135

Reply to the Wife of Matsuno

I AM deeply ashamed at having failed
until now to respond to your gift
of one chest of wheat, one basket of
taros, one basket of melons, and vari-
ous other items, which I received on
the third day of the sixth month.

This place, the valley of Minobu, is
located in the area of the three villages
of Iino, Mimaki, and Hakiri of Kai
Province, in the northwestern corner
of the district of Hakiri. To the north,
the peak of Mount Minobu pierces the
heavens; to the south, Mount Takato-
ri’s crest merges with the clouds; to
the east, Mount Tenshi rises as high as
the sun; and to the west, great sheer
mountains span across to the summit of
Mount Shirane. The air above resounds
with the screeching of monkeys, while
the earth is filled with the chirring of
cicadas.

I feel as if Eagle Peak in India had
made its way here, or as if I were see-
ing Mount T’ien-t’ai in China right
before my eyes. Although I am neither
Shakyamuni Buddha nor the Great
Teacher T’ien-t’ai, because each day I
read the Lotus Sutra day and night and
discuss Great Concentration and Insight
morning and evening, this place is like
the pure land of Eagle Peak and in no
way different from Mount T’ien-t’ai.

Nevertheless, I am an ordinary per-
son dependent on other things for my
existence. If I were without clothes,
the wind would penetrate my body,
and if I did not eat, my life could not
be sustained. It would be like failing to
replenish a lamp with oil, or failing to
add wood to a fire. How could I con-
tinue to live? If my life should become
difficult to maintain, if the provisions
needed to sustain it were to be ex-
hausted, in one to five days the voice
that now reads and recites the Lotus
Sutra would also be silenced, and weeds
would grow up thick before the win-
dow from which discourses on Great
Concentration and Insight are heard. Such
are the conditions under which I live,
but I wonder how you were able to
perceive this.

Because a hare made offerings to a
person walking about in exercise after
meditation,¹ the heavenly lord Shakra
took pity on it and placed it in the
moon. Now, when we gaze up at the
heavens, in the moon we see a hare.² In
your position as a woman, you have
made offerings to the Lotus Sutra in
this defiled latter age. Therefore, the
heavenly king Brahma will look after
you with his divine eye, Shakra will
press his palms together and pay obei-
sance to you, the earthly deities will
delight in reverently holding up your
feet, and Shakyamuni Buddha will
extend his hand from Eagle Peak to
pat your head. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
Background

Written in 1279, this letter was addressed to the wife of Matsuno Rokuro Saemon-no-jo, son of the lay priest Matsuno Rokuro Saemon.

Facts concerning Matsuno Rokuro Saemon-no-jo's wife, including her name, the dates of her birth and death, the province where she was born, and the identity of her parents, are unknown. She lived with her husband in the village of Matsuno in Ihara District of Suruga Province. They are thought to have taken faith in the Daishonin's teachings at about the same time as her husband's father, although the exact year is not known. The two letters that the Daishonin addressed to her tell us that her gifts were varied and extremely thoughtful in content. She seemed to have taken great care to send items that would be especially useful to the Daishonin.

Notes

1. In ancient India, religious practitioners would often walk in circles around their place of meditation as a form of exercise. Shakyamuni and his followers engaged in this practice as well.

2. The original version of this story is found in The Record of the Western Regions. It tells of three friends—a fox, a hare, and a monkey—who lived in a densely forested area. One day, in order to test them, the heavenly lord Shakra appeared as an old man and asked them for food. After searching about, the fox brought back a fresh carp, and the monkey returned with rare flowers and fruits. Only the hare returned empty-handed. He asked the fox and the monkey to prepare a fire. Then he flung his body into the fire, offering it to the old man. Moved by the hare's sincerity, the old man changed back to Shakra and said, "I will place the hare's body in the moon and convey his devotion to later generations." This story was used to explain the image of a hare that the people of ancient India saw in the moon.