

On Three Seating Mats



I HAVE received your gift of three seating mats and a basket of fresh wakame.

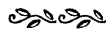
Your visit from the first to the fourth day of the third month was a great comfort to me. The illness that had made me so thin seemed to go away and I felt fit enough to go tiger hunting. And thanks to your gift of wakame, I think I could even ride a lion.

Possessions differ in value depending upon the place and the persons who use them. Here in Mount Minobu we have plenty of rocks but no rice cakes, lots of moss but no floor mats to sit on, so we peel off tree bark and use it instead. Therefore, your gift of seating mats could not help but be a most welcome possession.

The rich man known as the householder Shronakotivimsha¹ had hair

growing on the bottom of his feet. Not only at home, but wherever he went, he walked on what was like a four-inch carpet of cotton. And if you ask why this was so, it was because in a previous existence he had spread a bear-skin rug for a monk of eminent standing.

What a cause for rejoicing!—that in this country of Japan, a remote land some hundred thousand miles or more from India, and what is more, in islands inhabited by barbarians who have little understanding of the principle of cause and effect, and in the Latter Day of the Law too, that in this country that appears to put faith in the teaching of the Buddha but in fact slanders it, you not only win fame for the way in which you honor the Lotus Sutra, but donate seating mats to the Lotus Sutra as well!



Background

The final portion of this letter has been lost, so there is no record of its date or recipient. Because Nichiren Daishonin mentions a visit from the recipient “from the first to the fourth day of the third month” and overcoming an illness, however, it is thought to have been written at Minobu sometime in

the third month of 1282. Other letters indicate the Daishonin had been ill up until that time.

The Daishonin first expresses thanks for an offering of seaweed, saying he feels healthy enough to ride a lion.

The value of possessions varies according to need, he says. Because he

and his disciples have been using tree bark to sit on for lack of anything better, the gift of seating mats is particularly precious. To illustrate the benefit of such offerings, he relates the story from a Buddhist scripture of a man born with carpet-like hair on the soles of his feet. This occurred because in a

previous existence he had spread out a bear-skin rug for an eminent monk to sit on.

The extant letter ends where the Daishonin praises the recipient for distinguishing himself by honoring the Lotus Sutra in the country of Japan where slanderers of Buddhism abound.

Note

1. A reference to a Buddhist monk who attained the state of arhat in the time of Shakyamuni, as described in the Miscellaneous Āgama Sutra and *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*. "Householder" in Buddhist scriptures refers to male lay

practitioners of Buddhism in general, and wealthy householders of the Vaishya class in particular. Here it refers to a Vaishya class householder, which Shronakotivimsha was before he left the family to become a monk.