 HAVE received the one horseload of rice and one horseload of taros that you sent as food for the priests and as an offering to the object of devotion of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra is made up of 69,384 characters. Though in our eyes each individual character may appear to be no more than a character in black ink, in the Buddha’s eyes, each one is a Buddha.

For example, a ruler called King Golden Grains\(^1\) turned sand into gold. A man named Mahānāma\(^2\) turned rocks into gems. Wood immersed in the Spring of Jewels\(^3\) changes into lapis lazuli. Waters that enter the sea all become salty. Birds that approach Mount Sumeru turn golden-hued.\(^4\) Agada medicine\(^5\) changes poison into medicine. And the wonder of the Lotus Sutra is also like that; it changes ordinary people into Buddhas.

A turnip turns into a quail, and a taro growing in the mountains into an eel. Since such are the wonders of the secular world, how much truer must it be of the power of the Lotus Sutra? If one were to strap a rhinoceros horn onto one’s body and enter the sea, the water would part to a distance of five feet around.\(^6\) If one were to rub one’s body with the fragrance of sandalwood and enter a great blaze, one would never be burned.\(^7\)

When one upholds the Lotus Sutra one will neither be dampened by the waters of the eight cold hells, nor burned by the raging fires of the eight hot hells. The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra says that such a person “cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water.”\(^8\)

Though there is much more I would like to say, because we are approaching the end of the year your messenger is eager to go. So I will lay down my writing brush here.

Nichiren

The twelfth month of the second year of Kenji [1276], cyclical sign hinoe-ne

Reply to Nanjō Heishichirō
Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in the twelfth month of 1276 at Minobu to Nanjō Heishichirō, a samurai who belonged to the extended family of Nanjō Tokimitsu. The Daishonin writes in thanks for Heishichirō’s offering for the Lotus Sutra, explaining that though each of the sutra’s Chinese characters may appear to be simply black ink, each is actually a Buddha. Moreover, he says, the Lotus possesses the power to turn ordinary persons into Buddhas. He goes on to encourage Heishichirō by telling him that for those who uphold it, the Lotus Sutra promises protection from both the waters of the eight cold hells and the fires of the eight hot hells.

Notes

1. Little is known about King Golden Grains. The source of this account of turning sand into gold is also unknown.
2. One of the five ascetics who heard Shakyamuni Buddha’s first sermon and became his first converts. The Increasing by One Ågama Sutra describes him as excelling in supernatural powers. Descriptions of turning rocks into gems are found in Ts’ung-i’s Supplement to the Three Major Works on the Lotus Sutra.
3. Little is known about the Spring of Jewels. No sources are available for any description of wood changing into lapis lazuli.
4. According to The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, living beings that approach Mount Sumeru lose their own colors and take on a golden hue.
5. “Agada” refers to a medicine of ancient India that was believed to be extremely effective in curing disease.
6. According to an account in Pao-p’u Tzu, when placed in water, a rhinoceros horn carved in the form of a fish keeps the water three feet away.
7. This account is found in the Flower Garland Sutra.
8. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.