THE priests' quarters, which measure twenty meters square and have an additional set of eaves, have been completed. On the twenty-fourth day, we conducted the annual lecture on the doctrines of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai and performed the prolonging life ceremony¹ to our fullest satisfaction. That day, between the hours of the dog and the boar [around 9:00 P.M.], thirty some persons gathered before the object of devotion and engaged in copying the Lotus Sutra within a day. Also, before that, between the hours of the monkey and the cock [around 5:00 P.M.], the completion ceremony was brought to a close without the slightest problem.

For twenty-four days, while we prepared to build the priests' quarters by clearing the land and leveling the ground on the mountain, it rained not once, not even for an instant. On the first day of the eleventh month, a small lodging hall for the priests was built and also a shelter for the horses. On the eighth day, the pillars for the main priests' quarters were set up, and on the ninth and tenth the thatching of the roof was finished. Moreover, during this time, heavy rain fell on the seventh, and the eighth, ninth, and tenth were cloudy, and also as warm as a day in late spring.

From the eleventh to the fourteenth, heavy rain fell and so much snow that it remains even in the villages. In the mountains ten to twenty feet of snow has frozen as hard as metal. On the twenty-third and twenty-fourth the skies cleared and temperatures warmed. Many people came, and it was like the time between the hours of the monkey and the cock in the capital of Kyoto and the city of Kamakura. I believe that there are specific reasons for this.

Though your sons, including Jirō, were ordered by you, their father, to participate, they also sincerely wanted to be here. Thus they took the initiative in leveling the land and raising the pillars. Likewise, not one of the other people who engaged in the construction work—Tō Hyōe, the lay priest Uma, Saburō Hyōe-no-jō,² and their retainers—lagged in their efforts. People actually said that even if one paid one thousand coins in Kamakura, such a building would be impossible to construct. Still, I had the ceremony of copying the sutra in one day stopped. I did so because I thought we would complete the ceremony when your prayer has been answered.

In any event, I fear that perhaps as long as your prayer goes unanswered, it is as if it were words without substance or blooming flowers with no fruit.
Watch now what happens! If your prayer goes unanswered, you will probably think that if you rely upon the Lotus Sutra you may be unable to attain Buddhahood. If your prayer is answered, let the two of us together carry out the ceremony for paying reverence to the Lotus Sutra.

It is said that the power of the god of the shrine depends on the shrine attendant. If your prayer goes unanswered, of what use is your faith in the Lotus Sutra?

I will write about various matters again another time.

With my deep respect,
NICHIREN

The twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month
To Nambu Rokurō

Background

NICHIREN DAISHONIN wrote this letter at MINOBU on the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month in 1281 to Nambu Rokurō, or Hakiri Sanenaga, the steward of the mountainside area where the Daishonin had settled. He explains in detail the work involved in the construction of a new dwelling for the priests, from the clearing of the land to the dedication ceremonies that accompanied its final completion. Sanenaga had sent family members and retainers of his own to assist in the work. Praising their untiring efforts, the Daishonin says that the new dwelling could not be had anywhere else for any sum. He closes by expressing his wish that Sanenaga’s prayer will be answered and by urging him to deepen his faith.

Notes

1. The “annual lecture on the doctrines of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai” refers to a lecture held annually on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month to mark the anniversary of T’ien-t’ai’s death. The “prolonging life ceremony” refers to ritual performances combined with drama, dance, and song. It was held in celebration of long life. This ceremony took root late in the Heian period (794–1185), and is still held at some temples.

2. Details about these three persons are unknown.