

The Reconstruction of Hachiman Shrine



I HAVE been preaching this doctrine now for twenty-nine years. My body is worn out and my spirit suffers from the daily debates, monthly persecutions, and two exiles. That is why for the last seven or eight years illnesses of aging have assailed me yearly, though none has led to a crisis. This year, however, from the first month on my body has weakened considerably, and I have the feeling that my life is drawing to a close. Besides, I am already sixty years old. Even if there were a slight chance I might survive this year, how could I possibly live another year or two?

“Good advice grates on the ear, and good medicine tastes bitter” are the words of wise men of times past. It is said that a person who is wasting away hates life, and that flatterers never accept remonstrance.

Recently, I have not replied to anyone, whether high or low. The reason is that I feel listless and my hand is heavy. But since this is a serious matter, I think I will bear with my pains and reply. Though you may not care for this letter, I hope you will take it to heart. I beg that you do not respond as Emperor Murakami did when he threw away the document written by Imperial Prince Kaneakira.¹

Concerning the reconstruction of Hachiman Shrine, I was worried that

someone would surely slander you to the ruler. For two generations your family, both your father and you yourselves, has been in the service of the ruler, and thus ultimately you are in a position of obligation. Even if something goes against your wishes, does that mean you should take a less than respectful attitude toward him? Were you to have acted as a wise man would, had you been ordered by your lord to engage in the reconstruction work at Hachiman Shrine, no matter the circumstances, I think you would have had to excuse yourselves. If slanderous officials fortunately say this and that and attempt to exclude you, you should be delighted. For you to wish instead to engage in the reconstruction work is a mistake.

But let us set this aside. One who has upheld the five precepts in one's previous lifetime is born as a human being in this one. Thus, no matter how worthless one may appear to be, if the authorities, such as the ruler of the land, accuse one of an offense without cause, the protective deities will be angry. How much truer will this be if one's life is threatened. The deities will simply abandon such persons.

Speaking more specifically, there are 4,589,659 deities protecting the 4,589,659 men and women in Japan. Nonetheless, there seems to be no way to

escape the great disaster of invasion from another country. The reason is that all 4,589,659 persons have not only been abandoned by the deities, but also forsaken by the gods of the six heavens of the world of desire and the four meditation heavens, Brahmā, Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, and the four heavenly kings.

Despite this, the ruler of Japan and others believe that nothing untoward will happen since they are praying to Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. But because his personal power was unequal to the task, did not Hachiman burn down his own sacred shrine and hide himself? Still the authorities fail to reflect on their grave offenses, and think that by rebuilding the sacred shrine, they will gain the protection they seek.

Now all 4,589,659 people in Japan have been abandoned by Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, all the emanation Buddhas of the ten directions, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and the bodhisattvas of the saḥā world and other worlds. All the Brahmās, Shakras, gods of the sun and moon, and four heavenly kings of all the worlds of the ten directions have abandoned them. How, then, is it conceivable that the powers of the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, trifling minor gods of Japan, will be up to the task?

Let us say that at such a time as this you were to build Hachiman Shrine and this country were to suffer defeat at the hands of a foreign land. I have known for some time now that if this were to happen, just as dust builds up in depressions and water accumulates in low spots, the people of Japan, from the ruler on down to the ordinary populace, would criticize you.

They would cry out, "The true identity of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman is Amida Buddha.² Uemon no Tayū is the follower of one who claims that Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering. He also says, 'Burn

or throw in the water images of Amida Buddha. Burn down his halls of worship. Cut off the heads of Nembutsu priests.' It is because the follower and supporter of such a man built Hachiman Shrine that Great Bodhisattva Hachiman has never used it. That is the reason this nation has been attacked."

How will you respond when they carry on in this way? But I think, because the heavens were already aware of this matter, that that is why you were removed from the post of superintendent of the building project. And I wonder whether your removal from involvement in the reconstruction of the temple attached to Hachiman Shrine is not also the design of the heavens. The reason is that on the twelfth day of the fourth month in the eleventh year of Bun'ei [1274], a great wind blew, a sign that there would be an attack from another land that very year. The wind is an emissary of heaven and earth. This means that when the country is ill governed, the wind blows as a gale.

Again, this year, on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, this gale raged. Moreover, I heard that the framework for Hachiman Shrine was set up on the twenty-sixth day of the fourth month. So there can be no doubt that the gale blew within three days of the event. If you brothers, who people say are the emissaries of the Mongols, had built Hachiman Shrine and this gale blew, people would certainly have laughed and said things.

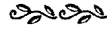
I strongly urge you to adopt a genial attitude and avoid any appearance of ill will or resentment. Dress inconspicuously and leave your retinue behind. Don't ride fine horses either. Be sure to carry your saw and hammer in your hands or hook them at your waist, and always wear a smile. Should you fail to follow through with even one of these points, you may not only meet with

ruin in this existence, but fall into the evil paths in your next one. Never, ever, hold a grudge against the Lotus Sutra.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-sixth day of the fifth month

To Tayū no Sakan
Hyōe no Sakan



Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the twenty-sixth day of the fifth month in 1281 at Minobu. It was addressed to the Ikegami brothers, Tayū no Sakan and Hyōe no Sakan, or Munenaka and Munenaga, who were living in Musashi Province at the time. The brothers had written the Daishonin to express their disappointment that they had not been given an expected appointment to a post to rebuild Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura. The shrine had suffered extensive damage in two fires the previous year, and the brothers, who following in their father's footsteps were engaged in government-sponsored building projects, would normally have been put in charge of this reconstruction work.

The Daishonin first writes that he has been spreading his teaching for twenty-nine years, and in that time he has encountered numerous persecutions, including two exiles. As a result, he has been suffering from exhaustion of both body and spirit, and illnesses of aging, for the past seven or eight years. Being now sixty years old, he says, he can have only one or two years at the most to live. Thus for some time he has not been replying to letters from anyone, whatever their station in society. But as this is clearly a matter of great importance to the brothers, he

says that he will bear up and write.

Pointing out that because the brothers and their father have been able to serve in the government establishment for two generations, he says that they are actually indebted to the ruler. Thus a single incident where developments were contrary to their wishes hardly justifies anger or resentment. Moreover, if they had indeed been ordered to join the project, had they been wise, they would have refused. The Daishonin explains that the very fact of the fire itself shows that all the protective deities have abandoned the nation. Thus, no amount of rebuilding will protect the nation from attack by other lands.

Furthermore, the Daishonin suggests, if Japan is attacked and the brothers had overseen the rebuilding of Hachiman Shrine, people would blame them and their devotion to the Daishonin for the lack of Great Bodhisattva Hachiman's protection. The heavens surely understood this and arranged matters so that the brothers would not be called on to assist in the project. In closing, he directs them to show no ill feeling whatsoever, but to keep a smiling countenance, remain inconspicuous, and apply themselves to their work. Finally, he urges them never to hold a grudge against the Lotus Sutra.

Notes

1. Murakami (926–967) was the sixty-second emperor, and Imperial Prince Kaneakira (914–987) was his elder brother. Kaneakira presented to Emperor Murakami a work he had written in which he deplored the arbitrary actions of the authorities as well as his own adverse circumstances.

2. In some of his writings Nichiren Daishonin refers to the people's belief that the true identity of Hachiman is Amida Buddha. He says, "And though they appear to pay reverence to Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, they claim that his true identity is Amida Buddha" (I, p. 1082). And

also, "Many people in the world today claim that Great Bodhisattva Hachiman is a manifestation of Amida Buddha" (p. 916). Because indigenous Japanese deities such as Hachiman were regarded as local manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, Hachiman was incorporated into Buddhism as Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), with the increasing popularity of Pure Land beliefs, most people came to regard Great Bodhisattva Hachiman as a manifestation of Amida Buddha. The Daishonin asserted that Great Bodhisattva Hachiman is a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings.