

New Year's Goshō



I HAVE received a hundred slabs of steamed rice cake and a basket of fruit. New Year's Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year, and the start of spring.¹ A person who celebrates this day will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east,² and as the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west.

First of all, as to the question of where exactly hell and the Buddha exist, one sutra states that hell exists underground, and another sutra says that the Buddha is in the west. Closer examination, however, reveals that both exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother. It is like the lotus seed, which contains both blossom and fruit. In the same way, the Buddha dwells within our hearts. For example, flint has the potential to produce fire, and gems have intrinsic value. We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance. Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts. You may question how it is that the Buddha can reside within us when our bodies, originating from our parents' sperm and blood, are the source of the three poisons and the seat of carnal desires. But repeated consideration

assures us of the truth of this matter. The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei was born of a woman of low station, and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect.

The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains, or the moon beginning to rise. Now Japan, in becoming an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, has invited misfortune from a thousand miles away. In light of this, it is clear that those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away. The shadow is cast by the form, and just as the shadow follows the form, misfortune will befall the country whose people are hostile to the Lotus Sutra. The believers in the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, are like the sandalwood with its fragrance. I will write you again.

Nichiren

The fifth day of the first month

Reply to the wife of Omosu

Background

This letter was written to the wife of Omosu in acknowledgment of offerings Nichiren Daishonin had received from her at the beginning of the year. The precise year of this letter, however, remains unclear.

Omosu derived his name from that of the area in which his estate was located, Omosu Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province. His full name was Ishikawa Shimbei Yoshisuke. His

wife was the elder sister of Nanjo Tokimitsu.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin explains the operative principle of the Ten Worlds in a simple, poetic way, revealing that both Buddhahood and hell exist within the life of each individual. A person with a heart full of hatred experiences the world of hell; a person with faith in the Lotus Sutra experiences the world of Buddhahood.

Notes

1. According to the Japanese lunar calendar, spring begins with the first month—that is, on New Year's Day by that calendar, which on the Gregorian calendar falls somewhere between January 21 and February 19.

2. This refers to the fact that the new moon is first seen in the west just after sunset. On successive nights, as the moon grows fuller, it appears to have moved a little farther toward the east.

