

This month, we will study excerpts from President Ikeda's lecture 'New Year's gosho' from the lecture series 'Learning from the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: The Teachings for Victory.'

Ushering In a New Year Filled with Happiness and Hope¹

[...] As Mother Earth embarks on another journey around the sun, courageous Bodhisattvas of the Earth, burning with a noble sense of mission, have risen into action with a great vow for kosen-rufu in 192 countries and territories. Bodhisattvas of the Earth are the disciples who share the same spirit as the Buddha; they stand up with the same vow as their teacher and carry on their teacher's courageous and persevering actions. We of the Soka family have ushered in the dawn of an exciting New Year, more determined than ever before to make a fresh start and advance anew. "In life, one must have hope!"²—my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, declared in a New Year's message. He then went on to speak of the nobility of living out one's life with the great altruistic hope for the happiness for all humanity, refusing to be defeated by any adversity. Specifically citing the lofty life of Nichiren Daishonin, he noted with profound emotion: "The way that the Daishonin held fast to every one of his youthful hopes and dreams and brought them to fruition in his own life is a truly monumental achievement, shining like a magnificent palace."³ [...]

In this installment, I will discuss the Daishonin's "New Year's Gosho," so that we can again study the essence of Nichiren Buddhism. [...]

I have received a hundred slabs of steamed rice cake and a basket of fruit. New Year's Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year, and the start of spring.⁴ A person who celebrates this day [based on the Mystic Law] will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east,⁵ and as the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west. (WND-1, 1137)

Sincere Offerings for the New Year

The "New Year's Gosho" is addressed to a follower named the wife of Omosu, who sent the Daishonin 100 steamed rice cakes and a basket of fruit one New Year. The Japanese title translates literally as the "Steamed Rice Cake Gosho." The Daishonin mentions steamed rice cakes in other writings as well,⁶ always around the New Year. Steamed rice cakes were incised with a cross, so that they could be divided easily into smaller portions. They were part of the

¹ SGI Newsletter 9093.

² Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Works of Josei Toda), (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 291. (New Year's message for 1957)

³ Ibid., p. 292.

⁴ According to the Japanese lunar calendar, spring begins with the first month—that is, on New Year's Day by that calendar, which on the Gregorian calendar falls somewhere between January 21 and February 19.

⁵ This refers to the fact that the new moon is first seen in the west just after sunset. On successive nights, as the moon grows fuller, it appears to have moved a little farther toward the east.

⁶ For instance, in "The Third Day of New Year" (WND-1, 1013).

New Year celebration in the Daishonin's time, just as they are in Japan today. [...] This letter is thought to have been composed in 1281 [at Minobu, the year before the Daishonin's death]. Tokimitsu was facing great difficulties at the time [owing to the ongoing Atsuhara Persecution], forced by the authorities to pay heavy punitive taxes and supply unpaid labor simply because he was a follower of Nichiren Daishonin. In addition, the wife of Omosu had lost a beloved daughter to illness in the spring of 1278. [...] The daughter had sent the Daishonin several letters and received guidance from him. Before she died, she wrote saying it would probably be her last letter to him and expressing her serene state of mind as she faced death (cf. WND-1, 902).⁷ How brave and pure-hearted she was! No doubt her mother greeted each New Year with the resolve to remain steadfast in her Buddhist practice as a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, not only for her own sake but also on behalf of her departed daughter. As this New Year approached, she must have renewed that determination as she sent the Daishonin these offerings. The Daishonin in turn wholeheartedly praises her sincerity and vibrant resolve.

Making Every Day a Fresh Start

New Year's Day marks the start of a new day, a new month, and a new year. In the East since ancient times, therefore, it has been known the day of "three beginnings." In Japan, according to the old lunar calendar, New Year's Day also marks the beginning of spring. All in all, it is a very festive day of many new beginnings. The Daishonin says that a person who celebrates this day based on the Mystic Law will steadily accumulate virtue and benefit and come to be loved by all, just as the moon gradually grows fuller and the sun shines more brightly as it rises higher in the sky (cf. WND-1, 1173). The first day of the New Year is a day of beginnings. Everyone can start the New Year with a fresh new determination. It is a wonderful opportunity to reawaken ourselves to the Buddhist spirit of "true cause"⁸—the spirit of always moving forward from the present moment on. When we do so, our lives are sure to overflow with irrepressible joy. The Daishonin placed deep significance in the Chinese character hajime—meaning "first," "start," or "beginning." As one example, in "The Blessings of the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin writes:

In this entire country of Japan, I am the only one who has been chanting Nam-myoho-
renge-kyo. I am like the single speck of dust that marks the beginning of Mount

⁷ In "The Teaching for the Latter Day," the Daishonin writes: "In one [letter] that reached me on the night of the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the third month [March 14 or 15], she [the daughter of Ishikawa no Hyoe] wrote, 'When I observe the world around me, it seems that even healthy people will be unable to survive this year. I have been ill for a long time, but my illness has suddenly worsened, and I imagine that this will be my last letter to you.' Has she then passed away after all?" (WND-1, 902).

⁸ True cause: Also, the mystic principle of true cause. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism directly expounds the true cause for enlightenment as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is the Law of life and the universe. It teaches a way of Buddhist practice of always moving forward from this moment on and overcoming all problems and difficulties based on this fundamental Law.

Sumeru⁹ or the single drop of dew that spells the start of the great ocean. (WND-1, 672)

In the Japanese, beginning and start in this passage are written with the same character hajime mentioned earlier. I can't help but feel that the Daishonin's use of this character conveys his impassioned spirit to stand alone and initiate an intense struggle for kosen-rufu. In addition, he established for the first time the Gohonzon—the object of devotion for observing the mind. Embracing the Gohonzon itself constitutes “observing the mind,” or enlightenment. In that sense, let us strive every day as we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo resonantly before the Gohonzon to begin anew, powerfully bringing forth fresh life force from within us. The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to lead lives of complete fulfillment, with the spirit that every day is New Year's Day, and illuminated by the morning sun of time without beginning.

First of all, as to the question of where exactly hell and the Buddha exist, one sutra states that hell exists underground, and another sutra says that the Buddha is in the west. Closer examination, however, reveals that both exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother. (WND-1, 1137)

Hell and Buddhahood Both Exist within Us

The Daishonin must have regarded the wife of Omosu's sincere spirit—her efforts to support him and keep striving based on faith—as incredibly noble and beautiful. [...] In this letter, he is assuring her that the Buddha is not to be found somewhere far away, but is present within her own heart. He explains this ultimate essence of life, the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds¹⁰—one of the most important Buddhist doctrines—in an accessible way in the next section. To illustrate his point, the Daishonin chooses as examples the life states of Hell and Buddhahood, the two extremes among the Ten Worlds. These states of life, which to our ordinary mortal eyes seem the farthest from our everyday existence, are actually both present within our hearts. From the perspective of the widely held notions of hell and the Buddha at the time, this was a radical departure. [...] But in this writing, the Daishonin clearly states that both hell and the Buddha are right here “in our five-foot body” (WND-1, 1137) and “in the heart” (WND-1, 1137). First of all, by using the word “our,” the Daishonin indicates that these states are within all of us, himself included, without any distinction or discrimination. Second,

⁹ Mount Sumeru: In ancient Indian cosmology, the mountain that stands at the center of the world.

¹⁰ Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds: The principle that each of the Ten Worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself. “Mutual possession” means that life is not fixed in one or another of the Ten Worlds, but can manifest any of the ten—from the world of Hell to the world of Buddhahood—at any given moment. The important point of this principle is that all beings in any of the nine worlds possess the Buddha nature. This means that every person has the potential to manifest Buddhahood, while a Buddha also possesses the nine worlds and in this sense is not separate or different from ordinary people.

the world of Hell and Buddhahood are not far away. They exist in our lives, in the lives of real people living right here and now. In explaining the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the Daishonin first gives an example of how the world of Hell is a potential within one's own life, describing it, for instance, as "the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother" (WND-1, 1137).

Naturally, there are all kinds of relationships between parents and children, and simply honoring one's parents isn't the solution to every problem. But the fact remains that without our parents, we would not exist in this world. [...]

The World of Buddhahood Also Exists within the World of Humanity

In the following sentence, the Daishonin states: "The Buddha dwells within our hearts" (WND-1, 1137), and then he offers examples to explain the most difficult-to-comprehend fact that the world of Buddhahood also exists within the world of Humanity. He writes: "For example, flint has the potential to produce fire, and gems have intrinsic value" (WND-1, 1137). When cold flint is struck, it produces sparks. When gems are polished, they reveal their inherent worth. In the same way, though it is not immediately obvious, the life state of the Buddha most certainly resides within the lives of ordinary human beings, the Daishonin says.

He continues: "We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance" (WND-1, 1137). Our eyelashes are too close to our eyes for us to see them, and the far reaches of space are too remote to be visible. In the same way, it is hard for us to believe and accept that the world of Buddhahood also exists within the world of Humanity. [...] The most difficult aspect of the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is being convinced that the world of Buddhahood is contained within the world of Humanity—namely, that it exists right here in our lives, in our ordinary bodies and hearts.

The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, . . . and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect. The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains,¹¹ or the moon beginning to rise. (WND-1, 1137)

The Pure Lotus Blossoming from the Muddy Water

[...] A lotus seed may be buried in mud for thousands of years, until, when conditions are right, it sprouts, grows, and sends forth buds. Cherry trees endure the harsh winter to blossom

¹¹ Snow Mountains: A reference to various snow-covered mountains. In Buddhist scriptures, this name often refers to the Himalayas.

beautifully in spring. The Daishonin is saying that no matter how trying our circumstances, flowers of happiness will emerge from our lives and adorn us. These explanations must have been immensely encouraging to the wife of Omosu, who had experienced so many trials in life. In his analogies of the lotus flower, sandalwood tree, and cherry blossoms, the Daishonin uses very active phrases such as “blossoms out,” “grows from,” and “come forth,” respectively. His description of a moon that “rises from” and “sheds light on” is likewise rich in action. Dormant potentials emerge and blossom, and they start functioning dynamically. In The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, the Daishonin explains the term “attain Buddhahood,” saying: “‘Attain’ means to open or reveal” (OTT, 126).

Those Embracing the Mystic Law Are Sure to Become Happy

[...] Nichiren Daishonin declares: “Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away” (WND-1, 1137). Here, the Daishonin assures us that when we believe in the Lotus Sutra (the Gohonzon) and live out our lives to the best of our ability, we are certain to become happy. We will never sink into misery but attain happiness without fail. No matter what our present situation, no matter how things have been in our lives up to now, if we persevere earnestly in faith we will enjoy unsurpassed good fortune and benefit beyond measure and lead lives of deep fulfillment. “Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra” means those who bring forth the world of Buddhahood inherent in their “five-foot body” and “in their heart.” Such people have entered the great path of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. With their lives shining like the noblest of Buddhas, they can never be unhappy. We ourselves embody happiness. No one can take that happiness away. No one can destroy it. As practitioners of the Mystic Law, we possess an incredibly strong “magnet” that attracts good fortune and happiness. That is why the heavenly deities and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three existences gather around to protect us. With the most powerful life force, one can stand surrounded by good fortune and dwell at ease in a beautiful “magnificent palace” of happiness. Such happiness is not self-centered. Rather, it is an inexhaustible happiness, happiness that can embrace both oneself and others.

Building a Society of Respect for Life and Human Beings

At the beginning of this section, we find the words, “Now Japan” (WND-1, 1137). This shows that the Daishonin was concerned not only with the happiness of individuals, but that he also directed his attention to the nation and society at large. The Daishonin points out the one factor that determines the direction of not only each individual but of the nation and society as a whole: that is, whether people are enemies of the Lotus Sutra or whether they have faith in the Lotus Sutra. If we express this in contemporary terms, it means that everything depends on whether the principles of respect for the dignity of life and respect for human beings taught in the Lotus Sutra become the spirit of the age, or whether society descends into a callous,

coldhearted era in which life is devalued and people disrespected.

Happiness Is Found in Creating Value

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi came to see that happiness in life is found in creating value. If that is the case, then our efforts to create value by spreading the flowers of culture, the light of education, and the way to peace based on Buddhist humanism constitute the work of bringing fortune and happiness to the entire world. It is you, the outstanding members of the SGI, who are shouldering this enormous task. As “human flowers” whose “fragrance is like the sandalwood” (cf. WND-1, 1137), you embrace everyone around you with your warm smiles and gain the trust of all. [...] My trustworthy fellow members! My dear young friends! Burning with a passionate new vow for kosen-rufu, let us continue our courageous struggle together again this year!