotus Sutra?

King Wonderful Adornment¹ [in a past existence] cherished the three sages deep in the mountains, and he became Sal Tree King Buddha. King Suzudan made offerings to the seer Asita, and he became Shakyamuni Buddha.

Thus though one may neither re-

cite nor copy the sutra oneself, if one makes offerings to a person who does, one will without fail attain Buddhahood.

The sutra reads, "Such a person assuredly and without doubt will attain the Buddha way."² Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the third month in the second year of Kenji [1276]

A reply presented to Nanjō

I apologize to Kissaburō and Tarō Tayū³ for writing this on one sheet of paper, and I want you to be sure to have Hōki-bō read it aloud to them.



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the eighteenth day of the third month in 1276 to Nanjō Tokimitsu, who, together with fellow believers Ōi Kissaburō and Tarō Tayū, had sent offerings of foodstuffs to him in Minobu. The Daishonin points to two kings of the past, Wonderful Adornment and Suzudan, who became Sal

Tree King Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha because they had protected and made offerings to practitioners of the correct teaching. He praises Tokimitsu and the others, telling them that the Lotus Sutra promises that those who make offerings to its practitioners will without doubt attain Buddhahood.

Notes

1. King Wonderful Adornment is the king who appears in the “King Wonderful Adornment” (27th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. According to that chapter, Wonderful Adornment lived in the age of a Buddha named Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom. Though a believer in Brahmanism, he took faith in this Buddha’s teachings, which were the Lotus Sutra teachings of that age, at the urging of his wife and two sons. The Buddha prophesied that the king would become a Buddha named Sal Tree King. In *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, T’ien-t’ai tells a story about the relationship in a past life of Wonderful Adornment and his wife and two sons. In the remote past, there were four religious practitioners carrying out austerities in search of the way. They found themselves hindered, however, by the daily routines of cooking and cleaning. To assist the practice of the other

three, one abandoned his austerities and took these chores upon himself. The other three continued their practice and obtained the way to Buddhahood, but he did not. As his karmic reward for having supported the others’ practice, he was reborn as King Wonderful Adornment, and the other three as his wife and sons to lead him to the Buddha way and thus repay their debt to him.

2. Lotus Sutra, chap. 21.

3. Kissaburō refers to Ōi Kissaburō, a follower of Nichiren Daishonin and an inhabitant of Tōtōmi Province. He was the third son of Ōi Kitsuroku and a younger brother of Nikkō, the successor to the Daishonin, who is referred to later in the sentence as Hōki-bō. Little is known about Tarō Tayū except that he was a follower of the Daishonin and an inhabitant of Suruga Province.