I have received the horse-load of taros, the basket of mandarin oranges, and the ten straw sitting mats, the last in place of six hundred coins.

Last year and this year disease has been rampant in this province. People die like trees toppling before a great wind or plants flattened by a severe snowfall. It seems as though not a single individual will be left alive.

The weather this year, however, was at first very seasonable. The five kinds of grain flourished in the fields, and plants and trees grew lush on the plains and mountains. It was as though we were living in the age of the sage rulers Yao and Shun, or in the beginning of a kalpa of formation.

But now, with the heavy rains and winds that appeared in the eighth and ninth months, the whole country of Japan is troubled by crop failure, and the common people who are left alive wonder how they can get through the winter. The situation is worse than what we faced in the past in the Kangi and Shōka eras, and hardly less severe than what we will experience when the three calamities come.

We are troubled by revolt in our own country, thieves and bandits fill the land, enemies come from abroad to attack us, and all our thoughts are of armed conflict. The people’s hearts are lacking in filial piety and they look on their own parents as strangers. Priests and nuns, embracing erroneous views, quarrel with one another like dogs and monkeys. Because of the lack of pity and compassion, the heavenly deities cease to guard this country of ours. Because of the prevalence of erroneous views, the three treasures of Buddhism cast it aside.

The pestilence seemed to have subsided for a time, but now the evil spirits appear to have come upon us again. In provinces to the north, provinces to the east, provinces to the west, and provinces to the south, everywhere alike we hear the cries of those suffering from sickness.

How thankful we must be that, in a world such as this, there are those who, because of some good karma accumulated in the past, are willing to support the votaries of the Lotus Sutra! How thankful we must be!

I will have much more to say to you when we meet in person.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twelfth day of the intercalary tenth month in the first year of Kōan [1278]

Reply to Ueno
Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Nanjō Tokimitsu, a leading disciple in Fuji District of Suruga Province on the twelfth day of the intercalary tenth month of 1278. Tokimitsu had sent offerings in the form of food and supplies to the Daishonin at Minobu. Historical records show that in the twelfth month of 1277, and as late as the fifth or sixth month of 1278, imperial edicts were issued instructing shrines and Buddhist temples to offer prayers to drive off epidemics.

In this letter, the Daishonin restates an assertion he had made in On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land of 1260, that because people throughout the nation embrace erroneous views of Buddhism and reject the correct teaching, protective deities abandon the land and the three calamities and seven disasters predicted in the sutras arise. By 1278, the predictions of internal revolt and foreign invasion he had made in that treatise had been borne out. Yet the various disasters still continued. The Daishonin appreciates and praises Tokimitsu for his offering at the time of crop failure.

Note

1. Wheat, rice, beans, and two types of millet. Also a general term for all grains.