

Regarding Great Bodhisattva Hachiman



I HAVE received the one thousand coins that you sent and reported that fact before the Lotus Sutra.

Earlier I heard that the mausoleum of the late General of the Right [Yoritomo] and the tomb of the late Acting Administrator [Yoshitoki] had been destroyed by a fire, which is most regrettable,¹ and now you write that the Wakamiya shrine of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman² has burned. This must have caused much lamentation among the populace.

Many people in the world today claim that Great Bodhisattva Hachiman is a manifestation of Amida Buddha. They are perhaps simply repeating what has been said by persons of middle antiquity. But in the main Hachiman Shrine in Ōsumi there is a stone with an inscription.³ One half of the stone bears the two characters for the name Hachiman. The other half says: "Long ago on Eagle Peak he preached the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law. Now he has manifested himself as the Great Bodhisattva and resides in the main shrine." He appeared in India as Shakyamuni and preached the Lotus Sutra, and now has manifested himself in this country of Japan as Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, taking a vow that centers about the word "honest."⁴ Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, was born in the ninth period of decrease of

the kalpa of continuance, when human beings had a life span of a hundred years, in central India on the eighth day of the fourth month, the day with the cyclical sign *kinoe-tora*. Eighty years later, he passed away, on the fifteenth day of the second month, the day with the cyclical sign *mizunoe-saru*. Great Bodhisattva Hachiman was born in Japan as the sixteenth sovereign, Emperor Ōjin, on the eighth day of the fourth month, the day with the cyclical sign *kinoe-tora*. He passed away at the age of eighty, on the fifteenth day of the second month, the day with the cyclical sign *mizunoe-saru*. Who, then, could question that he was in fact a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha?

But now the 4,589,659 people of this country of Japan have been deceived by the great heavenly devil in the person of men such as Shan-tao, Eshin, Yōkan, and Hōnen, who have led them to cast aside Shakyamuni and take Amida Buddha as their object of devotion. And in their madness, they have gone so far as to seize the fifteenth day of the second month [the day when Shakyamuni passed away] and declare it to be the day of Amida Buddha's passing; and the eighth day of the fourth month [when Shakyamuni was born] they claim to be the birthday of Medicine Master Buddha. Their hatred of Shakyamuni, who is the father of us all,

is so intense that they insist that Great Bodhisattva Hachiman is a manifestation of Amida Buddha. In doing so, they mean to pay honor to Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, but in fact they become enemies of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman.

If I understood nothing of all this, that would be the end of the matter. But in fact for the past twenty-eight years I have endeavored to dispel these mistaken beliefs by quoting the passage [from the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni Buddha states]: “But now this threefold world [is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children].”⁵ If people failed to believe me, they could at least have left it at that. But instead they shot arrows at me, slashed me, attempted to kill me, exiled me, or drove me away. For that reason Great Bodhisattva Hachiman has set fire to his dwelling and ascended to the heavens.

In the work I wrote, entitled *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, I indicated what I believed would be the outcome of this matter. And alas, when the armies of a foreign country come to attack Japan, like a hawk seizing a pheasant or a cat sinking its teeth into a rat, then the nuns and wives [who helped to foment this situation] will quake with fright. Those who have for the past twenty-eight years persecuted me and my fol-

lowers, as a result of their actions, will be slain with arrows or cut in two with swords, taken prisoner alive or driven away. Just as Munemori⁶ was bound with ropes and pilloried, so then, alas, many thousands or ten thousands of persons will be bound with ropes and made to suffer. But every living being in this country of Japan is guilty of the five cardinal sins. And therefore, when they are made to suffer in this manner, the heavenly deities will rejoice, and the Buddhas will find no means to pardon them.

How pitiful, how pitiful will be their fate! And therefore, before they suffer such shame, just as King Ajātashatru censured Devadatta for his crimes, so should they censure the True Word teachers, the Nembutsu priests, and the leaders of the Zen school, so that by doing so, their own guilt will be somewhat lessened.

How pitiful, how lamentable may be the outcome! These persons who deceive the nation and lead it astray appear to be wise and to speak the truth, and hence they are heeded, but how pitiful could be the consequences!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the twelfth month

Reply to Chimyō-bō



Background

Nichiren Daishonin sent this letter on the eighteenth day of the twelfth month in 1280 to a believer named Chimyō-bō, who presumably lived in Kamakura but about whom little is known. It is a reply to Chimyō-bō's offering of a thousand coins and to an accompanying report from him about a

fire at Hachiman Shrine at Tsurugaoka in Kamakura. On the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month, 1280, a major fire had broken out in Kamakura. The fire, beginning in the center of the city and spreading outward, burned the tomb of Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the Kamakura shogunate,

and the gravesite of Hōjō Yoshitoki, the shogunate's second regent. Then, on the fourteenth day of the eleventh month, another fire burned several structures within the precincts of Hachiman Shrine at Tsurugaoka.

At the time, the entire nation was in terror because of an imminent second attack by the Mongol Empire. As the Daishonin observes, to have the shrine of such a central deity damaged by fire must have heightened people's anxiety.

Stating that he has reported about Chimyō-bō's offering to the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin responds to the information Chimyō-bō has conveyed concerning the fire in Kamakura that damaged Hachiman Shrine. He takes the opportunity to explain that Hachiman, a Japanese tutelary god viewed by the warriors as their guardian deity, was once regarded as a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha. In recent times,

however, the Japanese people have come to view Hachiman as a manifestation of the Buddha Amida. This, he concludes, indicates that the people, misled by the teachers of the Nembutsu school, disregard Shakyamuni Buddha.

In *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land*, the Daishonin, as a reason for his prediction of foreign invasion, cites the principle that the deities will abandon a nation that is hostile to the correct teaching. In accord with this principle, he states that he, the votary of the Lotus Sutra, is harassed and attacked, and "for that reason Great Bodhisattva Hachiman has set fire to his dwelling and ascended to the heavens." He concludes by saying, "How pitiful could be the consequences" of heeding the priests who deceive and mislead others concerning Buddhism.

Notes

1. The fire destroyed the central area of Kamakura on the twenty-eighth day of the tenth month, 1280.

2. Great Bodhisattva Hachiman refers to the deity originally worshiped at Hachiman Shrine in Usa, Kyushu. The Minamoto family adopted Hachiman as their patron deity. In 1191, Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the Kamakura shogunate, established Hachiman Shrine at Tsurugaoka in Kamakura. "The Wakamiya shrine" refers to this shrine at Tsurugaoka.

3. This stone is said to have stood in the precincts of Hachiman Shrine in Ōsumi Province, an area in what is now Kagoshima in the southern part of Kyushu. The stone itself no longer exists, but the inscrip-

tion is quoted in a work by the Zen priest Nampo Genshō (1555–1620).

4. The Daishonin refers to the vow of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, which he describes in the words "When he preached the Lotus Sutra [as Shakyamuni Buddha] in India, he said, 'Honestly discarding expedient means,' and in Japan he vowed that he would make his residence on the heads of honest persons." See also I, pp. 1081–82.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

6. Taira no Munemori (1147–1185), a leader of the Taira clan who held a high position at court. When the Taira fought with the Minamoto clan at Dannoura, he was captured and eventually beheaded at Shinohara in Ōmi Province.