

The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith

About the difficulty of sustaining faith in this sutra: According to Nissho,¹ you said to him, "I have been practicing this sutra correctly since last year, when you told me that those who embrace this sutra will enjoy peace and security in this life and good circumstances in the next. But instead I have been deluged by hardships." 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, "...difficult to believe and difficult to understand."² Many hear about and accept this sutra, but few continue their faith in the face of great obstacles. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who embrace this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they will "quickly obtain the supreme enlightenment."³ To "sustain faith" means to cherish Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the teaching by which all Buddhas throughout past, present and future attain enlightenment. The sutra reads, "We will uphold what the Buddha has entrusted to us."⁴ The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai stated, "One accepts out of the power of faith and continues because of the power of prayer."⁵ Another part of the sutra reads, "It is difficult to sustain faith in this sutra. One who embraces it even for a short time will delight me and all other

¹ Nissho (1221-1323): One of the six close disciples of Nichiren Daishonin known collectively as the six elder priests.

² Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

³ Ibid., chap. 11.

⁴ Ibid., chap. 13.

⁵ *Hokke Mongu*, vol. 8.

Buddhas."⁶

A fire burns higher when logs are added, and a strong wind makes the *gura*⁷ swell. The boughs of the long-lived pine tree become bent and twisted as it grows older. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is like the fire and the *gura*, while his persecutions are like the logs and wind. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha of eternal life; no wonder his practice is hindered, just as the pine tree's branches are bent or broken. From now on, you should always remember the words, "It is difficult to sustain faith in this sutra."

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

The sixth day of the third month in the twelfth year of Bun'ei (1275)

⁶ Lotus Sutra, chap. 11.

⁷ *Gura*: (Skt., kalakula) Imaginary insects which swell rapidly in strong winds.