

Friday, June 6, 2008

SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series**LEARNING FROM THE GOSHO: THE HOPE-FILLED WRITINGS
OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN****[8] "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra"****Faith for Absolute Victory—The Legacy Passed from Mentor to Disciple**

I have carefully read your letter, in which you [Shijo Kingo] described the recent skirmish with powerful enemies. So they have finally attacked you. It is a matter of rejoicing that your usual prudence and courage, as well as your firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, enabled you to survive unharmed.

When one comes to the end of one's good fortune, no strategy whatsoever avails. When one's karmic rewards are exhausted, even one's retainers no longer follow one. You survived because you still have both good fortune and rewards. Moreover, in the "Entrustment" chapter [of the Lotus Sutra], the heavenly gods and benevolent deities pledged to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. Of all the guardian deities in heaven, it is the gods of the sun and moon who visibly protect us. How can we doubt their protection? The heavenly deity Marichi in particular stands in service before the god of the sun. When the god of the sun protects the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, how could the honorable one of heaven Marichi, who is his vassal, possibly abandon them? The "Introduction" chapter of the sutra reads, "[At that time Shakra Devanam Indra with his followers, twenty thousand sons of gods, also attended.] There were also the sons of gods Rare Moon [the god of the moon], Pervading Fragrance [the god of the stars], Jeweled Glow [the god of the sun], and the four heavenly kings, along with their followers, ten thousand sons of gods" [LS1, 4]. Marichi must be among the thirty thousand sons of gods [who were followers of the gods of the moon, stars, and sun and] who were present at the ceremony [i.e., the assembly where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra]. Otherwise, this deity could only abide in hell.

You must have escaped death because of this deity's protection. Marichi gave you skill in swordsmanship, while I, Nichiren, have bestowed on you the five characters of the title of the Lotus Sutra [Myoho-rence-kyo]. There can be no doubt that Marichi protects those who embrace the Lotus Sutra. Marichi also upholds the Lotus Sutra and helps all living beings. Even the words [of the warrior mantra] "Those who join the battle are all in the front lines" derive from the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by the passage "If they [those who uphold the Lotus Sutra] should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law" [cf. LS19, 263]. Therefore, you must summon up the great power of faith more than ever. Do not blame the heavenly gods if you exhaust your good fortune and lose their protection.

Masakado was renowned as a brave general who had mastered the art of war, yet he was defeated by the armies under the emperor's command. Even [famous warriors of ancient China such as] Fan K'uai and Chang Liang had their failures. It is the heart that is important. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. "All others who bear you enmity or malice will likewise be wiped out" [cf. LS23, 288]. These golden words will never prove false. The heart of strategy and swordsmanship derives from the Mystic Law. Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

(WND-1, 1000-01)

Lecture

Fifty-five years ago, in 1953, when I was 25, I strove in the vanguard of our efforts to foster capable people and develop our movement as the leader of the young men's division First Corps. Devoting my energies to fostering one person at a time, I built a solid network of youth who were directly connected to our mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, and committed to realizing his goal of a membership of

750,000 households. When I started out as its leader, the First Corps itself only had about 300 members, but within a year I had expanded it into a united force of 1,000 young men dedicated to kosen-rufu.

The young men's division general meeting held at the end of that year was attended by many eager new young successors. On that occasion, a smiling Mr. Toda remarked: "I'm so charged by your high energy that I feel like I'm in my 20s again! I'm sure if Mr. Makiguchi were here to see you all, he would also be very happy."¹ He then continued as if speaking personally to each one of us: "Incidentally, there's something I'd like your advice on. How do we go about achieving kosen-rufu? I'd like you to come up with ways we can do this."² He always trusted and respected the youth and was prepared to do anything he could to contribute to their growth and development.

He would often say: "When you are young, it is very important to believe in yourself."³ And: "It is essential for young people to have something they can truly believe in. They need to trust their own hearts."⁴ The purpose of faith is to make our hearts strong and steadfast—that is, to develop inner strength and conviction. Everything depends on our minds, our hearts. The ultimate conclusion of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is summed up in the words: "It is the heart that is important" (WND-1, 1000).

Buddhism is win or lose. It is a struggle between enlightenment⁵ and ignorance.⁶ Kosen-rufu is a battle between the Buddha and devilish functions. Our heart or mind is what decides our victory or defeat in all things. Spiritual victors can lead lives that are not defeated by anything. The secret to adorning our lives with brilliant victory is the "strategy of the Lotus Sutra."

In this installment, we will study "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra," in which the Daishonin teaches the key ingredients for faith for absolute victory. Let us strive to

¹ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1989), vol. 4, p. 106.

² Ibid., p. 107.

³ Ibid., p. 541.

⁴ Ibid., p. 543.

⁵ Enlightenment here refers to the Dharma nature, the unchanging nature inherent in all things and phenomena. Dharma nature is a concept equal to the "true aspect" (Jpn. *jisso*) of all phenomena, or "the true aspect of reality" (*shinnyo*). In Buddhism, the term *dharma* means both phenomena and the truth underlying them. A Buddha is defined as one who is enlightened to the essential nature of phenomena, and an ordinary person as one who is ignorant of this nature. Hence both enlightenment and ignorance, or darkness, originate from one source, the essential nature of phenomena.

⁶ Ignorance: Also, illusion or darkness. In Buddhism, ignorance about the true nature of existence. Ignorance is the first of the twelve-linked chain of causation, the sequence of causal relationships connecting ignorance with suffering. In the concept of the twelve-linked chain of causation, ignorance is the fundamental cause of delusion, suffering, and transmigration in the realm of delusion and suffering.

learn from these lessons and engrave them in our lives.

I have carefully read your letter, in which you [Shijo Kingo] described the recent skirmish with powerful enemies. So they have finally attacked you. It is a matter of rejoicing that your usual prudence and courage, as well as your firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, enabled you to survive unharmed. (WND-1, 1000)

Prudence, Courage, and Firm Faith

After the Daishonin was pardoned and returned from exile on Sado⁷ (in 1274), Shijo Kingo, one of his leading disciples, felt inspired to urge his feudal lord Ema to embrace faith in the Lotus Sutra. Ema, however, was a follower of Ryokan, the chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school. Kingo thus gradually fell out of favor with him. Taking advantage of this, fellow retainers started circulating malicious rumors to discredit Kingo to his lord. This is how the persecutions against him started.

Eventually, Ema delivered an ultimatum demanding that Kingo either give up his faith or leave his service with the clan. But throughout this difficult period, Kingo continued to persevere with strong faith and devoted himself earnestly to serving his lord, based on the guidance and encouragement of the Daishonin. Consequently, in 1278, having succeeded in regaining Ema's trust, he was granted landholdings three times the size of those previously in his possession.⁸

Despite this upturn in fortunes, hostile elements driven by jealousy and resentment sought to kill Kingo. Anticipating such a development, the Daishonin had long warned his disciple to stay alert and take various precautions. This was one of the reasons why Kingo was able to prevail over his enemies and emerge unharmed from an attack they had made on him. Evidently he had reported the incident to his mentor, and "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra" is the letter the Daishonin wrote in reply.

⁷ Sado exile: When the authorities failed in their attempt to execute the Daishonin at Tatsunokuchi in September 1271, they sentenced him to exile on Sado Island the following month. He was eventually pardoned after two and a half years and returned to Kamakura in November 1274.

⁸ In 1277, Ema fell ill and had to seek treatment from Shijo Kingo, who was also a skilled physician. He recovered under Kingo's care and thereafter placed renewed trust in him. In 1278, Kingo received from Ema an estate three times larger than his former one.

October 1279, when this letter is dated, coincides with the height of the Atsuhara Persecution.⁹ The entire community of the Daishonin's believers was engaged in a struggle against formidable obstacles.

In his letter, the Daishonin lists three reasons why Kingo triumphed in his recent skirmish. The first is "usual prudence." In other words, staying alert, taking careful precautions, paying close attention to what's happening, and never slackening for a moment in any of those efforts. The second is "courage." Namely, the courage to deal calmly with any crisis, along with the wisdom that derives from such courage. And third is "firm faith in the Lotus Sutra." That is to say, the strong resolve to maintain steadfast faith in the Mystic Law, no matter what happens. This is the foundation for everything else. Because, ultimately, prudence and courage derive from faith.

Of course, it is a mistake to think that everything will somehow work out okay just because we're practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism. Indeed, precisely because we are practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism, it is vital that we be strongly determined to prevent accidents at all costs and keep devilish forces from taking advantage.

When Shijo Kingo was buffeted by the winds of adversity, the Daishonin gave him detailed advice, ranging from how he should behave toward his lord to how he should turn down invitations to go drinking at night with his colleagues.¹⁰ Even after Kingo showed victorious actual proof of faith in the form of receiving new landholdings from his lord, the Daishonin cautioned him to be all the more careful. This is an important point.

The Daishonin writes: "An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack" (WND-1, 952), and "The protection of the gods depends on the strength of one's faith" (WND-1, 953). Precisely when we are moving forward vigorously, we must be careful not to grow negligent or complacent. Arrogance and recklessness put us off guard. The Daishonin urges: "Be millions of times more careful than ever" (WND-1, 839). That is his solemn advice.

⁹ Atsuhara Persecution: A series of threats and acts of violence against followers of Nichiren in Atsuhara Village, in Fuji District of Suruga Province, beginning around 1275 and continuing until around 1283. In 1279, 20 farmers were unjustly arrested and sent to Kamakura, where they were interrogated by Hei no Saemon, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, who demanded that they renounce their faith; however, not one of them yielded. Eventually, three of these peasant followers were executed—the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro. They are known as the three martyrs of Atsuhara.

¹⁰ In a writing titled "Nine Thoughts to One Word," the Daishonin advises Shijo Kingo: "Even if summoned by your lord, you should first send an aide to your lord's residence to make certain that it is in fact your lord who has sent the summons. Then fasten your breastplate, don a headband, and provide yourself with men to attend you front and back and to your left and right, and only then venture forth. When you reach the residence of someone who lives near your lord and is friendly toward you, or the room assigned to you in your lord's mansion, you should remove your armor there before presenting yourself to your lord. When you come back to your own home, before you enter, send someone in ahead of you to inspect the doorways, the area under any bridges, the area behind the stables, the upper apartments, and any other dark places before you venture in yourself" (WND-2, 730–31).

Faith is a struggle between the Buddha and devilish functions. If we let down our guard or are the least bit careless, we risk being overrun and defeated by negative forces. That's why it's crucial for us to have strong faith and keep working at strengthening it without cease. Acting with wisdom based on such faith is the key to victory.

The Daishonin constantly emphasizes to his followers the importance of waging a faith-based struggle against the three obstacles and four devils. It is essential that we also remember to cultivate the kind of faith that can combat all obstacles and devilish functions. Such faith is an indispensable requirement for victory.

When one comes to the end of one's good fortune, no strategy whatsoever avails. When one's karmic rewards are exhausted, even one's retainers no longer follow one. You survived because you still have both good fortune and rewards. Moreover, in the "Entrustment" chapter [of the Lotus Sutra], the heavenly gods and benevolent deities pledged to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.¹¹ Of all the guardian deities in heaven, it is the gods of the sun and moon who visibly protect us. How can we doubt their protection? The heavenly deity Marichi in particular stands in service before the god of the sun. When the god of the sun protects the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, how could the honorable one of heaven Marichi, who is his vassal, possibly abandon them? The "Introduction" chapter of the sutra reads, "[At that time Shakra Devanam Indra with his followers, twenty thousand sons of gods, also attended.] There were also the sons of gods Rare Moon [the god of the moon], Pervading Fragrance [the god of the stars], Jeweled Glow [the god of the sun], and the four heavenly kings, along with their followers, ten thousand sons of gods" [LS1, 4]. Marichi must be among the thirty thousand sons of gods [who were followers of the gods of the moon, stars, and sun] who were present at the ceremony [i.e., the assembly where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra]. Otherwise, this deity could only abide in hell.

You must have escaped death because of this deity's protection. Marichi gave you skill in swordsmanship, while I, Nichiren, have

¹¹ Possibly a reference to the passage that reads: "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded" (LS22, 278).

bestowed on you the five characters of the title of the Lotus Sutra [Myoho-rence-kyo]. There can be no doubt that Marichi protects those who embrace the Lotus Sutra. Marichi also upholds the Lotus Sutra and helps all living beings. Even the words [of the warrior mantra] “Those who join the battle are all in the front lines”¹² derive from the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by the passage “If they [those who uphold the Lotus Sutra] should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law” [cf. LS19, 263]. Therefore, you must summon up the great power of faith more than ever. Do not blame the heavenly gods if you exhaust your good fortune and lose their protection. (WND-1, 1000)

Faith That Activates the Heavenly Deities

The Daishonin asserts that Shijo Kingo survived the attack on him because he “still had both good fortune and rewards” (WND-1, 1000). “Good fortune” here means luck, while “rewards” refers to blessings that have been received in return for virtuous acts. From the profound view of Buddhism, luck is not just a matter of chance or coincidence; it is actually the result of the blessings we have accumulated in our lives. We’re the ones who are responsible for improving our luck or good fortune and increasing our blessings or karmic rewards.

The Daishonin then goes on to discuss the principle of protection by the heavenly deities—the benevolent functions of the universe—in order to clarify that Shijo Kingo’s own faith in the Lotus Sutra was the source of the “good fortune and rewards” that saved him from danger.

In the Lotus Sutra, the heavenly deities are described as making a pledge to protect the sutra’s votaries. Here, the Daishonin says that among all these innumerable guardian deities, it is the gods of the sun and the moon who carry out the function of protecting the saha world¹³ in a form that is clearly discernible to us. He further states that specifically in the case of Shijo Kingo’s recent skirmish, protection was no doubt lent by the heavenly deity Marichi, a vassal of the god of the sun.

¹² A quote from the fourth-century Taoist work *Pao-p’u Tzu* (*Baopuzi*). Chinese soldiers believed that reciting this phrase while drawing four vertical and five horizontal lines in the air with their fingers would protect them from harm. This practice later spread to Japan and was widely adopted among the samurai of the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

¹³ Saha world: This world, which is filled with suffering. Often translated as the world of endurance. Saha means the earth; it derives from a root meaning “to bear” or “to endure.” In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering.

Marichi, a deification of light and mirages, was said to proceed before the sun in its advance and that as such no one could see his true form, restrain him, or cause him harm. Because of this, Marichi appears to have been worshipped as a guardian deity by warriors during the Daishonin's day.

The Daishonin counts Marichi among the followers of the gods of the sun, the moon, and the stars—collectively known as the three heavenly gods of light—who gathered at the assembly where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra, and regards him as a heavenly deity who protects those who believe in the sutra.

The Daishonin states that it was Marichi who gave Shijo Kingo his skill in swordsmanship when he succeeded in driving off his attackers, and that this function of Marichi was produced by the power of the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo that he had bestowed on his disciple.

The protection of the heavenly deities functions in accord with the principle of “the Buddha nature manifesting itself from within resulting in protection from without” (cf. WND-1, 848). In other words, when we believe in the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we reveal our innate Buddha nature and this in turn activates the Buddha nature of all living beings which then function to protect us from without. This is what we refer to as the workings of the heavenly deities. Hence, the Daishonin declares that those who uphold faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, will definitely be safeguarded by these protective forces.

The Mystic Law Is the Source of All Wisdom

The Daishonin then goes on to explain the principle that “the affairs of this world are Buddhism,”¹⁴ in order to show that faith in the Lotus Sutra can serve as a source of value creation in all spheres of human endeavor. He offers as an example the famous nine-character mantra of the day recited by warriors as an incantation to protect them from harm in battle: “Those who join the battle are all in the front lines” (Jpn. *Rin pyo to ja kai jin retsu zai zen*). These words are thought to have originated from Chinese Taoist teachings, but in the Kamakura era of the Daishonin's day, they were widely in use among members of the warrior class.

The Daishonin asserts that this phrase also derives from the Lotus Sutra, citing as evidence the following passage from the “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” (19th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “If they [those who uphold the Lotus Sutra] should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law” [cf. LS19, 263] (WND-1, 1000).

The “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” chapter clarifies the benefit of the

¹⁴ The Daishonin cites the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai as saying: “In the Golden Light Sutra it is recorded that ‘all the good teachings that exist in the world derive from this sutra. To have a profound knowledge of this world is itself Buddhism’” (WND-1, 221).

“purification of the six senses”¹⁵ that accrues to practitioners who uphold and preach the correct teaching after the Buddha’s passing. In other words, we can purify our six sense organs—our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—and bring forth our rich potential for value creation. Through the power of the Mystic Law, we can overcome all hindrances such as ignorance and delusion and create the greatest possible value in our lives. This is what is meant by the benefit of the purification of the six senses.

The sutra passage cited by the Daishonin specifically corresponds to one benefit that accrues from purifying our mind. It tells us that when the functions of our mind are purified through upholding the Lotus Sutra, then when we speak on any matter of worldly affairs, our words will be correct and conform with Buddhism.

When recited by a practitioner of the Mystic Law, even the warrior mantra “Those who join the battle are all in the front lines” will manifest the value it was originally believed to possess—namely, that of protecting those who recite it. This is because its protective power is ultimately a function of the Mystic Law.

At essence, all of the best wisdom and cultural traditions that have developed with the aim of promoting human happiness, security, and prosperity in no way run counter to the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin writes: “When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs” (WND-1, 376). If we “know the Lotus Sutra”—that is, believe in the Mystic Law—we will “understand the meaning of all worldly affairs”—that is, we can bring forth true wisdom regarding all affairs of society, such as those of work or daily life, and live correctly. At the same time, it means that we must make every effort to develop this ability. Faith shouldn’t make us complacent. Rather, it should spur us to do our very best, to apply ourselves with wisdom, dedication, and energy to all areas of our life—be it work, study, child raising, or fostering friendships in the local community.

Masakado was renowned as a brave general who had mastered the art of war, yet he was defeated by the armies under the emperor’s command. Even [famous warriors of ancient China such as] Fan K’uai and Chang Liang had their failures. It is the heart that is important. No

¹⁵ Purification of the six sense organs: Also, purification of the six senses. This refers to the six sense organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind becoming pure, making it possible to apprehend all things correctly. The “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” (19th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains that those who uphold and practice the Lotus Sutra acquire 800 benefits of the eyes, nose, and body, and 1,200 benefits of the ears, tongue, and mind, and that through these benefits the six sense organs become refined and pure.

matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. “All others who bear you enmity or malice will likewise be wiped out”¹⁶ [cf. LS23, 288]. These golden words will never prove false. The heart of strategy and swordsmanship derives from the Mystic Law. Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

(WND-1, 1000–01)

The Essence of Buddhism: The Heart Is Most Important

Masakado refers to Taira no Masakado (d. 940), a great Japanese warrior of the Heian period (794–1185) who possessed outstanding military skill and achieved dominion over the Kanto region in eastern Japan. Nevertheless, he and his forces were destroyed on the orders of the imperial court, which felt threatened by his growing power.

Fan K’uai (Fan Kuai), who excelled in valor, and Chang Liang (Zhang Liang), a brilliant strategist, were famous generals of ancient China. They lent their support to Liu Pang (Liu Bang; 256–195 B.C.E.), who later became the first emperor of the Han dynasty; both made important contributions to the dynasty’s founding. Their quick-witted and decisive action also saved Liu from an assassination attempt during his meeting with another noted warlord, Hsiang Yü (Xiang Yu). This is the well-known “Hongmen Banquet” incident. The activities of Fan K’uai and Chang Liang are described in such Chinese classics as the *Compendium of Eighteen Histories*, a work that Mr. Toda read and studied up until the end of his life.

No matter how skilled Fan K’uai and Chang Liang may have been in the art of war, had they not shared Liu Pang’s commitment to fight for a noble cause, they wouldn’t have been able to make the great contributions they did to the founding of the Han dynasty; all of their strategies would have been to no avail. Power, military prowess, wealth, fame, and other external trappings do not automatically translate into victory. Nor do they guarantee happiness.

“It is the heart that is most important” (WND-1, 1000). This is the Daishonin’s ultimate conclusion. Happiness is not determined by educational background, titles, social status, organizational position, or age. It all comes down to our heart or mind. A

¹⁶ In the sutra, the sentence reads in the past tense. It was changed here to fit the context of this letter.

heart can be clouded by darkness, or ignorance; or it can shine brightly as an entity of the Mystic Law, free of all such ignorance. A deluded mind is trapped in a descending cycle of negativity and misery, with the sufferings of birth and death only intensifying. In contrast, an enlightened mind—one that shines as an entity of the Mystic Law—carves out a solid, ascending path of optimism and hope, having the power to transform that which is negative into something positive. The potential for both these states of mind exist within our lives. Ignorance and enlightenment are one in essence (cf. WND-1, 418). Therefore, the entity of “a mind clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life” can come to shine as a sparkling jewel of “the essential nature of phenomena, the true aspect of reality” (cf. WND-1, 4).¹⁷ We can transform ignorance into enlightenment, thereby changing poison into medicine. That is why the Law is described as mystic or wondrous.

A mind that has broken free of the fetters of ignorance is as vast as the sky and as free as a soaring eagle. Further, it is as dignified and majestic as the colossal Treasure Tower in the Lotus Sutra, freely delighting in the Law and abounding with absolute peace of mind. It is filled with the Buddha wisdom to be able to rise above and overcome all ills and misfortunes.

The power of the mind is truly unfathomable. A subtle change in our mind can change everything. The practice that lets us draw forth this power of the mind is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for ourselves and others. The Daishonin writes: “This mind that is beyond comprehension constitutes the core teaching of the sutras and treatises. And one who is awake to and understands this mind is called a Thus Come One [i.e., a Buddha]” (WND-2, 844).

Making full use of this power of the mind is the key to victory in terms of both our daily life and our eternal existence. This is none other than the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra.”

Sharing the Same Commitment as the Mentor

Nichiren Daishonin actualized this ultimate true potential of the mind, and he inscribed the Gohonzon—the object of devotion—as a direct expression of the vast and boundless state of life he achieved. Consequently, when we single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, it is like facing a mirror and seeing our inner universe—that is, the towering life-state of Buddhahood—clearly reflected back at us. We can manifest in our own lives the same courageous life-state of the lion king, just as the Daishonin did.

¹⁷ The Daishonin writes: “A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND-1, 4).

Nichikan Shonin (1665–1726), who is known as a great restorer of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, writes: “Through the power of the Mystic Law, we manifest the life of the Daishonin within ourselves.”¹⁸ He also says: “When we believe in the object of devotion with our whole heart, the object of devotion itself becomes our heart. Therefore, the world of Buddhahood is itself the nine worlds. When we single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our life in its entirety becomes the object of devotion.”¹⁹

The Daishonin declares: “This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith”²⁰ (WND-1, 832). In the passage “It is the heart that is important,” “heart” can be interpreted as “faith.” A heart of true and genuine faith is an unsurpassed treasure; it contains within it all the treasures of the universe.

In “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” as in other writings, the Daishonin emphasizes one important point regarding our attitude in faith. And that is praying and striving with the same spirit as the mentor. We can discern this message in the following passage: “No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder” (WND-1, 1000–01). In another letter to Shijo Kingo, the Daishonin also warns: “If lay believers and their teacher pray with differing minds, their prayers will be as futile as trying to kindle a fire on water” (WND-1, 795).

Further, in a letter that he sent from Minobu to the lay nun Sennichi on Sado Island, the Daishonin praises her ongoing seeking spirit toward his teachings despite the distance separating them: “Though you remain in Sado, your heart has come to this province. . . . It is the heart that is important” (WND-1, 949). He warmly encourages her, telling her that even though she is far away, her heart has reached him, and that they share a profound connection. One’s sincerity of heart is the most important thing, he assures her.

In the passage, “It is the heart that is important,” “heart” can also be interpreted as “the spirit of sharing the same heart as the mentor.” The Daishonin writes: “Those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren for example.” (WND-1, 302).

The heart of faith to actively propagate the Mystic Law, the heart of a disciple to actively support the mentor, and the heart of a lion to actively speak out for truth and justice—these are the most powerful weapons and strategies we have for achieving peace and securing happiness across the three existences of past, present, and future. This, the Daishonin says, is the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 1001).

The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra: Faith That Brings Absolute Victory

¹⁸ “Totaigi Sho Mondan” (Commentary on “The Entity of the Mystic Law”).

¹⁹ “Kanjin no Honzon Sho Mondan” (Commentary on “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”).

²⁰ The Japanese word for faith consists of two Chinese characters.

In its original sense, the term “strategy” refers to battle tactics, the science of warfare, or martial arts. Considered more broadly, it can be taken to mean a method for achieving better results in all areas—that is to say, for leading a victorious life of value creation.

The “strategy of the Lotus sutra” refers to faith in the Gohonzon. It is faith that battles ignorance and delusion, breaks through negative karma, and wins without fail through confident prayer and the boundless wisdom and courage that flow forth as a result.

No matter what the situation, when we base ourselves on the Mystic Law, the ultimate Law of the universe, we will never be deadlocked. The unparalleled power of the Mystic Law enables us to overcome all obstacles or enemies that hinder us on the path to attaining Buddhahood. The Daishonin cites the passage from the “Medicine King” chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “All others who bear you enmity or malice will likewise be wiped out” [cf. LS23, 288] (WND-1, 1001). These words indicate one example of the immense good fortune that comes from embracing and propagating the Lotus Sutra. Being able to defeat all obstacles and negative forces through faith in the Mystic Law is the power of the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra.”

Hence, the Daishonin indicates that the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra” is in fact the essence of the “strategy and swordsmanship” that allowed Shijo Kingo to emerge unscathed and victorious from his encounter with enemies (cf. WND-1, 1001).

The foundation of all of our efforts, endeavors, and challenges—whether it be staying healthy, leading a fulfilling life, and showing actual proof of winning trust in the community and in society—is the strategy of the Lotus Sutra, or in other words, strong faith.

At the end of his letter to Shijo Kingo, the Daishonin writes: “Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered” (WND-1, 1001).

“Cowardice shuts the eyes”²¹—this was the insight of the American Renaissance philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82). Cowardice prevents us from seeing the truth, from seeing things as they are. It can cause even a minor hardship to appear like a huge, immovable obstacle, and make even the door to a solution appear instead like a thick wall. Courage is, therefore, crucial.

Emerson says something very interesting: “It is plain that there is no separate essence called courage, no cup or cell in the brain, no vessel in the heart containing drops or atoms that make or give this virtue; but it [courage] is the right or healthy state of every man, when he is free to do that which is constitutional to him to do. It is directness,— the instant performing of that which he ought.”²² In terms of Buddhism, courage indicates the most sound and robust spirit that derives from our inherent

²¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1870), p. 244.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 251.

Buddha nature, which could be described as our most “healthy state”; it means the fighting spirit to vanquish our fundamental darkness and instantly reveal our enlightened Dharma nature.

For us, courage means to challenge the real-life issues confronting us right where we are with the belief that we ourselves are entities of the Mystic Law. This is the way to employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra and construct an indestructible history of victory and glory.

As a young man working under Mr. Toda, I battled various hardships. Whenever I reached an impasse, I would chant daimoku to break through. I would chant daimoku and challenge myself afresh. Determined to win victory for my mentor and for kosen-rufu, each day I fiercely pitted myself against one obstacle after another. And in the end, I triumphed over all adversity.

“For my mentor!” “For kosen-rufu!”—when youth strive with this strong resolve to reply to their mentor and contribute to kosen-rufu, they will be able to bring forth their true full potential and ability. This, from my personal experience, is the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra.”

In order to realize Mr. Toda’s vision, I exerted myself on the front lines of countless hard-fought battles, and as a result, I came to understand the true meaning of faith that brings absolute victory. During the 11 years that I served my mentor, I showed unequivocal actual proof of victory based on the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra.” This brought Mr. Toda great joy.

The time has now come for me to entrust this practical philosophy for certain victory to my genuine disciples.

Just as Mr. Toda called out 55 years ago, I would like to call out to all the youth who are my true successors: “My young friends, how will you accomplish kosen-rufu? What are the challenges that lie before you? Where and how will you fight and win?”

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