I have received the sack of polished barley, the sack of polished wheat, and the five packets of river nori that you were kind enough to send.

The Venerable Aniruddha, a disciple of the Buddha, in his youth bore the name At Will. He was called At Will because he could cause to rain down any manner of treasures that his heart desired. If one asked the Buddha why he was born with such power, the Buddha would reply that it was because, long ago, in a time of famine, Aniruddha had presented a humble meal of millet as an offering to a sage who was a cause-awakened one.

The Venerable Mahākāśyapa was the most outstanding monk in all of Jambudvīpa, second only to the Buddha himself. When he was still a layman, he was very rich, possessing sixty storehouses, each stocked with 140 measures of gold, and his other treasures were beyond description. If one asked the Buddha about Mahākāśyapa’s past existences, the Buddha would explain that, in a time of famine, he had made an offering of a bowl of cooked wheat [to a pratye kabuddha]. As a result, he was reborn a thousand times in the heaven of the thirty-three gods, and now has encountered Shakyamuni Buddha and become first among all the monks. In the Lotus Sutra it is said that he will become a Buddha named Light Bright Thus Come One. All this is recorded in volume one of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra.

Comparing these examples with what you yourself have done, could anyone imagine that the Venerable Mahākāśyapa’s offering of a bowl of wheat was so wonderful that it entitled him to become Light Bright Thus Come One, but that the offering I have now received from this lay supporter of mine is too paltry to merit the reward of Buddhahood? The moon when the Buddha was in the world is today the same moon, the flowers are today the same flowers, and the benefits resulting from meritorious acts in past ages are benefits today.

Moreover, I am a votary of the Lotus Sutra, hated by all, from the supreme ruler down to the masses of common people, and forced to face starvation and death here in these mountains. And because you pity me, out of your kindness you have sent this offering, conveying it over mountains and rivers, this wheat that is not wheat but gold, not gold but the words and letters of the Lotus Sutra. In our eyes it is wheat, but to the ten demon daughters this wheat appears as the seeds of Buddhahood!

Aniruddha’s meal of millet changed and became a hare, then the hare
changed and became a dead man, the dead man changed and became gold. Whenever Aniruddha pulled off one of the [golden man’s] fingers and sold it, a new finger would appear, and when the ruler tried to seize the gold, it changed once more into a dead man. And so this fortune continued for the space of ninety-one kalpas.  

When a man named Mahānāma picked up stones, they turned to gold, and King Golden Grains could turn grains of sand into gold. And now this wheat of yours has become the words and letters of the Lotus Sutra. Or again it may become a mirror for a woman to use to adorn herself, and for a man it may become armor and a helmet, or it may become a guardian deity who will make you foremost among the wielders of bow and arrow. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo!

With my deep respect

POSTSCRIPT:
When things are going smoothly in this world of ours, we suppose there is nothing to worry about, but these days the situation seems very threatening indeed. Whatever happens, however, you must not despair. Be firm in your approach, and if things should not go as you wish with regard to your lands, then determine to be more contented than ever, adopt an attitude of indifference, and if you like, come here. There are a great many people nowadays who cannot keep possession of their lands. Think of how grievous it must be for those who these days have to set off for Tsukushi! And all of this comes about because the authorities treat me with disdain.

Nichiren

The second day of the seventh month

Reply to Nanjō

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Nanjō Tokimitsu out of gratitude for his offering of wheat and other items. Dated only “the second day of the seventh month,” it is thought to have been written at Minobu in 1275. Nichiren Daishonin cites two stories from T’ien-t’ai’s Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra that demonstrate the benefits of making such offerings. These are accounts of the past lives of two of Shakyamuni Buddha’s foremost disciples, Aniruddha and Mahākāśyapa. The Daishonin also cites as examples persons who are said to have turned stones or sand into gold.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni predicts that Aniruddha will become a Buddha named Universal Brightness, and Mahākāśyapa, a Buddha named Light Bright. Thus, the ultimate effect of their sincere acts of offering in past existences will be Buddhahood. Their offerings consisted of simple wheat and millet, given in times of famine when their own lives depended on such food.

Tokimitsu’s offering, too, came in a time of food shortage, when he could not have had much for himself and his family. But his concern for the Daishonin’s situation in the mountains prompted him to gladly extend his support. Moreover, his offering was not to an ordinary sage, but to the votary of the Lotus Sutra. How, then, the Daishonin states, can his offering be any less a cause for Buddhahood than those of Aniruddha and Mahākāśyapa?

Tokimitsu’s offerings sustained the
Daishonin's life and his efforts to establish his teaching in perpetuity. The Daishonin says the wheat Tokimitsu provided is ultimately the "words and letters of the Lotus Sutra." In other writings, the Daishonin states: "All the characters in which the Lotus Sutra is written represent living Buddhas" (I, p. 517), "Each character in the Lotus Sutra is like a single wish-granting jewel" (I, p. 323), and "It is the characters of the Lotus Sutra that are the true Buddhas" (p. 602).

In the postscript, the Daishonin encourages Tokimitsu to adopt a positive attitude toward his life and circumstances, saying, "Whatever happens, . . . you must not despair." The first Mongol invasion in 1274 had failed, but the threat of another attack loomed large, and many warriors were being dispatched southwestward to Kyushu (Tsukushi) to bolster defenses. Expressing sympathy for those warriors, the Daishonin condemns the rulers for inviting these excruciating circumstances by persecuting him, the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Notes

1. One of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples, known as the foremost in divine insight.

2. Also, the Trayastrimsha heaven. The second of the six heavens in the world of desire. It is said to be located on a plateau at the top of Mount Sumeru, where it is home to thirty-three gods, including Shakra who rules over the others.

3. This story is found in The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra. Long ago, a pratekabuddha was engaged in the practice of begging alms, but could obtain nothing. Seeing this, a poor man offered him millet. Later, when the poor man went in search of more millet, a hare jumped on his back and then turned into a dead man. Frightened, the man tried to shake it off, but in vain. As soon as he returned home, however, the dead man fell off and turned into gold. Hearing of this, wicked men came to rob him, but they saw only a dead man. For the poor man, however, it was genuine gold, and he became wealthy. Ninety-one kalpas later, he was born as Aniruddha.

4. One of the five men who were ordered by Shakyamuni's father, the king, to become monks and accompany Shakyamuni when he left the palace to live a religious life. They followed and practiced asceticism with Shakyamuni, but left him when he renounced this path. Shortly after Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, however, he preached his first sermon to them at Deer Park, and they became his first disciples. According to the Increasing by One Âgama Sutra, Mahânâma was said to possess occult powers. The story of “stones turning to gold” is found in Ts'ung-i's Supplement to T'ien-t'ai's Three Major Works.

5. Little is known about King Golden Grains.

6. Tsukushi is an ancient name used to refer both to the area that is now Fukuoka Prefecture in Kyushu and to Kyushu itself, Japan's southernmost major island.