

Offerings in the Snow



YOU have taken the trouble to have your messenger bring ninety pieces of rice cake and fifty yams from Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province, to this cave on Mount Minobu in the village of Hakiri in Kai Province at the hour of the sheep [1:00–3:00 P.M.] on the third day of the New Year.

At the seaside, wood is regarded as a treasure, and in the mountains, salt. In a drought, water is thought of as a treasure, and in the darkness, a lamp. Women see their husbands as their treasures, and men look upon their wives as their very lives. A king sees his people as his parents, and the people see their food as Heaven.

Over these last two or three years a great plague has raged in Japan and perhaps half the population have lost their lives. Moreover, since the seventh month of last year, due to a terrible famine, people who have no relations and live far from human habitation, and priests living deep in the mountains, have been finding it hard to sustain their lives. Furthermore, I, Nichiren, have been born in a country that slanders the Lotus Sutra and am like Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in the latter age of the Law of Awesome Sound King Buddha. Or I am like the monk Realization of Virtue

in the latter age of Joy Increasing Buddha. The ruler detests me and the people hate me. My clothing is thin and food scarce. Padded cotton clothing seems like brocade, and greens I think of as sweet dew.

Moreover, since the eleventh month of last year, the snow has piled up and cut off the mountain path. Though the New Year has arrived, the cry of birds comes my way, but no visitors. Just when I was feeling forlorn, thinking that if not a friend, then who would visit me here, during the first three celebratory days of the New Year your ninety steamed rice cakes appeared, looking like the full moon. My mind has brightened and the darkness of life and death will lift, I am sure. How admirable of you, how admirable!

It is said that Ueno, your deceased father, was a man of feeling. Since you are his son, perhaps you have inherited the outstanding qualities of his character. Blue dye is bluer even than indigo itself, and ice is colder than water. How wonderful it is, how wonderful!

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The third day of the New Year

Reply to Ueno

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter at Minobu on the third day of the first month in 1279 to Nanjō Tokimitsu. The Daishonin was fifty-eight years old. He thanks Tokimitsu for the ninety steamed rice cakes he has gone to the trouble to send as a New Year's offering even in the midst of a plague raging nationwide and a famine. Priests

living deep in the mountains, the Daishonin says, are hard pressed to survive, and moreover, as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, he is widely despised. The Daishonin praises Tokimitsu's excellence of character and suggests that he must have inherited such qualities from his deceased father.