

In the Continent of Jambudvīpa



“**I**N the continent of Jambudvīpa [when a kalpa of] famine has begun I [the Buddha] will make my advent. In the continent of Jambudvīpa [when a kalpa of armed conflict has begun I will] make my advent.”¹ And it also states: “In the continent of Jambudvīpa when a kalpa [of pestilence] has begun I will make my advent.”

In the reign of the thirtieth human sovereign [Kimmei], King Syōngmyōng of the country [of Paekche] had [the Buddhist sutras and a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha] brought to this country. But the ruler did not accept them, and so for three reigns² the country endured the Buddha’s punishment. . . . [illegible] The blame incurred for concealing Shakyamuni Buddha . . . [illegible] the Nembutsu believers claimed that the statue brought from Paekche was that of Amida Buddha of Zenkō-ji temple.³ From the one ruler on down to the commoners, all people . . . [illegible] declared this.

Those persons who treat Nichiren as an enemy all attack him. The heavenly gods all [abandon] this country. [The Lotus Sutra] states, “[If this person] on seeing those who read, recite, copy, and uphold this sutra, should despise, hate, envy, or bear grudges against them, . . .”⁴ It also says,

“[He will be] plagued by many ailments, thin and gaunt.”⁵ And the eighth volume states, “[And he will] suffer from severe and malignant illnesses.”⁶ The second volume also states, “Though he might practice the art of medicine and by its methods cure someone’s disease, the person would grow sicker from some other malady and perhaps in the end would die.”⁷ And it goes on to say, “If he himself had an illness, no one would aid or nurse him, and though he took good medicine, it would only make his condition worse.”⁸

The Great Teacher Kōbō remarked, “[Each vehicle that is put forward is claimed to be the vehicle of Buddhahood, but] when examined from a later stage, they are all seen to be mere childish theory.”⁹ And so the followers of Tō-ji temple, from the prelate of Omuro¹⁰ on down to the ordinary priests, all referred to the Lotus Sutra as “childish theory.” The chief priest of Mount Hiei [Jikaku], along with the three thousand priests under him . . . [illegible] throughout Japan, the mountain temples all alike said that [the Lotus Sutra was inferior to] the Mahāvairocana Sutra. The Great Teacher Chishō stated that the Lotus Sutra could not equal it. The chief official of Onjō-ji and the other followers

of Chishō throughout the country declared that the Lotus Sutra could not compare to the True Word sutras. And the rulers who accepted the opinion of these three teachers [Kōbō, Jikaku, and Chishō] were overthrown, and the retired emperors too were wiped out. The chief priest Myōun was killed by Yoshinaka,¹¹ and in the Jōkyū Disturbance, the prelate of Omuro was driven to death by sorrow.

My wish is that my disciples will be cubs of the lion king, never to be laughed at by the pack of foxes. It is hard to encounter a master like Nichiren, who since distant kalpas in the past down to the present day has never begrudged his body or life in order to expose the faults of his powerful enemies!

Even the reproaches of the temporal ruler are greatly to be feared, and how much more so are the reproaches of Yama! The reproaches of the land of Japan are like water, and one should not fear to be drenched by them. The reproaches of Yama are like fire; imagine yourselves striding naked into the flames. The Nirvana Sutra in essence teaches us that when persons who have faith in the Buddhist teachings and are determined to free themselves from the sufferings of birth and death grow a little faint in heart, the Buddha inflicts illness upon them in order to encourage them to strive harder. He does so to embolden them, to drive them forward.

I, Nichiren, am an ordinary mortal. Lacking the divine eye of heavenly beings, I cannot even see through a sheet of paper. Lacking the power of knowing past lives, I have little understanding of the three existences of past, present, and future. But, though people speak of the divine eye, the wisdom eye, or the Dharma eye, these are no different from the physical eye. The votary of the Lotus Sutra possesses only the physical eye, but it is said that he is

also endowed with the divine eye, the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, and the Buddha eye. Thus, just as the sutra passage states,¹² though I have only the physical eyes, it is as if I were endowed with the divine eye and the power of knowing past lives. It is clear to me how the Buddha's teachings have spread in the seven hundred and more years since they were introduced to Japan. I can also judge which of the eight schools or the ten schools of Buddhism are correct and which in error, I can weigh the relative worth of the various Buddhist teachers and scholars of China and India, and I can fathom the meaning of the eighty thousand teachings and twelve divisions of the scriptures... [illegible] I could see in advance the causes that would bring about the downfall of the nation, and my predictions have proved to be entirely accurate just as two tallies match precisely. I was able to do all of this through the power of the Lotus Sutra.

The ruler, heeding the evil words of slanderous officials, has persecuted me, but because they are only ordinary mortals, I know that this is simply to be expected. I had no intention of ceasing my efforts, and have suffered further persecution from time to time since then.

Since they refused to accept the fine feast I offered them, there was nothing more I could do, and so I have retired to this mountain forest. But as I am an ordinary mortal, I find it hard to endure the cold or to put up with the heat here. And we are very short of food. Piao Ch'ing-mu¹³ could travel ten thousand miles on one meal, but I am not up to that. Tzu Ssu¹⁴ and Confucius ate only nine meals in the space of a hundred days,¹⁵ but that is beyond me. I barely have the voice to recite the sutra, and I have grown remiss in matters of meditation.

How wonderful it was, then, that

your messenger should arrive at such a moment! Did Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, prompt this visit? Or did it come about because of some

action in a past life? I cannot express on paper all that I wish to say.

With my deep respect.



Background

The opening portion of this letter is missing, and its date and recipient are unknown. However, the words “there was nothing more I could do, and so I have retired to this mountain forest” make clear that it was written after Nichiren Daishonin began to live at Minobu, and one view suggests that it was written in 1278. Because the existing portion begins with the phrase “in the continent of Jambudvīpa,” this later became the title of this writing. And because the contents emphasize the fearless and indomitable spirit of the lion king, *The Lion King* is its alternative title. While the original manuscript is extant, it is illegible in places, and since no copy exists in which the illegible portions have been clearly transcribed, there are gaps in the text. In this translation, these gaps are indicated by ellipsis points followed by the word “illegible” in brackets. The words that can be guessed are also given in brackets.

In the first section, quoting the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, the Daishonin ascribes the cause of the various disasters afflicting Japan to the slander of the correct Buddhist teaching. He

refers in particular to the slander of the Lotus Sutra committed by the teachers of the True Word school and the True Word, or esoteric, tradition within the Tendai school, and to the fact that the imperial rulers who supported and made use of them were all defeated, dethroned, or exiled.

Next, he exhorts his disciples to be “cubs of the lion king.” The “lion king” is a title of the Buddha and here refers to the Daishonin himself, a master of Buddhism who has “never begrudged his body or life in order to expose the faults of his powerful enemies.” Thus he teaches the correct spirit of faith. That is, his disciples should regard opposition from secular authorities as “water,” and should not fear getting wet; they should view retribution in the afterlife as “fire,” the suffering of the state of hell, which is far more terrible and prolonged.

Finally, he speaks of the difficulty of life at Minobu, where extremes of temperature and scarcity of provisions are taking their toll on him, and expresses deep gratitude for the offerings sent by the recipient of this letter.

Notes

1. Nirvana Sutra.
2. The three reigns refer to those of Emperor Kimmei (r. 539–571), Emperor Bidatsu (r. 572–585), and Emperor Yōmei (r. 585–587). During these reigns, Buddhism was rejected, and disasters and calamities, including epidemics, occurred frequently.
3. Zenkō-ji is a temple located in what

is now Nagano Prefecture. According to the documents of this temple, the statue of the Buddha originally enshrined there was the one sent by King Syōngmyōng of the Korean kingdom of Paekche to Emperor Kimmei; they state that it had been transported to Nagano by Honda Zenkō and in 642 enshrined at a temple that later became

Zenkō-ji. The statue came to be regarded as that of Amida Buddha.

4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., chap. 28.

7. Ibid., chap. 3.

8. Ibid.

9. *The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*.

10. The prelate of Omuro is Prince Dōjo, a son of Emperor Gotoba who had entered the priesthood. This title is generally applied to a retired emperor or prince who entered the priesthood and lived at Ninna-ji, a True Word temple in Kyoto. Omuro is another name for Ninna-ji.

11. Myōun was the fifty-fifth and fifty-seventh chief priest of Enryaku-ji. He offered prayers in an attempt to subdue the Minamoto clan, but was beheaded in 1183 by Minamoto no Yoshinaka, a general who assisted Minamoto no Yoritomo, the head of the Minamoto clan, in his revolt against the Taira.

12. Probably a reference to the passage

from chapter nineteen of the Lotus Sutra, which says, "These good men and good women, with the pure physical eyes they received from their parents at birth, will view all that exists in the inner and outer parts of the major world system, its mountains, forests, rivers, and seas, down as far as the Avīchi hell and up to the Summit of Being [Heaven]. And in the midst they will see all the living beings, and will also see and understand all the causes and conditions created by their deeds and the births that await them as a result and recompense for those deeds."

13. Details about Piao Ch'ing-mu are unknown.

14. The grandson of Confucius, native of the ancient state of Lu (present Shantung Province).

15. The source of this statement is uncertain. The *Meng Ch'iu* (Beginner's Search), a collection of stories from Chinese history and legend, describes this episode as "nine meals in thirty days."