

Nine Thoughts to One Word



ON Mount Takatori, Mount Minobu, Mount Shichimen, in Iidani,¹ under the trees, among the grass roots, on the peaks, down in the dirt, search where you may, nowhere will you find it growing—only in the sea does the seaweed grow. And only on the mountains are the mushrooms found. In like manner, the way to Buddhahood is found nowhere outside the Lotus Sutra. But I will say no more on this matter.

I was most delighted to hear that your lord, who in the past has treated you with enmity, has once more admitted you to the company of those in his service, and that you are called upon to serve him not for a mere day or two but without interruption. I cannot tell you how this pleases me.

Uemon no Tayū² went against his father's wishes, but as a result of a single word from above, he was pardoned and taken back into favor. You, on the other hand, have been viewed with enmity for a number of years now, and I heard that the situation last winter was very serious. Yet now you are called into the service of your lord day after day. What are we to make of this? Surely it is all due to the designs of the heavenly gods and the power of the Lotus Sutra, is it not?

The priest Enkyō-bō³ is here at the moment and reports that Ema no Shi-

rō has twenty-four or twenty-five samurai in his service. Leaving aside the lord himself, one may note that, in imposing stature, in countenance, as well as in his mount and the subordinates attending him, no one can compare to Nakatsukasa Saemon-no-jō.⁴ The boys of Kamakura, gathering at the crossroads, all exclaim, "Ah, there's a fine fellow, a fine fellow indeed!"

When I hear such reports, I cannot help feeling greatly concerned. Confucius thought nine times before saying one word. Tan, the Duke of Chou, would bind up his hair three times in the course of washing it and spit out his food three times in the course of a meal [in order not to keep callers waiting].⁵ These were worthy men of ancient times, a model for the people of today. Therefore you should in future be even more careful of your conduct.

When night comes, whatever the circumstances, you should never venture out alone. Even if summoned by your lord, you should first send an aide to your lord's residence to make certain that it is in fact your lord who has sent the summons. Then fasten your breastplate, don a headband, and provide yourself with men to attend you front and back and to your left and right, and only then venture forth. When you reach the residence of someone who lives near your lord and is friend-

ly toward you, or the room assigned to you in your lord's mansion, you should remove your armor there before presenting yourself to your lord.

When you come back to your own home, before you enter, send someone in ahead of you to inspect the doorways, the area under any bridges, the area behind the stables, the upper apartments, and any other dark places before you venture in yourself.

If a fire should break out, whether in your own house or the house of someone else, do not rush to the site of the fire in hopes of putting it out and saving objects of value. And of course you should not dash out of the building where you will be exposed.

When you return with your lord from some outing, you should dismount when you arrive at the gate of the lord's residence, report on your mission to the officer in charge there, and then hurry back to your own house. Even though your lord may urge you, if it is nighttime, you should not enter his residence and remain there with him for any length of time. And when you return to your own home, be even more careful than usual, because your enemies will invariably try to use your return as an opportunity to attack you. Also, if others should invite you to drink with them, be suspicious, reply in a vague manner, or on occasion simply decline the invitation outright.

Also, you should always look out for your younger brothers and make sure they have the money they need for the bath charge and proper sandals. You must keep in mind that if anything should happen to you, your brothers will not forgive your enemies and may be obliged to give up their lives on your behalf. Even if they have their faults, if they are only minor ones, just pretend you do not notice them.

With regard to your women relatives, whatever faults they may have, do not make any attempt to correct them

and certainly never quarrel with them. The Nirvana Sutra states, "Though the offense may be grave, punishment should never be inflicted on women." The meaning of this passage is that whatever the error may be, women should not be chastised for their faults. This is the proper approach for a person of wisdom and a disciple of the Buddha. This passage in the sutra occurs when King Ajātashatru, having not only killed his father, is about to do the same to his mother, and is reprimanded by his ministers Jīvaka and Chandraprabha.⁶

Remember that these brothers and sisters of yours are dear to your mother, and she will be concerned for them until the moment of her death. If you pardon their faults and treat them with kindness, you will be easing your mother's mind and exercising proper filial regard. Reflect deeply on this! If you treat others with kindness, how much more so should you treat your own siblings. For if you should encounter trouble, they would be the ones to share your fate with you. And if you should die before they do, they would be the ones left behind to mourn you. With that thought in mind, you should be particularly kind to them.

The reason I am saying these things is none other than this. In the game called *sugoroku*, you cannot knock over a pair of stones with only one from a pair of dice. A bird cannot fly on a single wing. Even brave warriors such as Masakado and Sadatō could not accomplish their aims all by themselves. If you think of your siblings as your own children or followers and depend upon them, and if the Lotus Sutra spreads widely and you remain alive, they will become devoted allies of the sutra.

Already in the imperial palace in Kyoto, the palace of the retired emperor, the residence of the shogun in

Kamakura, and that of the regent, fires have broken out twice in a single year, in the first month and again in the twelfth month. These are no ordinary occurrences. In these places, priests of the True Word doctrine, who slander the correct teaching, have been chosen to act as religious teachers, and these men are enemies of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the heavenly deities send down admonitions, and the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters warn them [to cease their slander]. With sincere repentance on their part, the situation can probably be remedied. It is because the heavenly deities are so gravely concerned about our country that they send down such awesome chastisements as this.

This country of ours has already been attacked by a foreign power, which seeks to overthrow our ruler and his people, as well as to destroy the hundred, thousand, ten thousand temples and shrines of the Buddhas and

gods. The eyes of the heavenly beings look down upon all this with lamentation. Moreover, those persons who slander the correct teaching, seeing how other persons bravely chant the name of the Lotus Sutra, menace their safety, and this too arouses the ire of the heavenly deities.

Ah, how fearful, how fearful indeed! This year you must observe the situation in a sagacious manner. If there is some place in the mountains or the sea-side, some obscure community where you can retire, then spend the year there. When the seer Asita⁷ observed the birth of the Buddha, he lamented that he himself was already so old, so old.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-fifth day of the first
month

To Nakatsukasa Saemon-no-jō



Background

This letter was written on the twenty-fifth day of the first month in 1278. Shijō Kingo, because of his faith in Nichiren Daishonin's teaching, had long suffered the disfavor of his lord, Ema. In this letter the Daishonin congratulates Kingo on the trust Ema has newly placed in him, and on what appears to be a positive turn of events. Citing a report from a priest who has observed Kingo taking a prominent position in his lord's entourage, the Daishonin nevertheless expresses concern. In the previous year, some of Kingo's colleagues had made false accusations against Kingo to Ema. Kingo's coming into Ema's favor again would surely arouse their jealousy, making

them capable of any kind of treachery. For this reason, the Daishonin points out that he must now be extremely careful, attentive, and considerate, citing the example of Confucius thinking nine times before speaking a word, among others. The following year, 1279, an attempt on Kingo's life was in fact made, against which he was able to protect himself. The Daishonin also cautions Shijō Kingo to be warm and charitable in his dealings with the women in his household, and to be supportive and considerate of his younger brothers. Without trust and unity among family members, it would be difficult to protect against the plotting of enemies.

Notes

1. Iidani was also called Iino, a village of Kai Province. *Letter to Akimoto* reads, "Let me describe this mountain. In Japan there are seven marches, and it is in the march called the Tōkaidō, which is made up of fifteen provinces. Within these is the province of Kai, where there are three village districts called Iino, Mimaki, and Hakiri, and it is in the one called Hakiri" (I, p. 1022).

2. Ikegami Uemon no Tayū Munenaka (d. 1293), the elder of the Ikegami brothers. *See also* p. 679.

3. Probably one of Nichiren Daishonin's disciples, but little is known about him except that he lived in Kamakura. Lord Ema no Shirō, who appears subsequently, is Hōjō Chikatoki (*see* Ema in Glossary).

4. Shijō Kingo. His full name and title were Shijō Nakatsukasa Saburō Saemon-no-jō Yorimoto. Kingo is equivalent to the title Saemon-no-jō.

5. This anecdote is mentioned in *Records*

of the Historian. Tan, the Duke of Chou, was a younger brother of Emperor Wu of the Chou dynasty. He implemented a number of reforms and established a foundation for the dynasty. He was so eager to find able persons and anxious not to overlook anyone that he would receive visitors even while washing his hair or during the course of a meal. The Daishonin cites this example to explain the importance of being considerate, cautious, and prudent. *See also* Glossary under Duke of Chou.

6. Chandraprabha was a minister of Bimbisāra, king of Magadha in ancient India. He also served as a minister to Ajātashatru, a son of Bimbisāra, after Ajātashatru's ascent to the throne. When Ajātashatru killed his father to usurp the throne and further attempted to kill his mother, Chandraprabha, along with Jīvaka, dissuaded him from committing the crime. For Jīvaka, *see* Glossary.

7. *See* Glossary under Asita (2).