

Reply to Kurō Tarō



I HAVE received the horseload of taros that you sent. In the range of mountains called K'un-lun there are only pieces of jade and no ordinary stones. And because stones are so rare, people use pieces of jade when they want to buy a stone. Around the lake known as P'eng-li there are no trees or plants, so fish are used as barter when purchasing firewood.

A person whose nose is defective has no use for sandalwood; a blind person can do nothing with the brightest mirror.

This place called the valley of Minobu is situated deep in the mountains of the village of Hakiri in Kai Province. To the west is the steep slope of Shichimen, to the east is the peak of Tenshi, to the south the peak of Takatori, and to the north the peak of Minobu. The deep valley is in the midst of these four mountains, like the bottom of a box. From the heights come the noisy cries of monkeys, like those of the Pa Gorges [of the

Yangtze],¹ and the stream is choked with tumbled stones.

But there is not one stone here that can equal the taros of Suruga. Here a taro is rarer and more welcome than a lamp on a dark night or a drink of water when one is thirsty. How can you say there is nothing unusual about these taros? You say that, I suppose, because there are lots of them where you are, but to us they are very dear!

I have presented your gift to the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha. I know that the Buddha will be delighted to accept your kind offering. You may ask him yourself when you go to meet him in the pure land of Eagle Peak.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The fifteenth day of the ninth month in the second year of Kenji [1276], cyclical sign *hinoe-ne*

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Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu in 1276. It is addressed to Kurō Tarō, a relative of the Nanjō

family of Ueno. In this and other letters sent to Kurō Tarō, the Daishonin uses only his given name. However,

references in the other writing to the late Ueno (p. 804) make it clear he was a member of the Nanjō family.

This letter is an expression of gratitude for an offering of taros. As the Daishonin's words "How can you say there is nothing unusual about these taros" suggest, Kurō Tarō must have sent a letter accompanying his offering, in which he humbly referred to the gift as "nothing unusual." The Daishonin, on the contrary, explains to him how truly precious his gift is, citing two examples from Chinese folklore to illustrate how the same things may have entirely different value to different persons under differing circumstances.

The first is that of the K'un-lun Mountains, where jade, being plentiful, is used to trade for ordinary rocks, which are scarce. The second is that of the lake P'eng-li where trees are scarce, and fish are used to barter for firewood.

In the same manner, the Daishonin says that, while taros may be commonplace in Suruga, they are a feast for him and his disciples at Minobu.

In the end he states that he has reported this to Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutra, and that the Buddha will be delighted by Kurō Tarō's "kind offering," a cause for attaining Buddhahood.

Note

1. Gorges in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in China.