

## The Tree of Mutual Love



I HAVE received the food you sent me for the priests' meals. Is it already the anniversary of the passing of your husband, the lay priest? I was absorbed in one thing or another and had forgotten. But you would certainly never forget.

A man named Su Wu traveled to the land of the northern barbarians as an emissary on behalf of the Han emperor, and as a result his wife was separated from her husband for nineteen years. On his side, her husband could not stop thinking of her. And so strong was her love for him that each autumn, she would lay cloth for him upon a fulling block and beat it to spread the fibers. And it is said that her longing for him finally transcended the miles and her husband actually heard the sound.

There was a man of Ch'en<sup>1</sup> who, when he and his wife parted, broke a mirror in two so that each had a piece to keep. When one party forgot the other, the pieces flew off like birds.

A woman in Sung,<sup>2</sup> longing for her husband, went to his grave, and was reborn there as a tree. This is what is now known as the tree of mutual love.

There is a deity called the Shika deity,<sup>3</sup> who dwells along the way people travel when they journey to China. It is said that a woman, pining for her

husband who had crossed over to China, became the shrine deity, and that the shape of the island where this deity dwells resembles that of a woman. That woman was Princess Sayo of Matura.<sup>4</sup>

From the distant past to our present day, what parting is there, whether parent from child, or lord from retainer, that has ever been painless? But no parting is as painful as that that takes place between man and woman.

You have been born as a woman in countless existences since the far distant past, but it is this husband who was your last good friend in the saha world.

Scattered blossoms  
and fallen fruit  
bloom and form again.  
Why must the deceased one  
never return?

Last year you grieved  
this year is also hard  
day after day, month after month.  
For your heart  
is ever heavy.

I have chanted the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra on his behalf.

Nichiren

The second day of the eleventh  
month

Reply to the lay nun Myōshin

## Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the second day of the eleventh month in 1279 (another view suggests 1276) at Minobu to the lay nun Myōshin. He expresses his gratitude for the food for priests' meals she has sent to mark the anniversary of her husband's passing. Sympathizing with her feelings of loss, the Daishonin recounts

several popular tales from ancient times of exemplary love between husband and wife. He then refers to her deceased husband as her last good influence in the saḥā world because it was he who led her to her faith in the Lotus Sutra. He closes with two short poems he has written acknowledging her grief.

## Notes

1. One account regards "a man of Ch'en" as Ch'u Te-yen, an official of the Ch'en dynasty (557–589) of China.

2. One account regards "a woman in Sung" as the wife of Han P'ing, an official of Sung, a state in China that was destroyed in 286 B.C.E.

3. Shika refers to Shikanoshima, an island at the mouth of Hakata Bay in southern Japan, and to Shikanoumi Shrine on that island.

4. A woman who is said to have lived at Matsura in Hizen Province in Japan in the sixth century.