

## Protecting the Atsuhara Believers



I WAS delighted to see you this past fifteenth day of the sixth month.

I am extremely grateful that you have provided for the priest of the shrine<sup>1</sup> and his family until now. Though in their hearts our enemies detest the Lotus Sutra, for appearance's sake they make a pretext of something else to the authorities, and in this way express their hatred for us. Thus they made claims against the believers in Atsuhara and have been obstructing us wherever they can.

Nevertheless, when the enemies of the sutra make claims to the authorities and cause them to obstruct us, should you simply refuse to go along, you would then be one who is ignorant in the ways of the world. If it seems to be unwise to keep the shrine priest at your residence, I wish you would tell him to come here for a short while. Even if his wife and child remain there, it is most unlikely that anyone will search for them. I feel that it is better to have them stay there until things quiet down.

People in society, whether they be the rulers or the general public, find much to grieve about. Those with no place in society peer at people of rank as if they were pheasants peering at a hawk or hungry spirits admiring the god Vaishravana. But the hawk is

snatched up by the eagle, and Vaishravana is harassed by asuras.

Likewise now when prosperous people in Japan hear about the Mongols it is as if sheep were hearing a tiger's roar. And for those who are dispatched to Tsukushi, separated from their beloved wives and unable to see their children, it may seem to them as if their skin were being peeled away or their flesh were being pierced. How much more so, then, if that foreign land attacks, will people feel as if they were a frog caught up in the mouth of a snake, or a carp laid out on the cutting board before a master carver. But let us set aside matters of this lifetime. If they lose their lives, they will certainly fall into the 136 hells and remain there for countless kalpas.

Because we have put our trust in the Lotus Sutra, it will be as if fish living in a shallow pool were to rejoice when the heavens cloud over and rain falls. Though we may suffer for a while, ultimately delight awaits us. It is like the case of a crown prince, the only son of the king. Consider this: How can he possibly fail to ascend the throne?

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The second day of the seventh

month in the third year of Kōan  
[1280]  
Reply to Ueno

You must not tell others about this,  
and speak in secret to the shrine  
priest.



## Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the second day of the seventh month in 1280 at Minobu to Nanjō Tokimitsu in Suruga Province. The Daishonin expresses his delight at having seen Tokimitsu and his younger brother Shichirō Gorō, who had visited Minobu a few weeks earlier. He also expresses his thanks that Tokimitsu is looking after a fellow believer, who is the priest of a shrine in Atsuhara, and his wife and child. They were dwelling temporarily with Tokimitsu because of

continued harassment associated with the Atsuhara Persecution, which had culminated in the death of three believers the year before (or, according to another account, three months before). The Daishonin gives specific instructions regarding the safety of the priest and his family, and also advises Tokimitsu in case of further persecution directed against his own family. While those who believe in the Lotus Sutra may suffer for a time, he tells Tokimitsu, in the end delight awaits them.

## Note

1. “The priest of the shrine” refers to the priest of Shinfuchi Shrine in Atsuhara Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province. Because he put faith in the Lotus Sutra, he was harassed by Gyōchi, the deputy chief

priest of Ryūsen-ji temple in Atsuhara Village, and by the local officials. When the harassment grew severe he was sheltered by Nanjō Tokimitsu in his home.