

THE SPIRIT AND BENEFIT OF OFFERINGS

How rare is the faith that moves one to give alms to a priest who knows the heart of the Lotus Sutra! He will not stray into the evil paths if he does so even once. Still greater are the benefits arising from ten or twenty contributions, or from five years, ten years, or a lifetime of contributions. They are even beyond the measure of the Buddha's wisdom. ... by your frequent offerings to me deep in these mountains you will repay the merciful kindness of both the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha. — "Letter to Niike" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 254)

Yet even common mortals can attain Buddhahood if they cherish one thing: earnest faith. In the deepest sense, earnest faith is the will to understand and live up to the spirit, not the words, of the sutras. What does this mean? In one sense, it means that offering one's only robe to the Lotus Sutra is equivalent to tearing off one's own skin, and in a time of famine, offering the Buddha the single bowl of rice on which one's life depends is to dedicate one's life to the Buddha. ... Therefore, saints consecrated themselves by offering their own bodies, whereas common mortals may consecrate themselves by the sincerity with which they give. — "The Gift of Rice" (MW-1, 268)

As you well know, one of the sutras tells us the story of Tokusho Doji, who offered a mud pie to the Buddha and was later reborn as King Ashoka who ruled over most of India. Since the Buddha is worthy of respect, the boy was able to receive this great reward even though the pie was only mud. However, Shakyamuni Buddha teaches that one who makes offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law for even a single day will gain incomparably greater fortune than he would by offering countless treasures to the Buddha for one hundred thousand aeons. — "The Person and the Law" (MW-1, 263–64)

The Buddha taught that offering one's little finger for the sutra is more rewarding than covering an entire galaxy with seven kinds of jewels. Sessen Doji offered his life, and Gyobo Bonji ripped off his own skin to seek the truth of Buddhism. Since nothing is more precious than life itself, those who dedicate their lives to the Buddhist practice are certain to attain Buddhahood. If they are prepared to offer their lives, why should they begrudge any other treasure for the sake of Buddhism? On the other hand, if one is loath to part with his material possessions, how can he possibly give away his life, which is far more valuable? — "Letter From Sado" (MW-1, 33–34)

The Buddha is of course respectable, but when compared with the Lotus Sutra, he is like a firefly beside the sun or the moon. The Lotus Sutra is as superior to Shakyamuni Buddha as heaven is higher than the earth. To present offerings to the Buddha produces such great benefits [as to be born a king], yet even greater benefit is obtained by making offerings to the Lotus Sutra. If such a mar-

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velous reward was brought about by the mere offering of a mud pie, how much more will come about as a result of all your various gifts! — “Two Kinds of Faith” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 249–50)

Whether you chant the Buddha’s name, recite the sutra or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and good fortune in your life. With this conviction you should put your faith into practice. — “On Attaining Buddhahood” (MW-1, 4)

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