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Reply to Nishiyama

I HAVE received the cask of sweet sake and the gifts of wild yams and tokoro yams that you sent. The Brah- 
ma Net Sutra says that in giving alms one must not begrudge even a single sheet of paper or a single straw. And The 
Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom tells how, because someone offered a mud pie to the Buddha, he was 
reborn as the king of Jambudvipa.2

How much greater by comparison are these gifts of yours! Moreover, you have lost your husband and are now a 
lay nun, with no one to depend upon. And from Nishiyama in the province of Suruga you have sent them all the way to the mountains of Hakiri in the province of Kai. You sent them, I surmise, because you understand how hard life is for me, a sage abandoned by the world and beset by the cold. Since I lost my father and mother, I have known no such kindness as this! When I think of the depth of your concern for me, I can barely hold back my tears.

I, Nichiren, may be an evil man, but how can the Lotus Sutra be anything but perfect? Though the bag may be smelly, the gold in it is pure; though the lake may be muddy, the lotuses that grow there are unsullied. I, Nichiren, may be the most perverse person in all Japan, but the Lotus Sutra is still the greatest of all the sutras. If sensible people wish to avail themselves of the gold, they will not discard its bag; if they care for the lotuses, they will not despise the lake.

If I were evil and yet were to attain Buddhahood, the power of the Lotus Sutra would be revealed without fail. Therefore, if I were to come to an evil end, that would perhaps bring disgrace upon the Lotus Sutra. As such is the case, though I may be seen as evil, let me be evil, let me be evil!

With my deep respect.

Reply

Background

This letter was written in 1281 and sent from Minobu to the widow of the lay priest Nishiyama, who lived in Nishiyama Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province. According to one account, the lay priest Nishiyama was a
relative of the steward of the village. After he died of an illness, his wife continued to send offerings to Nichiren Daishonin.

Notes

1. Also called onidokoro, genus Dioscorea. They are perennial plants with thick, sometimes woody roots or tuber-like underground stems and net-veined, often heart-shaped leaves that sometimes are lobed.

2. According to this work, the great king Ashoka, when he was a boy named Virtue Victorious in a previous existence, offered a mud pie to Shakyamuni Buddha as a gesture of respect. See also Ashoka and Virtue Victorious in Glossary.