

## Prayer for the Lay Nun's Recovery



THE string of coins that you sent has been presented as an offering to adorn the shrine of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai.

The Lotus Sutra says, "The Lotus is the foremost!"<sup>1</sup> It also says, "A person who can accept and uphold this sutra is likewise foremost among all living beings."<sup>2</sup> And it also says, "[And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra], one's good fortune will be even greater."<sup>3</sup>

Miao-lo states, "Those who vex or trouble [the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split into seven pieces, but those who give alms to them will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles."<sup>4</sup> And the Great Teacher Dengyō says, "Those who praise him [the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai] will receive blessings that will pile up as high as Mount Calm and Bright, while those who slander him will be committing a fault that will condemn them to the hell of incessant suffering."<sup>5</sup>

Volume ten of *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra"* says, "Even bodhisattvas who have attained the highest of the seven expedient means ranks cannot compare to the fiftieth person [who responds with joy to the successively relayed word of the Lotus Sutra]."

The bodhisattvas Dharma Wisdom and Forest of Merits of the Flower Garland Sutra or Vajrasattva of the Mahāvairochana Sutra could never equal even the lowliest ordinary mortal of the Lotus Sutra, much less could the patriarchs of the various schools that these other sutras represent such as Fatsang or Shan-wu-wei. But I will set this matter aside for the moment.

I am as concerned about the illness of your wife, the lay nun Toki, as though it were I myself who is ailing, and day and night I pray to the heavenly gods that she will recover. She has supported the votary of the Lotus Sutra just as she has supplied oil to the lamps, or piled earth around the roots of the trees. I am beseeching the gods of the sun and moon that they will guard her life even at the cost of their own!

If there are other matters I have forgotten to mention here, I will send word of them by way of Iyo-bō.<sup>6</sup> Rest assured that I will do all I can.

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

The twenty-ninth day of the  
eleventh month

Reply to Toki

## Background

Toki Jōnin, a leading lay disciple in Shimōsa Province, sent an offering of a string of coins to Nichiren Daishonin, who wrote this letter to express his gratitude. It contains passages from sutra commentaries emphasizing the great benefit deriving from such offerings, and conveys the Daishonin's prayer for Toki's wife, the lay nun Toki, who was suffering from a serious illness.

The letter is dated only "the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month" with no indication of the year. It was formerly regarded as having been written in 1276, but a more recent study places it in 1280.

Acknowledging receipt of the coins, the Daishonin states that he has used

them to adorn the "shrine of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai." This refers to the annual lecture on the doctrine of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai that the Daishonin held at Minobu on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the anniversary of T'ien-t'ai's passing.

Citing several passages from the Lotus Sutra, he makes the point that because the Lotus Sutra is foremost among Buddhist teachings, its votary is foremost among all living beings, and therefore making offerings to such a votary is a source of supreme benefit. He ends by sharing his compassionate concern and strong prayer for the recovery of Toki's wife, who has lent him consistent support over the years.

## Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.
2. Ibid., chap. 23.
3. Ibid., chap. 10.
4. *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* "Have their heads split into seven pieces" refers to the vow made by the ten demon daughters in the "Dhāranī" chapter of the Lotus Sutra to afflict in this manner anyone who troubles a believer of the sutra. The ten honorable titles are epithets for a Buddha,

expressing his virtue, wisdom, and compassion.

5. *A Clarification of the Schools Based on T'ien-t'ai's Doctrine.* "Calm and Bright" is another name for Mount Sumeru.

6. Iyo-bō is another name for Nitchō, who was later designated by the Daishonin as one of the six senior priests. He was Toki Jōnin's adopted son, his wife's son by her first husband.