

On the Difficulty of Believing in the Lotus Sutra



I HAVE received the sack of yams that you sent. Also, the fine horse and the groom attending him are at the residence of the shrine priest.¹

With regard to your deceased younger brother Gorō,² I am sure your grief is as yet unabated, though it must seem a long time ago that I saw him last.

It would appear that opposition to the Lotus Sutra has by no means come to an end, and in the future as well, there is no telling what may occur. Under these circumstances it is incredible that you have endured until now. The Buddha tells us that though there may be those who enter fire without becoming burned or enter a great body of water without getting wet; though huge mountains may fly through the air or the great ocean rise up to the heavens, when once we enter the evil world of the latter age, it will be difficult to believe in the Lotus Sutra for even the space of a moment.³

Emperor Hui-tsung was the ruler of the land of China, but he was carried off as a prisoner to the kingdom of

the Mongols.⁴ The Retired Emperor of Oki was the sovereign of Japan, but he was attacked by Yoshitoki,⁵ the acting administrator of the western sector of Kyoto, the capital, and ended his life as an island exile. If they had undergone these trials for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, they would surely have attained Buddhahood in their present existences. Though many endanger themselves and throw away their lives for petty reasons, no one would dare to suffer an unjust fate in the service of the Lotus Sutra. But when I think of what you yourself have suffered [because of the sutra], I find it most worthy of admiration, most worthy of admiration indeed!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the third
month in the fourth year of Kōan
[1281]

Reply to Ueno



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Nanjō Tokimitsu, also known as Ueno, at Minobu on the eighteenth day of

the third month in 1281. After acknowledging Tokimitsu's offering of yams, the Daishonin refers to a horse

being kept at the residence of the priest of a local shrine and mentions Tokimitsu's younger brother, Shichirō Gorō, who died exactly a half year earlier.

Next, the Daishonin praises Tokimitsu's perseverance in his practice of the Lotus Sutra in the face of persistent opposition. He cites references to the difficulty of practicing the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, paraphrasing the sutra text. Then he men-

tions two well-known emperors, one of China and one of Japan, both of whom encountered great hardships and defeat. Their difficulties, however, did not lead them to attain Buddhahood because their hardships were not due to faith in the Lotus Sutra. Tokimitsu's hardships, on the other hand, have occurred because of the Lotus Sutra, and will therefore be a cause for his attainment of Buddhahood.

Notes

1. In *Protecting the Atsuhara Believers*, Nichiren Daishonin says, "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 and his family until now" (p. 882). According to that letter, the shrine priest could be identified with the priest of Shinfuchi Shrine in Atsuhara, a branch of Sengen Shrine, who took faith in the Lotus Sutra.

2. Nanjō Shichirō Gorō, the youngest of Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō's five sons and four daughters. In the sixth month of 1280, he and his elder brother Tokimitsu visited the Daishonin at Minobu. But he died about three months later, on the fifth day of the ninth month, at the age of sixteen.

3. This statement is partly based on a passage in chapter eleven of the Lotus Sutra

that describes the six difficult and nine easy acts.

4. In the light of Chinese history, "the kingdom of the Mongols" here must refer to a state founded by the Jurchen tribes of Manchuria. In 1125, Hui-tsung abdicated in favor of his son, Ch'in-tsung, and in 1127 the Jurchen forces invaded north China and overthrew the Northern Sung dynasty. Both Hui-tsung and his son were captured and lived in exile in Manchuria until their death.

5. Yoshitoki refers to Hōjō Yoshitoki, the second regent of the Kamakura government. He defeated the imperial forces led by the Retired Emperor of Oki, or the ex-emperor Gotoba, during the Jōkyū Disturbance of 1221. Gotoba was exiled to the island of Oki. *See also* Retired Emperor of Oki in Glossary.