I HAVE received the cloth for a lined robe and cloth for an unlined robe. Food sustains life and clothing covers our bodies. Those who bestow food on sentient beings invite the reward of long life, while those who steal food from people incur the retribution of a shortened life. Those who refuse to give clothing to people will experience the retribution of nakedness in existence after existence. Among those in the six paths, living beings from the world of human beings on down are all born naked, while beings of the heavenly realm are born wearing garments that freely change shape. Among those in the six paths, such beings as deer not only are born without garments, but because they once stole people’s clothing, they now receive the retribution of having their own skins peeled off and thus make up for that offense.

And even in the realm of human beings, the nun Bright White was born dressed in a robe. In Buddhism too no practice of teachings may be carried out without one’s robes. That is the reason Shakyamuni received a robe from his foster mother, the nun Mahā-prajāpatī, and attained enlightenment. He also allowed all the monks to take up the three robes.

It is said that if a monk of inferior capacity is unable to acquire a supply of food and robes he will never reach the state of arhat. In particular, the Lotus Sutra tells of the robe of gentleness and patience and regards this robe as the basis of practice. Also, when it says that the Buddha covers the votary of the Lotus Sutra with the robe, this attests further to its significance.

Because I am a priest of no precepts who holds perverse views, the heavenly gods hate me and I am poor in both food and clothing. Nevertheless, I recite the Lotus Sutra and from time to time preach it. It is exactly as if a huge snake were clasping a jewel in its mouth or sandalwood trees were growing amid the eranda groves. I throw away the eranda and offer the sandalwood, or cover the body of the snake and bestow the jewel.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai said, “The other sutras predict Buddhahood only for men, but not for women.” If it were not for the Lotus Sutra, women could never attain Buddhahood. The Thus Come One Endowed with a Thousand Ten Thousand Glowing Marks refers to the nun Yashodharā.

Considering these things, one realizes that certainly it is the Lotus Sutra that makes it possible for women to attain Buddhahood. The statement that he “now must reveal the truth” is the golden words of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. The
statement that “all that you have expounded is the truth” is the testimony of Many Treasures Buddha. “Their tongues reach to the Brahma heaven” is the solemn pledge of all the various Buddhas.

Could the sun and moon ever fall to the earth? Could Mount Sumeru ever crumble? Could the tide ever cease its ebb and flow? Could the earth ever overturn?

The benefits arising from the offering of these robes are described in the Lotus Sutra. Simply consider this with your faith, for it is difficult to express in words.

**Background**

Nichiren Daishonin is thought either to have written this letter at Minobu in 1280, or, as another view suggests, when he was in exile on Sado Island in 1273. The recipient is believed to have been a woman, judging from the contents of the letter. Her name is unknown. Expressing his thanks, the Daishonin says that the robe is inseparable from Buddhist practice and that in particular the robe of gentleness and patience as described in the Lotus Sutra is seen as the very basis of practice. And the Daishonin assures her that the Lotus Sutra alone offers the promise of Buddhahood to women, and that since this is attested to by all the Buddhas, surely she too will enjoy this benefit.

**Notes**

1. The daughter of a wealthy man in Kapilavastu, she was a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha.

2. The robe of gentleness and patience is described in the “Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This chapter says that those who wish to expound the Lotus Sutra after the Thus Come One’s extinction should “enter the Thus Come One’s room, put on the Thus Come One’s robe, sit in the Thus Come One’s seat….” The “Thus Come One’s robe,” says the chapter, “is the mind that is gentle and forbearing.” A gentle and forbearing mind enables one to uphold the Law while bearing insult with grace and equanimity. The sutra also says, “Gentleness and patience are the robe.”


4. The “Encouraging Devotion” chapter of the Lotus Sutra predicts that Yasodharā will become a Buddha named Endowed with a Thousand Ten Thousand Glowing Marks.

5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

6. Ibid., chap. 11.

7. Ibid., chap. 21. A long tongue attests to the veracity of a statement or teaching.