

311 - Reply to Hōki and the Others

Generally speaking, you should draw up the petition in this manner. But if the Atsuhara farmers are released without injury, then there is no need for Nisshū and the others to submit the petition.

The lawless actions carried out by the priest Daishin-bō, the lay priest Yatōji, and the others were gone originally at the urging of Gyōchi,¹ and they resulted in violence and bloodshed. If, on top of this, our people should be pressed to present a written oath [regarding their religious beliefs], they should under no circumstances agree to such an oath. I say this because violence and bloodshed have already been committed, and neither in past times nor present have I ever heard of a case in which, on top of such violence, one takes an oath and thereby agrees to overlook the other party's offense. Moreover, if Gyōchi is guilty of the acts stated in your petition, then there is no way he can excuse himself and he will have no course other than to accept the appropriate punishment. How could it be otherwise, how could it be otherwise?

When you submit your petition stating these facts, if you press your case firmly, I am certain that the authorities will listen to you. If Gyōchi produces witnesses to support his contentions, point out that such witnesses represent the same point of view as those who conspired with Gyōchi to seize the reapings from several tens of rice fields from the farmers. If on top of that he produces written testimonies, declare that such testimonies are false.

In all these proceedings, there is no need to have witnesses take an oath [regarding their religious beliefs]. Just stick to the charges in the present petition, which are simply those of violence and bloodshed.

If anyone should go against the instructions contained herein, then he I no disciple of Nichiren, he is no disciple of Nichiren!

Respectfully, Nichiren

The twelfth day of the tenth month in the second year of Kōan
[1279]

To Hōki
Nisshū
Nichiben and others

Background

This letter was addressed to, among others, Hōki, or Hōki-bō, also known as Nikkō, and Nisshū and Nichiben, priests of Ryūsen-ji, a Tendai temple in the Atsuhara area, who had been converted to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings by Nikkō. They were in Kamakura attempting to gain the release of twenty farmers from the Atsuhara area being detained by the authorities on false charges, and threatened and tortured to make them recant their faith in the Daishonin's teaching. This was the culmination of what is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.

Gyōchi, the deputy chief priest of Ryūsen-ji, had tried to expel Nisshū and Nichiben

from the temple on account of their belief. Moreover, he had colluded with the authorities to arrest twenty farmers who had been converted by these priests. The Daishonin and Nikkō drafted a petition to the authorities in the name of Nisshu and Nichiben detailing Gyōchi's crimes and calling for the release of the arrested farmers.

From the opening line, "Generally speaking, you should draw up the petition in this manner," it can be assumed that the Daishonin sent this letter along with the draft of the petition, written originally by Nikkō and revised by the Daishonin, who appended the opening section concerning Buddhist doctrines. That document appears in this volume under the title *The Ryūsen-ji Petition*. The petition was ignored, and the shogunate official Hei no Saemon had three of the arrested farmers beheaded. Nevertheless, none of those detained recanted their faith.

This letter is dated the twelfth day of the tenth month in 1279, and that is the exact date when the Daishonin inscribed the object of devotion known as the Dai-Gohonzon. The courageous faith of the Atsuhara believers and others in the face of official persecution is believed to have inspired him to conclude that the time had come to so.

Note

1. Daishin-bō was a priest who lived in the Fuji area. He was in the group that rode to arrest twenty of the believers in Atsuhara. The farmers resisted, and in the melee Daishin-bō was thrown from his horse and died. Yatōji was the elder brother of Jinshirō, Yagorō, and Yarokurō, farmers and followers of the Daishonin who were beheaded during the Atsuhara Persecution. Yatōji had lodged a false complaint with the authorities, alleging that the farmers, including his three younger brothers, were stealing rice from the fields of Ryūsen-ji temple. Gyōchi was a lay priest and a member of the ruling Hōjō clan who acted as the deputy chief priest of Ryūsen-ji temple.