

## On the Meritorious Act of Filial Devotion



I HAVE duly received, in the numbers noted, the articles that you sent as offerings. Now that we are into the fifth month, the farmers are at their busiest, and in addition there is the matter of the rebuilding of the shrine.<sup>1</sup> At such a busy season, how great was your kindness in thinking of those of us who are living in the mountains and sending these gifts!

The great monarch named King Ashoka ruled over nearly the whole continent of Jambudvīpa, where the sun shines down. In a past existence, when the king was a boy of five named Virtue Victorious, he presented a mud pie to Shakyamuni Buddha as an offering. Because of this, he was reborn as a great king. This little boy had no profound motive in what he did but acted in a spirit of play. But because the Buddha is so venerable a being, from this one trifling act the boy was able to receive such a splendid reward. The Lotus Sutra is superior to the Buddha in venerability, as the moon in its light surpasses the stars or the sun surpasses a lamp. Your motive in sending these gifts far surpasses that of the boy Virtue Victorious.

As a result, your late husband, the lay priest, has no doubt attained Buddhahood. And your only daughter will

enjoy a long and happy life, and will be known as a child worthy of her father. Though she is still young, she knows how to treat her mother with filial devotion, and will no doubt aid her father as well in his next existence.

In China there lived a woman named Hsi-shih who went to the mountains to pick young herbs and in this way provided for her aged mother. The gods, taking pity on her, moved the king, the ruler of the state of Yüeh,<sup>2</sup> to go out hunting, and when he saw her, he made her his consort. And because your daughter exercises filial devotion, the gods will surely protect her, and the Buddhas will look on her with favor. For among all the good roots or meritorious acts, the foremost is filial service to one's father and mother. And your daughter does all this out of faith in the Lotus Sutra. Such faith is like pure water poured into a golden vessel—not a drop of it will be wasted. How wonderful, how wonderful!

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The fourth day of the fifth month  
Reply to the lay nun of Kubo

## Background

The year of this letter is not indicated, but it is thought to have been written in 1279. This is because there is a similar reference to farm work and the construction of a shrine in another letter written in the same month of 1279. Entitled *The Unmatched Blessings of the Law* and addressed to the lay priest Nishiyama, it says, "Moreover, at the present time, because of farmwork and the building of the shrine, people have no spare time" (I, p. 974). The shrine mentioned in these letters is thought to

be Fuji Sengen Shrine.

The lay nun of Kubo was a widow who lived with her young daughter at Kubo in Fuji District of Suruga Province. Little is known about her, but one explanation identifies her with the wife of the lay priest Takahashi Rokurō Hyōe who died of an illness in 1277. From the contents of the several letters addressed to her, she appears to have been a believer of pure faith who frequently sent offerings to the Daishonin.

## Notes

1. "The shrine" refers to Fuji Sengen Shrine in Fuji District, Suruga Province, where the lay nun of Kubo lived.

2. A reference to King Kou-chien (r. 496–465 B.C.E.) of China.