

## Climbing Up Dragon Gate



I HAVE received three strings of dried persimmons, one container of vinegar, some stalks of greens, and some field horsetail.

On Mount T'ien-t'ai in China, there is a waterfall a thousand feet high called Dragon Gate. From early spring on, many fish gather at the foot of this waterfall in hopes of climbing it. When one in a thousand or one in ten thousand succeeds in making the ascent, it becomes a dragon. Fish desiring to become dragons are like common persons wishing to be admitted to the palace of the emperor, or like poor persons seeking treasure. And becoming a Buddha also is similar to these things.

That waterfall, which plunges a thousand feet, thunders down faster than an arrow shot from a strong bow in the sky.

When the fish come to climb the waterfall, people gather together, throwing nets, casting lines, and shooting at the fish with bows and arrows, so that there is not an inch open on either bank.

In the sky above hawks, eagles, kites, and crows circle, awaiting their chance. When night falls, tigers, wolves, foxes, and raccoon dogs appear out of nowhere, snatch up the fish and devour them.

You should know what it is to become a Buddha through this example.

We have no idea how many times, as sentient beings transmigrating through the six paths, we have been born in India as a lion, or in China or Japan as a tiger, a wolf, or a fox. Or how many times we have been born in the heavens as a hawk or an eagle, or on the ground as a deer or a snake. Or how many times we have been born as a pheasant to tremble before a hawk, or a mouse to cringe before a cat, and, while yet living, have had our heads pecked at or our flesh bitten off.

The pile of bones from the bodies we have lived and died in over the course of one kalpa would soar higher than Mount Sumeru and be packed deeper than the earth. Though our lives are precious, they are all too easily snatched away.

Therefore you must resolve that if, this time, you give up your body and sacrifice your life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, it will without fail become the source of satisfaction of countless, innumerable kalpas of lifetimes. How wonderful! How wonderful!

I will write again another time.

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The second year of Kenji [1276],  
cyclical sign *hinoe-ne*

To the lay priest Ōi, the supervisor  
of the manor

**Background**

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1276 at Minobu in Kai Province to the lay priest Ōi, supervisor of a manor in Koma District in the same province. The Daishonin compares the difficulty of attaining Buddhahood to the struggles faced by fish that, wishing to become dragons, attempt to climb a

thousand-foot-high waterfall in China called Dragon Gate. Nothing less than a willingness to sacrifice even one's life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, says the Daishonin, is necessary to achieve Buddhahood, but this will become the source of satisfaction in countless kalpas to come.