

On Forgetting the Copy of the Sutra



I HAVE delegated one of the priests in training here to deliver to you your copy of the sutra, which you forgot when you were here.

Duke Ai of the state of Lu¹ said, "Some people are very forgetful—there was a man who, when he moved to another house, forgot his wife." Confucius said, "Some people are even more forgetful. The tyrannical rulers Chieh and Chou forgot about their own safety."

The Venerable Panthaka² forgot his own name—he was the most forgetful person in the whole continent of Jambudvīpa. And the Honorable Jōnin³ forgot his copy of the sutra—he is perhaps the most forgetful person in all Japan!

The persons who had formed ties with the Lotus Sutra in the days of Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha forgot the jewel that had been sewn into their robe,⁴ and for the period of major world system dust particle kalpas they wandered in paths of poverty. Those persons who received the seeds of Buddhahood in the even more remote past forgot the good medicine that had been given them, and for the period of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas they tumbled into the perilous region of the three evil paths of existence.

These days the scholars of the True

Word, Nembutsu, Zen, and Precepts schools of Buddhism have utterly forgotten the true meaning of the Buddha's teachings, and are destined to spend countless kalpas in the future immersed in the fiery pits of the Avīchi hell. Even worse than them are the greatest forgetters of all, the so-called scholars of the present-day Tendai school and upholders of the Lotus Sutra who slander and defame Nichiren and lend support to the Nembutsu and other believers. They are like persons who turn against their own parents and side with the enemy, who wield a sword only to injure themselves. But I will say no more of this.

Bodhisattva Ever Wailing traveled eastward, seeking the teaching of the perfection of wisdom; the boy Good Treasures traveled south to acquire the Flower Garland teachings. The boy named Snow Mountains sacrificed his body for the sake of half a verse; the ascetic Aspiration for the Law stripped off his skin in order to gain a single verse.

But these were all great men, sages of the highest order. If we look into their transient identities, we find that they resided at the first stage of development or the first stage of security [of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice],⁵ and if we examine their true identities, we realize that they had

attained near-perfect enlightenment or perfect enlightenment. Though their bodies might be in the eight hot hells, they had mastered the fiery pit meditation;⁶ though their minds were in the eight cold hells, they manifested the clear cool meditation. Thus neither their bodies nor their minds experienced suffering. The heat and cold were as ineffective as an arrow shot into the empty sky, or a stone flung into the water.

But now you, Jōnin, are an ignorant person of the latter age, an ordinary mortal who has yet to cut off the illusions of thought and desire. In body neither layman nor priest, but a shaved believer; in mind neither good nor bad, but a mere half-grown he-goat. Nevertheless, you have a loving mother. In the morning you venture forth to wait on your lord, and in the evening you return to your home, where you do all that can be done for your loving mother, where all your thoughts are of the duties of a filial son. But in the latter part of last month your mother, obeying the principle of birth and death, set out on her journey to the Yellow Springs.

However much you may lament, she was already in her nineties, and it is only natural for such a parent to depart and leave her son behind. And yet you keep dwelling on the fact that, once gone, she will never come again, no matter how the days and months may pass. You have no other mother in this land. From now on, whom will you wait on?

Because of the great grief you felt at this separation, you placed the ashes of the deceased in a container hung from your neck and, trusting to your feet, set out upon the highroad, journeying all the way from Shimōsa Province to this province of Kai, a distance of a thousand *ri* here and back. All the lands you passed through were beset by famine, and the mountains and plains

were full of bandits. Where you put up each night, there was little food to be had; you were weak in body, all but without attendants, and never knew where you could obtain fresh horses or oxen. Steep mountains towered before you and the wide rolling rivers you confronted were many.

Climbing a tall peak, your head seemed to brush the heavens; descending into a deep valley, your feet tread upon clouds. Not being a bird, you could scarcely make your way over such places; not being a deer, there were barriers you could barely cross, your eyes dazed, your feet half frozen. Your trials were like those of the Tripitaka Master Kumārajīva when he crossed the Pamirs, or of En no Ubasoku⁷ in the peaks of the Ōmine range.

And then in time you arrived at this remote hollow and saw a lone hermitage where the sound of Lotus Sutra recitation echoed to the blue sky and the words expounding the single vehicle were heard among the mountains. Following the guide assigned you, you entered the chamber and then, when you had safely placed the remains of your mother before the sacred image of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, bowed your limbs and body to the ground in obeisance, pressed your palms together, and opened your eyes to pay homage to the noble visage, your body was filled with overwhelming joy and all suffering at once vanished from your mind.

My head, you reflected, is the head of my parents, my feet are their feet, my ten fingers are their ten fingers, my mouth is their mouth. As the fruit is to the seeds from which it came, as the shadow is to the body, so am I to them. When Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, attained enlightenment, he made it possible for his father, Shuddhodana, and his mother, Māyā, to do likewise. Kissen Shishi and Shōdai-nyo,⁸ father and mother of the Ven-

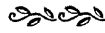
erable Maudgalyāyana, both attained Buddhahood at the same time as their son. When you consider these examples, you know that your mother too will quickly be absolved of the karmic impediments that have been accumulated from time without beginning, and the wonderful lotus that is the inner

nature of her mind will quickly open its petals.

Thereafter you fully engaged in Buddhist services and then made your way safely back home.

With my deep respect.

To the lay priest Toki



Background

Toki Jōnin had lost his mother toward the end of the second month of 1276, and in the third month, bearing her cremated remains, he made the long journey from his home in Shimōsa to visit Nichiren Daishonin at Mount Minobu. There he held services for her, thus earnestly fulfilling his filial duty.

Upon leaving Minobu, he forgot the copy of the Lotus Sutra he had carried with him. The Daishonin sent this letter with the disciple he had dispatched to return Jōnin's sutra copy to him. Therefore, though it bears no date, it is known to have been written in the third month of 1276.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin cautions Jōnin against forgetfulness, and praises his filial devotion to his deceased mother as well as his sincere faith. Citing examples from Chinese and Buddhist literature about forgetful-

ness, the Daishonin affectionately refers to Jōnin as "the most forgetful person in all Japan." Next, he refers to a more serious kind of forgetfulness—forgetting the true meaning of the Buddha's teachings. In this regard, he mentions the teachers of the True Word, Nembutsu, Zen, and Precepts schools of Buddhism. Worse yet, he says, are the scholars of the Lotus Sutra-based Tendai school and their followers who slander the Daishonin and side with the Nembutsu and other believers against him. The Daishonin describes them as "the greatest forgetters of all."

The letter concludes with the Daishonin praising Jōnin's devotion in making the difficult journey to Minobu with his mother's ashes for a memorial service, pointing out that such sincere faith will enable both child and parent to attain Buddhahood together.

Notes

1. The twenty-fifth ruler (r. 494–468 B.C.E.) of the state of Lu, China. Confucius was a native of Lu in Duke Ai's time.
2. Also known as Chūdapanthaka. See Chūdapanthaka in Glossary.
3. Toki Jōnin, the recipient of this letter.
4. Those who heard the Lotus Sutra of Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha from Shakyamuni when he was the sixteenth son of that Buddha in the remote past. According to the parable of the jewel

in the robe related in the Lotus Sutra, just as an impoverished man was ignorant of the treasure he possessed, so the Buddha's disciples were unaware that the Buddha had planted the seeds of Buddhahood in their lives.

5. The fifty-two stages of practice are of two kinds—that of the specific teaching and that of the perfect teaching. In the former, the first stage of development, and in the latter, the first stage of security, are

regarded as the first stages of sages. In either case, it is indicated that Bodhisattva Ever Wailing and the others were at the stage of sages.

6. A meditation undisturbed by flames and heat. It is said that even the flames and heat of hell do not affect one who has obtained the fiery pit meditation.

7. En no Ubasoku (b. 634), also known

as En no Ozunu, founded the Japanese Shugendō school, a quasi-Buddhist school that teaches ascetic practices in the mountains aimed at obtaining supernatural powers.

8. Kissen Shishi and Shōdai-nyo are the Japanese names for this couple. Their Sanskrit names are unknown.