Teachings Depend on the Time and the Country

I have received one horseload of taros, one bundle of burdock root, and six daikon radishes. The taros are like stones, the burdock roots are like the horns of big oxen, and the radishes are like the large nails that hold together the Great Buddha Hall. And the flavor of all these is like the sweet dew of the heaven of the thirty-three gods.

There are countries where people pay gold for stones, or where rice is paid for soil. But a person with a thousand pieces of gold may nevertheless die of hunger. Such a person ranks lower than someone who has at least one packet of rice to eat. As the sutra says, “In a time of famine, rice is treasured.”

Everything depends on the particular country and the particular time. In dealing with the Buddhist teachings, one must understand this principle. I will say more at another time.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twentieth day of the ninth month in the fourth year of Kōan [1281]
Reply to Ueno

Background

This letter, sent from Minobu and dated the twentieth day of the ninth month of 1281, is Nichiren Daishonin’s response to Nanjō Tokimitsu for donations of food items. Praising those offerings, the Daishonin explains that things take on different value according to the country and the times. He makes the point that food is far more valuable than gold in a time of famine. He concludes that one must understand these principles of the time and country when it comes to the Buddhist teachings as well.

Note
1. Source unknown.