

## Snow and Lacquer



I HAVE received your gift of five thousand coins.

Snow is the ultimate in whiteness; no dyeing will make it any other color. Lacquer is the ultimate in blackness; it will never become white. But how different is the human heart in its fickleness! It can be dyed by either good or evil.

Those persons who are imbued with the evil and erroneous teachings of the True Word, Zen, Nembutsu, and similar schools will invariably fall into hell; those who are imbued with the Lotus Sutra will invariably become Buddhas.

The sutra speaks of “the true aspect of all phenomena,”<sup>1</sup> and says that “if a person fails to have faith [but instead slanders this sutra], . . . he will enter the Avīchi hell.”<sup>2</sup> With regard to the faith that you hold in your heart, you must be as unchanging as snow or lacquer.

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

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

Reply to Nishiyama



### Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu in 1276, in response to an offering of five thousand coins from the lay priest of Nishiyama, a follower who lived in Nishiyama Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province.

The Daishonin points out that the human heart may be colored either by

good or evil. Those who are imbued by erroneous Buddhist schools and teachers will suffer as a result. In contrast, those who have their hearts imbued with faith in the Lotus Sutra will become Buddhas. Therefore, he says, faith in the Lotus Sutra should remain firm and unchanging.

### Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
2. Ibid., chap. 3.