

On Namu



I DO not build Buddhist halls or pagodas, I do not carry out almsgiving. The only thing I hold precious is my life, and this I have offered to the Lotus Sutra.

The Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future, when they were still ordinary mortals, all offered their lives to the Lotus Sutra and thus were able to become Buddhas.

For this reason, the names of all the

various Buddhas are prefixed by the word *namu*.¹ *Namu* is a word of the language of India, and in this country it means “to dedicate one’s life.” Explaining the term “to dedicate one’s life,” T’ien-t’ai says it means “to single-mindedly dedicate one’s life.” By offering their lives to the Lotus Sutra, they became Buddhas. And now I, Nichiren, offering my life to the Lotus Sutra . . .



Background

The opening and last portions of this letter are missing, and its date and addressee are unknown. Nichiren Daishonin speaks of how he has dedicated his life to the Lotus Sutra, and discusses the significance of the term *namu* or *nam*, which derives from the Sanskrit

word *namas*. It was translated into Chinese as “to dedicate one’s life.” The Daishonin points out that it was by devoting their lives to the Lotus Sutra that all Buddhas attained enlightenment, and says that he is committed to doing the same.

Note

1. A reference to the phrases “Namu Shakyamuni Buddha,” “Namu Amida Butsu,” and the like. “Namu Amida Butsu”

means “Homage to Amida Buddha” or “I take refuge in Amida Buddha.”