

Reply to the Sages



YOUR letter, written in the hour of the cock [5:00–7:00 P.M.] on the fifteenth day of this month, reached me in the hour of the cock on the seventeenth day of the same month. I learned that when the accused were subjected to the wrath of the officials, they chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.¹ This was no ordinary matter! I am sure that the ten demon daughters must have taken possession of Hei no Saemon and induced him to test the faith of these votaries of the Lotus Sutra. It was similar to the way in which the boy Snow Mountains and King Shibi were tested. And even if an evil demon had taken possession of Hei no Saemon, Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the other Buddhas of the ten directions, Brahmā and Shakra have vowed to guard and protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the fifth five-hundred-year period.

The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom speaks of that which “can change poison into medicine.” And T’ien-t’ai says that “the poison is changed into medicine.”² If the word *myō*, or wonderful, is not completely powerless, I know it will without fail deal out reward and punishment where they belong.

The priest Hōki-bō and the others

should ponder deeply on the meaning of all this and initiate legal action on this matter. Ask Hei no Saemon if he has forgotten what I told him when, in the Bun’ei era, I appeared before him to answer charges against me. The calamities I predicted at that time have yet to come to an end. Tell him at the last that the ten demon daughters will call down further punishment on him.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The hour of the dog [7:00–9:00 P.M.], the seventeenth day of the tenth month

Reply to the sages

In saying these things, I am sure everyone will understand that there is no error on our part. That is evident from the fact that the priest Daishin-bō³ fell from his horse. And the fact that he died should awaken fear in others, for it was part of Heaven’s plan. But the rest of you should not be afraid. So long as you remain firm in heart, I am sure that the whole truth of the matter will become clear in the end. Next time I will send you word by way of the priest Awaji-bō.⁴

Background

Nichiren Daishonin acknowledges receiving an urgent letter at Minobu from Nikkō, also known as Hōki-bō, two days after it was sent from Kamakura. It was the evening of the seventeenth day of the tenth month in 1279, and immediately he began to write this reply. Nikkō had reported an incident of vital importance to which the Daishonin refers, saying, “When the accused were subjected to the wrath of the officials, they chanted Nam-myohorenge-kyo, Nam-myohorenge-kyo.” According to one account, this indicates the execution of three of twenty believers from the Atsuhara area who had been arrested on false charges. They had been confined at the Kamakura residence of Hei no Saemon, deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, who had subjected them to threats and torture, pressing them to recant their faith in the Lotus Sutra. Concerning this, the Daishonin writes, “The ten demon daughters must have taken possession of Hei no Saemon and induced him to test the faith of these votaries of the Lotus Sutra.”

He cites the vital principle of changing poison into medicine through the

power of faith in the wonderful Law, in which “medicine” indicates the attainment of Buddhahood.

The Daishonin concludes by instructing Nikkō to “tell him [Hei no Saemon] at the last that the ten demon daughters will call down further punishment on him.” In fact, in 1293, on the charge of conspiring against the regent, Hei no Saemon and his warriors were attacked by the forces of the regent, Hōjō Sadatoki, and he and his second son committed suicide. His eldest son was exiled to Sado Island.

In the postscript, the Daishonin cites the example of the priest Daishin-bō, who during the attack on the Atsuhara believers fell from his horse and died. This, the Daishonin says, will awaken fear in the others involved in the Atsuhara Persecution. He urges his disciples to “remain firm in heart” and assures them that “the whole truth of the matter will become clear in the end.”

Nisshū and Nichiben, whom the Daishonin addresses along with Nikkō as “sages,” were priests who had been converted by Nikkō and who assisted him throughout the Atsuhara Persecution.

Notes

1. This refers to the torture of twenty farmers from the Atsuhara area in an attempt to force them to discard their faith in the Lotus Sutra. Eventually, on the fifteenth, it is thought, three of them were beheaded. The confinement, torture, and execution of the farmers were all carried out under orders from Hei no Saemon.

2. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra.*

3. Daishin-bō was a priest who lived in the Fuji area. He was in the group that rode to arrest twenty of the farmer-believers in Atsuhara. The farmers resisted, and in the melee he was thrown from his horse and died.

4. Awaji-bō Nichiken. Little is known about him except that he was a disciple of Nichiji, one of the six senior priests designated by Nichiren Daishonin.