

The Woman Who Gave a Piece of Gold



FROM Kamakura in Sagami Province you have sent two strings of coins¹ to me on this mountain peak in Minobu in the province of Kai.

Long ago, the so-called Woman Who Gave a Piece of Gold donated a gold coin to be used to gild a wooden statue [of a Buddha. Because of the benefits she received], for ninety-one long kalpas she was reborn with a golden body. The goldsmith at that time, who became her husband, was reborn as Mahākāshyapa, who in the future, the Buddha predicted, will become a Buddha named Light Bright Thus Come One.²

You, the Dharma Teacher Jōmyō, or Myōnichi,³ and your wife have offered two thousand copper coins to the Lotus Sutra. That woman made an offering to the Buddha, and this couple to the Lotus Sutra. The sutra is the teacher and the Buddha is the disciple.

The Nirvana Sutra says, “What the Buddhas take as their teacher is the Law. Therefore, the Buddhas honor, respect, and make offerings to it.”

The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra states: “Even if a person were to fill the whole major world system with the seven treasures as an offering to the

Buddha and the great bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas and arhats, the benefits gained by such a person cannot match those gained by accepting and upholding this Lotus Sutra, even just one four-line verse of it! The latter brings the most numerous blessings of all.”⁴

If the woman I have mentioned earlier, by making an offering to an inferior Buddha, could still be reborn for ninety-one kalpas with a golden body, then surely you, who have made offerings to a superior sutra, will be able to enter the realm of Buddhahood in your present lifetime, will you not?

But making offerings to those who slander the Law, such as the followers of the True Word or Zen schools or the Nembutsu believers, should be avoided. It is like paying honor to the asuras while putting one’s faith in the god Shakra [whom the asuras constantly war with].

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twelfth day of the fourth
month

Reply to the Sage Jōmyō



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1277 to Ōta Jōmyō, a follower who lived in Nakayama of Shimōsa Province. Ōta Jōmyō's full name and title were Ōta Gorō Saemon-no-jō Jōmyō, and the Daishonin's reference to him as the Sage Jōmyō in this letter indicates the deep trust he placed in him. Expressing his appreciation for the offer-

ing Jōmyō and his wife sent him at Minobu, the Daishonin cites from Buddhist scripture the story of a woman who donated a gold coin to a Buddha. Because the Lotus Sutra is the teacher of the Buddha, he suggests that Jōmyō's offering presented to the sutra will yield benefit far greater than the woman's offering of gold.

Notes

1. Japanese coins of the time had square holes in the center and were usually strung together in hundreds or thousands to form larger monetary units.

2. This story appears in *A History of the Buddha's Successors*, but in that account what

she donated was a small lump of gold rather than a gold coin.

3. Myōnichi, meaning Wonderful Sun, is the Buddhist name that the Daishonin gave Ōta Jōmyō.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.