

PERSPECTIVE
THE BODHISATTVA IN ALL OF US
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Over the months that I've contributed stories of Nichiren Daishonin's disciples for *Living Buddhism* magazine, I've had to read the Gosho from different perspectives. Sometimes I find wonderful pieces of wisdom and wit or I mine passages rich with insight into the individual characters and lives of his followers that are like rare and precious metals. There are moments when I read the Daishonin's words and I simply have to stop and let them sink into me. How truly fortunate we are to have his words, always strong and sure, passionate, often provocative and unerringly human.

Without the Daishonin's compassionate outpouring of letters to his followers, it is unlikely that we would have known about the courageous people who, against tremendous opposition, were determined to follow him and to embrace a vision of hope in those incredibly desperate times. They would have disappeared into the misty obscurities of time.

We've heard President Ikeda say: "Read the Gosho with your very lives." What this means to me is to enter into those chaotic and amazing times and imagine ourselves walking alongside the Daishonin's followers and to see how very like ourselves they were. Many of their obstacles have become familiar to us and the Daishonin's words to them have come to serve as verbal touchstones that followed us through our years of practice and whose truth and application continue to deepen in meaning.

One of the things that strikes me is the offerings and gifts that were sent to the Daishonin. From the simplest of garments to the 60 plates he had no food for, all gifts were carefully noted and words of appreciation sent in response. What sparked my imagination was his careful accounting of food items, thus providing us with a vivid picture of how liquids were contained, how seaweed was packed or the types of fruits that were available and in what season.

In his deepest appreciation for the sustenance provided by his followers, the Daishonin praises them for their gifts and often says they surely must have been with him in other lifetimes, or they must be bodhisattvas or Buddhas. I believe that the Daishonin saw in these offerings and gifts the purity of each person's Buddha nature and he was determined to communicate that to them in the clearest terms.

This is the time of the year when we are invited to participate in our annual contribution activity. Just as the basket of oranges or the arrival of a horseload of rice gave the Daishonin the strength to continue, our sincere appreciation, in the form of monetary donations, fuels and refreshes our efforts and keeps our Buddhist movement healthy and strong. Contributing in this spirit is what I call "a bodhisattva activity." There were times when I could contribute very little. However, as the years pass and my fortune grows, I challenge myself to give more. In my heart, there is a tremendous pleasure and assurance in being able to contribute to the organization that so sincerely carries on the Daishonin's work and perpetuates this Buddhism.

Offerings

by Fay Hovey

I think of the persimmons.
How they arrived skewered and dried.
Or ripening in a net bag, the blush
of autumn blazing on their smooth cheeks.
The seaweed that reminded him of his home
in Awa province and his parents whose living
came from the sea. Dark green kelp, bundled
and wrapped in paper.

Imagine the excitement of the messenger.
The horses eager under their loads
for water and rest. A basket of melons
or one hundred mandarin oranges
holding sunlight against the darkening season.
Or the cold trip first on horseback and later,
trudging on foot through the mountains
to his door: the greetings of amazement,
to be visited with drifts banked
to the eaves of the small hut.

The taste of tea and hot sake
warming the chest and stomach.
And the sound of rice cooking,
comforting, over the small fire.
Rice, parched or polished
and white as fresh snow.
Upon the receipt of sixty slabs
of steamed rice cake, he exclaimed:
“Rice! Such a small thing, but it sustains life!”
The horseload of polished wheat:
“Just when I thought I would die
of starvation, the wheat arrived!”
The sixty plates and thirty cups sent
when he was so hungry.
He said he would fill them
with snow and pretend they were filled with rice.
The incomparable joy of a fat bag of chestnuts
or bamboo shoots.

The solid feel of coins in a small sack
or strung, heavy in their certainty.
And yams, cooked in the fire,
roasted black on the outside and
split open, a cornucopia

of steam and sweetness.
Vinegar to make pickles
with the bunch of radishes
and bamboo containers of oil,
for cooking and for light.
Eggplants, meaty and purple,
and pounded soybean curd
to mix with vegetables.
Two sho of syrup, thick,
and more luxurious than silk.
Five blocks of konnyaku,
to cleanse the blood—and herbs,
powders that renewed his strength
when it was thought he'd never
sit up again. Ginger, for spice
and for tea to drive the cold
from his lungs.

The robes, unlined in the summer,
against the sweltering heat.
Those woven of bark fibre from
the humblest of followers.
Or quilted silk from a samurai,
hand-stitched by his mother
or his wife, to fend off
the icy teeth of the wind.
“Rest yourself and your horses tonight,”
he would say. “Let us eat together and
you will tell me how everyone is.”
And placing the gifts gently
before the Gohonzon he chanted:
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
Later that evening,
he would take up his brush. “Thank you,” the Daishonin
always began in this way. To him, they were all bodhisattvas.

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