I was very happy to receive the letter written by the priest Hōki.¹

The joy we feel at the beginning of spring is like the blossoms that open on the trees or the plants that spring up in the mountains. I, as well as others, am filled with joy. I have duly received the gifts noted in your list, namely, one sack of rice, one sack of salt, thirty slabs of steamed rice cake, and one sack of taros.

Here in the remote mountains the snow falls for three days at a time, until it is over ten feet deep in the garden. The valleys turn into peaks, and the peaks seem to be ladderling up to the sky. Birds and deer gather around my hermitage, but no woodcutters or herdsmen venture into the mountains. My clothes are thin, my food supplies exhausted. Nights I am no better off than the cold-suffering bird, and in the daytime I think constantly of going down to the village. The sound of voices reciting the sutra has ceased, my religious meditations grow thin, and I grieve to think that, should I falter in my practice in this present existence, I must go on suffering for major world system dust particle kalpas or for numberless major world system dust particle kalpas. But with these gifts of yours my life has been restored, and I am delighted to think that we may soon meet in person.

In the past, when the Buddha was still an ordinary mortal, in a turbulent age troubled by the five impurities he nourished the starving votaries of the Lotus Sutra and thereby was able to attain Buddhahood.² And if the words of the Lotus Sutra are true, then because of the merit [you have gained by your gifts], there can be no doubt that your deceased father has already achieved Buddhahood.

Your late brother Gorō too has by now journeyed to the pure land of Eagle Peak, where your father is patting him on the head. Just thinking of this, I find I cannot hold back my tears.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

The twentieth day of the first month

Reply to Ueno

[To Hōki]: I am sorry to trouble you, but may I ask you to read this letter to Ueno and make sure he understands the contents.
Background

This letter was written at Minobu on the twentieth day of the first month in 1282. To celebrate the New Year, Nanjō Tokimitsu, the steward of Ueno, had sent Nichiren Daishonin offerings of food. These were accompanied by a letter from the priest Hōki, or Nikkō. In reply, the Daishonin describes the snowbound winter landscape of Mount Minobu, where shortages of food and clothing have made it difficult to continue Buddhist practice. He expresses his gratitude for Tokimitsu's offerings under such circumstances, and compares his merit to that of the Buddha, who had nourished starving votaries of the Lotus Sutra in a past existence while still an ordinary mortal, and thus attained Buddhahood. Tokimitsu's merit, he suggests, assures the Buddhahood of the deceased, his father and younger brother. In the postscript, the Daishonin asks Nikkō to read this letter to Tokimitsu.

Notes

1. Hōki was the name that Nikkō, the Daishonin's closest disciple and successor, had received from the Daishonin on becoming his disciple at age thirteen.
2. The source of this story is uncertain.