

The Offering of Copper Vessels



I HAVE received the two copper vessels that you sent.

When Shakyamuni Buddha was thirty years old and about to attain Buddhahood, a woman, known as the cowherd girl, boiled rice in milk and prepared gruel to offer to the Buddha,¹ but she had no vessel to put it in. The four heavenly kings, Vaishravana and the others, had presented the Buddha with four bowls. The woman placed the bowls one within another and made her offering of gruel in these, and the Buddha was thus able to attain enlightenment.

Thereafter, though no one filled the bowls, they were always full of food.

Later the bodhisattva known as Ashvaghosha handed them over [to King Kanishka] in lieu of a payment of three thousand coins.²

And now you have sent these two vessels a thousand miles, an offering to Shakyamuni Buddha, and you will receive similar good fortune. I cannot write in further detail.

Nichiren

The seventh day of the eleventh month in the third year of Kenji [1277], cyclical sign *hinoto-ushi*

Reply to the wife of Hyōe no Sakan



Background

This letter was written at Minobu in 1277, and sent to the wife of Ikegami Hyōe no Sakan Munenaga. It is Nichiren Daishonin's response to her offering of two copper containers. In it he relates a tale from a Buddhist sutra about the woman who offered rice-

milk gruel to Shakyamuni Buddha when he had abandoned ascetic practices and was about to begin meditating in order to attain enlightenment. In like manner, the recipient's gift of copper vessels will serve the Buddha and yield great fortune, he concludes.

Notes

1. This story is found in the Causality of Past and Present Sutra, in which her name

is given as Nandabalā. Accounts of her offering of rice-milk gruel or milk curds to

Shakyamuni Buddha appear in a number of sutras. In some she is known as Sujātā.

2. This statement is based on a story that appears in *The Record of the Western Regions*. When Ashvaghosha, the twelfth of Shakyamuni's twenty-four successors, was preaching Buddhism in Pātaliputra in Ma-

gadha, King Kanishka led his army against Pātaliputra and demanded a huge sum in tribute. Instead of money, the defeated king offered Ashvaghosha and the bowls always full of food. Later, with the support of Kanishka, Ashvaghosha propagated Buddhism in northern India.