

Reply to Ōama



THE wardens of hell and King Yama are ten *chō* in height, their faces daubed in vermilion, their eyes like the sun or moon, with teeth like the prongs of a rake and fists like boulders. When they walk, the earth shakes as though it were a boat afloat on the ocean; their voices are like peals of thunder rumbling forth.

[Should you have to face them], you would be powerless to utter the words Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. You are not a disciple of mine. Write to me of what is truly in your heart and I will heed

your words. Then I will pray on your behalf, racking my brains and taxing my body to the fullest. But understand that these must be prayers for your future existence. From now on, firmly resolve to strive for your future existence.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The twentieth day of the ninth
month

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Background

Ōama, who received this letter, was the wife of the proprietor of an estate in Tōjō Village of Nagasa District in Awa Province. She had been acquainted with Nichiren Daishonin's parents and took faith in his teaching, but abandoned it around the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Later, she changed her mind and asked the Daishonin to give her a Gohonzon, but he refused due to her unsteady faith.

The present text is the last part of a letter the Daishonin wrote to her from Minobu, though the year is unknown. From the contents it appears that the

Daishonin is trying to correct her attitude in faith. He describes a frightening image of the king Yama and the wardens of hell, before whom she may likely appear due to her weak faith. Terrified, she then will be unable even to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which could save her from hell's sufferings. The Daishonin sternly tells her, "You are not a disciple of mine," while admonishing her to frankly express to him what is in her heart. If she does, he promises, he will pray for her to the very limits of his ability.