

## Reply to the Lay Nun Myōshin



I APPRECIATE your offerings of various items. How can I thank you enough for sending me such a variety of things, especially now, at the busiest time of year for farmers, when no one has a spare moment? I think this is wholly because it is hard for you to bear being separated from your late husband, the lay priest, and you are eager to do something for the sake of his next existence. How delighted he must be with your warm concern for his future existence. In that dew-dampened grassy place bereft of visitors, he is probably longing to ask what has become of the small children he left behind in the sahā world.

Su Wu, who was captive for nineteen years in the land of the northern barbarians, so longed for his wife and children that he sent them a letter attached to the leg of a wild goose. Abe no Nakamaro,<sup>1</sup> when he was in China and unable to return to Japan, gazed longingly at the moon that rose in the east and composed a poem comparing it to the moon over Kasugano. Your husband may be feeling how little different from these are his own circumstances.

But because you are always chanting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, the character *myō* will change into an emissary to your husband, or become

Bodhisattva Manjushrī, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, Bodhisattva Superior Practices, or Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. It will probably report all the affairs of the sahā world to the other world, just as the mirror of [the wife of] the man of Ch'en<sup>2</sup> kept up a continual report by flying off like a bird, or as the sound of Su Wu's wife beating cloth reached his ears. Moreover, the character *myō*, like flowers that become fruit and the half moon that waxes full, is one that changes into a Buddha.

Thus it says in the sutra, "If one can uphold this sutra, one will be upholding the Buddha's body."<sup>3</sup> The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai says, "[The Lotus Sutra . . .] is in each and every one of its characters the true Buddha."<sup>4</sup> The character *myō* is the Thus Come One Shakyamuni perfectly endowed with the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics, but because our vision is poor we see only a character. For example, it is similar to an elderly person whose eyesight is dim and therefore fails to see that the lotus flowers in the pond have produced seeds. And at night, because of the darkness, one fails to see the forms of things. Nonetheless, this character *myō* is itself a Buddha.

Furthermore, this character *myō* is the moon, it is the sun, it is the stars, it

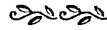
is a mirror, it is garments, it is food, it is flowers, it is the great earth, it is the great sea. All benefits clustered together make up the character *myō*. Also, it is the wish-granting jewel. You should understand things in this way.

I will write in detail another time.

Nichiren

The fourth day of the fifth month

Please have Hōki-bō explain this to you.



## Background

This is a letter of thanks written by Nichiren Daishonin on the fourth day of the fifth month in 1280. The lay nun Myōshin had sent the Daishonin offerings from her home in Suruga Province for the benefit of her deceased husband. The Daishonin assures her that the word *myō* of the daimoku she chants

will act as an emissary and carry news about her and her children to her late husband. Moreover, he explains, the character *myō* is not only the cluster of all benefits but also the wish-granting jewel. He encourages her to believe in the immeasurable benefits of the daimoku.

## Notes

1. Abe no Nakamaro went to T'ang China as a student envoy in 717 and later served Emperor Hsüan-tsung as an official in the Chinese government. In 733 he attempted to return to Japan, but the T'ang authorities would not permit it. When he finally obtained permission to return, his ship was wrecked on the way, and he was forced to go back to China, where he later died. "Kasugano," which appears subsequently, is the name of an area west of a hill called Kasugayama in Nara. Nara was the

capital of Japan during most of Nakamaro's life.

2. One account describes "the man of Ch'en" as Ch'u Te-yen, an official of the Ch'en dynasty (557-589) in China. It is said that when he and his wife parted, he broke a mirror in two, and each kept a piece. Both pieces flew off like birds, the story goes, to work as a means of mutual communication.

3. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.

4. Source unknown.