

The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith



THIS is in regard to the passage “This sutra is hard to uphold.”¹ According to Acharya Ben,² you said to him: “I have been practicing the Lotus Sutra correctly since last year, when you told me that those who embrace this sutra will ‘enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.’³ Instead, however, great hardships have showered down on me like rain.” Is this true, or did he give me a false report? In either case, I will take advantage of this opportunity to resolve any doubts you may have.

A passage from the Lotus Sutra reads that it is “the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.”⁴ Many hear about and accept this sutra, but when great obstacles arise, just as they were told would happen, few remember it and bear it firmly in mind. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they will “quickly attain the unsurpassed Buddha way.”⁵ To “continue” means to cherish Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the most important principle for all the Buddhas of the three existences. The

sutra reads, “We will protect and uphold what the Buddha has entrusted to us.”⁶ The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai stated, “One accepts because of one’s power of faith and continues because of one’s power of constant thought.”⁷ Another part of the sutra reads, “This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas.”⁸

A fire burns higher when logs are added, and a strong wind makes a kalakula grow larger. The pine tree lives for ten thousand years, and therefore its boughs become bent and twisted. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is like the fire and the kalakula, while his persecutions are like the logs and the wind. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is the Thus Come One whose life span is immeasurable; no wonder his practice is hindered, just as the pine tree’s branches are bent or broken. From now on, always remember the words “This sutra is hard to uphold.”

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The sixth day of the third month in
the twelfth year of Bun’ei (1275),
cyclical sign *kinoto-i*

To Shijo Kingo

Background

This short letter is one of thirty-seven still extant writings addressed by Nichiren Daishonin to his faithful disciple Shijo Kingo. Kingo was under great pressure from his lord, Ema, and other

fellow warriors to renounce his support for the Daishonin. This letter was written to encourage Kingo and to strengthen his resolve.

Notes

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.
2. Nissho (1221–1323), one of the six senior priest-disciples of the Daishonin.
3. Lotus Sutra, chap. 5.
4. Ibid., chap. 10.

5. Ibid., chap. II.
6. Ibid., chap. 13.
7. *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.
8. Lotus Sutra, chap. II.