

Reply to the Wife of Matsuno



I AM deeply ashamed at having failed until now to respond to your gift of one chest of wheat, one basket of yams, one basket of melons, and various other items, which I received on the third day of the sixth month.

This place, the valley of Minobu, is located in the area of the three villages of Iino, Mimaki, and Hakiri of Kai Province, in the northwestern corner of the district of Hakiri. To the north, the peak of Mount Minobu pierces the heavens; to the south, Mount Takatori's crest merges with the clouds; to the east, Mount Tenshi rises as high as the sun; and to the west, great sheer mountains span across to the summit of Mount Shirane. The air above resounds with the screeching of monkeys, while the earth is filled with the chirring of cicadas.

I feel as if Eagle Peak in India had made its way here, or as if I were seeing Mount T'ien-t'ai in China right before my eyes. Although I am neither Shakyamuni Buddha nor the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, because each day I read the Lotus Sutra day and night and discuss *Great Concentration and Insight* morning and evening, this place is like the pure land of Eagle Peak and in no way different from Mount T'ien-t'ai.

Nevertheless, I am an ordinary person dependent on other things for my existence. If I were without clothes,

the wind would penetrate my body, and if I did not eat, my life could not be sustained. It would be like failing to replenish a lamp with oil, or failing to add wood to a fire. How could I continue to live? If my life should become difficult to maintain, if the provisions needed to sustain it were to be exhausted, in one to five days the voice that now reads and recites the Lotus Sutra would also be silenced, and weeds would grow up thick before the window from which discourses on *Great Concentration and Insight* are heard. Such are the conditions under which I live, but I wonder how you were able to perceive this.

Because a hare made offerings to a person walking about in exercise after meditation,¹ the heavenly lord Shakra took pity on it and placed it in the moon. Now, when we gaze up at the heavens, in the moon we see a hare.² In your position as a woman, you have made offerings to the Lotus Sutra in this defiled latter age. Therefore, the heavenly king Brahma will look after you with his divine eye, Shakra will press his palms together and pay obeisance to you, the earthly deities will delight in reverently holding up your feet, and Shakyamuni Buddha will extend his hand from Eagle Peak to pat your head. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The twentieth day of the sixth

month in the second year of Koan
(1279), cyclical sign *tsuchimoto-u*

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Background

Written in 1279, this letter was addressed to the wife of Matsuno Rokuro Saemon-no-jo, son of the lay priest Matsuno Rokuro Saemon.

Facts concerning Matsuno Rokuro Saemon-no-jo's wife, including her name, the dates of her birth and death, the province where she was born, and the identity of her parents, are unknown. She lived with her husband in the village of Matsuno in Ihara District

of Suruga Province. They are thought to have taken faith in the Daishonin's teachings at about the same time as her husband's father, although the exact year is not known. The two letters that the Daishonin addressed to her tell us that her gifts were varied and extremely thoughtful in content. She seemed to have taken great care to send items that would be especially useful to the Daishonin.

Notes

1. In ancient India, religious practitioners would often walk in circles around their place of meditation as a form of exercise. Shakyamuni and his followers engaged in this practice as well.

2. The original version of this story is found in *The Record of the Western Regions*. It tells of three friends—a fox, a hare, and a monkey—who lived in a densely forested area. One day, in order to test them, the heavenly lord Shakra appeared as an old man and asked them for food. After searching about, the fox brought back a fresh

carp, and the monkey returned with rare flowers and fruits. Only the hare returned empty-handed. He asked the fox and the monkey to prepare a fire. Then he flung his body into the fire, offering it to the old man. Moved by the hare's sincerity, the old man changed back to Shakra and said, "I will place the hare's body in the moon and convey his devotion to later generations." This story was used to explain the image of a hare that the people of ancient India saw in the moon.