I HAVE received six thousand coins, including one thousand coins from Jirō, and one white thick-quilted cotton robe. You offer precious things to the three treasures throughout the four seasons. Not a single one of them will fail to bring you benefit.

In accord with the time, however, benefits differ in degree, being either lesser or greater, shallow or profound. The benefit to be gained from giving food to those who are starving is somewhat greater than that from giving them clothing. The benefit to be gained from giving clothing to those who are freezing is greater than from giving them food. The benefit to be gained from giving a thick-quilted robe in fall or winter is twice as great as that from giving it in spring or summer.

You will surely understand everything through these examples. But concerning this point, regardless of the season, no matter the day or month, I receive from you money, rice, unlined robes, and undergarments, day after day and month after month without pause. It is like King Bimbisāra sending five hundred cartloads filled with offerings day after day to Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, or King Ashoka donating ten million pieces of gold to Kukkutārāma Monastery. Even if there is the matter of size, your resolve still surpasses that of those men.

In addition, this year has been different from any other. If it goes by the name of winter, is it ever anything but cold? If it goes by the name of summer, is it ever anything but hot? Still, though I don’t know how it has been in other provinces, the cold here in Hakiri has been exceptional. When we ask the longtime older residents, the ones who are eighty, ninety, and a hundred all say there has never been a winter as cold as this.

No one visits from ten chō or twenty chō away beyond the mountains surrounding my hut in all four directions. Thus I don’t know how things are there, but about one chō away from here, the snow is piled up to a height of ten feet, twenty feet, or five feet even in shallow places.

On the thirtieth day of the intercalary tenth month, it snowed a bit, but it melted right away. This month there was a heavy snowfall that started at the hour of the dragon [7:00–9:00 A.M.] on the eleventh day and continued right up to the fourteenth day. Two or three days later, a light rain fell, the snow froze as hard as diamonds, and it still has not melted. It is unusual for it to be bone-chilling cold both day and night. The sake has frozen over as hard as stone, frozen oil gleams like gold, and when just a bit of water remains in the cooking vessels, it freezes
and they shatter. And as it keeps getting colder and colder, and our clothing is thin and food scarce, no one ventures out. Our living quarters are as yet only half finished so there is no keeping out the snow or wind, and we have nothing to lay down as floor covering. There is no one to go out in search of wood so we are unable to build a fire. The skin of those wearing a single old soiled quilted robe is like the skin of those in the hell of the crimson lotus or the hell of the great crimson lotus. Their voices resemble those that emit from the Hahava hell and Ababa hell. Hands and feet freeze, crack, and break open, and there is no end to people dying. The beards on the laymen look as if they had ornaments dangling from them, while the noses of the priests seem to be strung with bells.

Such an extraordinary event has never occurred before. And not only that, but I have had a bout of diarrhea since the thirtieth day of the twelfth month last year, which failed to improve even in the spring or summer of this year. Fall passed and around the tenth month it actually worsened. After that there was a slight improvement, but it is apt to start up again at any moment.

It was just at such a time that the two quilted robes arrived from you two brothers. Even with forty ryō of cotton padding they are as light as an unlined summer robe. The contrast is all the more apparent because until now I have been wearing a robe so thinly padded it seemed to be no more than a single layer of cloth. Try to imagine how this must have been. Without these two robes, I would surely have frozen to death this year.

Moreover, whether from you two brothers, or from Ukon-no-jō, food also keeps arriving. Even when there is hardly anyone here, there are forty people, and when it is a crowd, there are as many as sixty. No matter how much I refuse, they still come to visit. Saying they are the older brother or the younger brother of someone here, they settle down, but out of regard for their feelings in the end I say nothing. Speaking strictly of my own wishes, I had prayed to be tranquil, alone with my acolyte reciting the sutra in my hut. Thus nothing could be as irksome as this state of affairs. And so I have been planning that, once the New Year has arrived, I would escape somewhere. Nothing could be as irksome as this. I will certainly write you again.

But above all, as for you and your brother Uemon no Tayū Sakan, whether it be about your better relations with your father or your winning the trust of your lord, without actually meeting you it is hard to say all that I wish.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month

Reply to Hyōe no Sakan

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter on the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month in 1278 at Minobu to Ikegami Hyōe no Sakan Munenaga, the younger brother of Ikegami Uemon no Tayū Munenaka, in Musashi Province. Hyōe no Sakan had just sent the Daishonin six thousand coins and a thick-quilted robe. The Daishonin praises these, saying that the benefit
that accrues from such offerings is either lesser or greater, shallow or profound, depending on the time. And the winter has been so exceptionally harsh, he says, that he would have frozen to death but for the robe. The Daishonin concludes the letter expressing his joy that relations between the Ikegami brothers and their father have improved, and that, moreover, the brothers have won the trust of their lord.

Notes

1. Jirō seems to have been a relative of the Ikegami brothers, though no details about him are known.

2. The hell of the crimson lotus and the hell of the great crimson lotus are the seventh and eighth of the eight cold hells. In these two hells, the cold is said to make one’s flesh crack open, so that it has the appearance of crimson lotus flowers.

3. “The Hahava hell” and “the Ababa hell” are the first and fourth of the eight cold hells. The names of these two hells represent the cries uttered by sufferers in them because of the intolerable cold.

4. According to the lunar calendar, winter lasts from the tenth month through the twelfth month.

5. Ukon-no-jō appears to have been a relative of the Ikegami brothers, though no further details about him are known.