

Reply to the Lay Nun, Mother of Ueno



I HAVE duly received the horseload of unpolished rice, the bamboo container of clear sake, probably twenty decanters worth, and the paper bag of dried betony you sent.

Things here are as I have described them in the past. I came to this mountain in the eleventh year of the Bun'ei era [1274], the seventeenth day of the sixth month, and since then, up to the present day, the eighth day of the twelfth month, I have never set foot outside the mountain. But during these past eight years, what with a wasting illness and advancing age, I have grown weaker and weaker in body with each year, and my mind has become increasingly distracted. I have been particularly troubled by illness since the spring of this year, and as autumn passed and we entered into winter, I have grown feebler each day and each night seem to be in graver condition.

For the last ten days or more I have barely eaten, while the snow piles up and the cold air assaults me. My body is cold as a stone, my chest as frozen as ice. But now when I warm up some of this clear sake and drink it, or eat some of the betony, my chest is aglow with fire, it is as though I were in a hot bath. Sweat washes away the grime and my legs are bathed in moisture. How can I thank you for your kindness in sending

these things? I am so overjoyed that tears pour from my eyes.

Indeed, indeed, it was the ninth month of last year, the fifth day, that your son, the late Gorō,¹ passed away. In consternation I count on my fingers and find that already a year and more have passed, sixteen months, over four hundred days! You are his mother—perhaps you have had some word of him. Could you let me know if you have?

The fallen snow will fall another time, the blossoms, scattered, will bloom again. Why is it that people alone, once gone, never come back again? How hateful, how hateful! Mere onlooker though I am, I know he was a splendid young man, a splendid young man, a jewel of a son—how happy you must have been to have such a son.

But, like the full moon that clouds cover and goes behind the mountain, like the shining blossoms that are heartlessly scattered by the wind—ah, how grievous is his loss!

Because of my illness, I do not ordinarily write answers myself to the letters I receive from others. But in your case the events are so sad that I have taken up my brush to write this. I do not feel that I will be in this world much longer. If that is the case, I will

no doubt soon be meeting with Gorō.
If I should meet him before you do, I
will tell him how much you grieve for
him. I will write more at another time.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The eighth day of the twelfth
month

Reply to the mother of Ueno



Background

Nichiren Daishonin sent this letter to the mother of Nanjō Tokimitsu from Mount Minobu in 1281, the year after she had lost her youngest son, Shichirō Gorō, and less than one year before his own death. Expressing appreciation for the offerings he had received, the Daishonin mentions that his physical condition has been deteriorating, and that her offerings have relieved his suffering.

Next, he expresses sympathy and deep concern for the mother, who still mourns the death of her son. The Daishonin has refrained from writing letters due to his weakened condition, he says, but the sadness of her loss moves him to make an exception. Sensing his own death approaching, the Daishonin promises to relate to Gorō how much his mother grieves for him.

Note

1. Nanjō Shichirō Gorō, the youngest of Nanjō Hyōe Shichirō's five sons and four daughters. His father, Hyōe Shichirō, died before he was born. In the sixth month of

1280, he and his brother Tokimitsu visited the Daishonin at Minobu, but about three months later he died suddenly at the age of sixteen.