

## Study Material for January • February “The Opening of the Eyes”

*(The following passage is taken from the book Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, pp. 49–58, and can also be found in The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, pp. 186–87.)*

### Spiritual Victory in the Midst of a Great Storm

A TOTALLY cloudless sky. An endless sea of blue. My mentor, Josei Toda, once used these images to describe Nichiren Daishonin’s life state while in exile on Sado Island:

If it were people like us [who were in exile on Sado], our lives would be in the depths of hell itself. But in the case of Nichiren Daishonin, who was utterly invincible and free from fear, we find that his life from moment to moment was as [vast and serene as] the ocean or the sky.

In “The Opening of the Eyes,”<sup>1</sup> the Daishonin says: “I, Nichiren, am the richest man in all of present-day Japan. I have dedicated my life to the Lotus Sutra, and my name will be handed down in ages to come” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 151).

In the Daishonin’s day, the winters on Sado were a great deal more severe than they are today. And he was living at Tsukahara in a dilapidated shrine called Sanmai-do. Socially, he was an exile. His life was constantly in jeopardy. Under such conditions, with the roar of a lion, he voiced this declaration as a king of the spirit.

Arriving at Tsukahara on November 1, 1271, Nichiren Daishonin began composing lengthy manuscripts with an awesome vigor; the image that comes to my mind is that of a great waterfall. In the second month of the following year, he entrusted a messenger from Shijo Kingo with a Goshō intended for all of his followers — “The Opening of the Eyes.”

Even amid the blowing snows on Sado, his conviction in the justice of his actions was like a flame. It definitely was not extinguished; rather, his burning spirit to lead all people to happiness blazed all the more brilliantly.

With this writing, he wanted to convey his immense life state to his followers, to show them that only through waging a great life-or-death struggle can one manifest a truly immense state of life. He wanted to establish this truth for all time.

While the original manuscript of “The Opening of the Eyes” is not extant, it is said to have been sixty-six pages long, with sixty-five pages of text and a cover page reading “Opening of the Eyes.”

The title refers to opening the eyes, or the minds, of the Japanese people. In light of the sutras, it is clear that Nichiren Daishonin was truly a person of justice. With this writing, the Daishonin declares that he is the votary of the

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Lotus Sutra and, hence, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

I hope that, by studying the final section of this writing, we can learn about the Daishonin's towering state of life.

**Question:** When you condemn the evil of the followers of the Nembutsu and Zen sects and arouse their enmity, what merit does that bring?

**Answer:** The Nirvana Sutra says, "If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him or to bring his offense to light, then you should realize that that monk is an enemy of Buddhism from within. But if he ousts the destroyer of the Law, reproaches him or exposes his offense, then he is my [the Buddha's] disciple and a true voice-hearer."

Chang-an comments on this as follows: "One who destroys or brings confusion to the Buddha's teachings is an enemy of Buddhism from within. If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy. But one who reprimands and corrects an offender is a voice-hearer who defends the Buddha's teachings, a true disciple of the Buddha. One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent. Those who reproach offenders are disciples of the Buddha. But those who do not oust offenders are enemies of Buddhism from within."<sup>2</sup> (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 186)

It is one thing if a person does something wrong, but all too often those doing good are vilified and attacked. While completely unreasonable, this is the reality of society.

The great author Leo Tolstoy said: "You cannot live without enemies.... And the fact of the matter is, the more upright you live, the more enemies you will have."<sup>3</sup>

Never has anyone called out for justice as did the Daishonin. Never has anyone fought so hard for the happiness of all people. As a result, he encountered one persecution after another. And, in what was tantamount to a death sentence, he was exiled to Sado Island.

The persecution was directed against his followers, too. Some were imprisoned, others had fiefs taken away and still others were banished. The confusion and unrest among the Daishonin's followers was intense. Fearful, many discarded their faith or simply fell silent.

Some disciples even, with knowing looks on their faces, criticized their mentor, telling people things like, "If you are more flexible in spreading the teaching, you won't face persecutions like those besetting our revered teacher."

At the end of "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin addresses this. He poses the question: In propagating this teaching, what merit does it bring, what can you gain, if you arouse the enmity of those around you? Citing a sutra passage, the Daishonin replies: Doesn't the Nirvana Sutra say that those seeking to destroy the Law should be reproached and driven away, that their offenses be made clear, that they cannot be simply disregarded? Doesn't it say that people should be reproached for their evil, ousted and their offenses brought to light?

In essence, treating someone who tries to subvert the teachings in this manner is a practice of compassion necessary to protect Buddhism. Therefore, although

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those who carry this out may encounter persecution, they can definitely attain Buddhahood. And, the Daishonin says, there is no greater merit or benefit than this.

“My disciples,” he cries, “do not be afraid!” “Live with pride and dignity, chests out and heads held high, like lion kings!” Out of his immense compassion, he wishes to convey to all his disciples his desire for them to lead good lives and continue advancing along the path of belief that they have resolved to follow.

Buddhism only exists in action. Through action, the Mystic Law inherent in our lives begins to shine. The Buddhist gods and all Buddhas protect people of action; those who consistently take action for justice are truly happy.

Nichiren Daishonin was stronger than anyone. And what was the source of his strength? It was his concern for the people.

But it seems that the Daishonin’s strength was generally misunderstood. Toward Hei no Saemon and wicked priests, the Daishonin was the severest foe. Yet he teaches his followers that in spreading the teaching to others, they should conduct themselves courteously. For example, he advised one person to always speak “mildly but firmly in a quiet voice with a calm gaze and an even expression” (MW-4, 122).

Again, in his landmark treatise the “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” which takes the form of a dialogue between a traveler and a host, the host (representing the Daishonin) never at any point raises his voice. On the contrary, when the guest becomes agitated, the host soothes him, smiles brightly and tenaciously continues the dialogue. We can take it that the Daishonin depicts the host in such a way because this was how he himself conducted dialogue.

If we examine the Hoto chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find Shakyamuni Buddha, Taho Buddha and the various Buddhas from the ten directions who are emanations of Shakyamuni Buddha gathering together. And why? As the sutra itself says, “Each ... has come to this place on purpose to make certain the Law will long endure” (LS11, 177). Shakyamuni, Taho and the other Buddhas intend to insure the future propagation of the Lotus Sutra so that it can be made available to every single living being, the children of the Buddha, in times to come. We may surmise from this that their concern and compassion are even greater than that of a father and mother who see their only child inflicted with great suffering. Honen, however, indifferent to their pain, would tightly shut the gates to the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law so that no one would have access to it. Like a person who tricks a demented child into throwing away his treasure, he induces people to discard the Lotus Sutra, a shameless thing to do indeed!

If someone is about to kill your father and mother, shouldn’t you try to warn them? If a bad son who is insane with drink is threatening to kill his father and mother, shouldn’t you try to stop him? If some evil person is about to set fire to the temples and pagodas, shouldn’t you try to stop him? If your only child is gravely ill, shouldn’t you try to cure him with moxibustion treatment? To fail to do so is to act like those people who see but do not try to put a stop to the Zen and Nembutsu followers in Japan. As Chang-an says, “If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy.” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 186–87)

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## **The Buddha Yearns To Save Those Most Miserable**

WITH what intention do Shakyamuni, Taho and Shakyamuni's emanations, the Buddhas of the ten directions, gather in one place in "Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (*Hoto*), the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra? They do so entirely out of their desire to ensure the future propagation of the Lotus Sutra, to see to it that the Lotus Sutra is made available to all living beings, who are all children of the Buddha, in the future.

The Nirvana Sutra relates that just before Shakyamuni died, he lamented: "I will shortly die. The matter of King Ajatashatru is my only misgiving."

King Ajatashatru was for many years bitterly hostile toward Shakyamuni, and even tried to kill him. He had murdered his own father, the king, to take over the throne. But even as king, inwardly his life was impoverished and empty. Shakyamuni was deeply pained by the thought of Ajatashatru's unhappiness.

A disciple then asked Shakyamuni, "If the Buddha's compassion is directed toward all beings equally, then why are you concerned only about King Ajatashatru?"

Shakyamuni answered: "Consider the case of a couple that has seven children. The parents love all their children equally and without discrimination. But if one child falls ill, won't the parents be most concerned about that sick child?"

"I will definitely not abandon—I will not forget—the person who is the most miserable. Rather, I will try hardest of all to save that person." This is the Buddha's conviction.

Nichiren Daishonin strove to save all the people of Japan, including those who had persecuted him and even exiled him to Sado.

President Toda said, "Because of the Daishonin's love for the people of Japan, he directly accepted the onslaught of the three powerful enemies, thinking nothing of the great persecutions that befell him time and again." The Daishonin, while on Sado, goes so far as to say, "I pray that before anything else I can guide to the truth the sovereign and those others who persecuted me" (MW-1,117).

What a magnanimity of spirit!

From the time he declared the establishment of his teaching, the Daishonin never retreated a step in his great and merciful struggle for the people, whom he loved as his own children.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin indicates his frame of mind prior to establishing his teaching on April 28, 1253, saying he was fully aware that if he did not speak out and proclaim the correct Buddhist teaching for the Latter Day, he "would be lacking in compassion" (MW-1, 95).

To spread this Buddhism would mean encountering great obstacles. Had he not spoken out, he could well have led a peaceful and secure existence—but to have done so, he says, would have been lacking in compassion.

No matter how compassionate some might appear, if they fail to take action it is the same as if they have no compassion; they lack compassion.

The opposite of compassion is “false friendship”—falsely befriending another. This term clearly mirrors the state of society today. President Toda proclaimed: “People’s lives today lack any sense of compassion.... Isn’t a lack of compassion the prime characteristic of the present age?”

Society today is very cruel and unforgiving. In this compassionless society, SGI members are working to relieve people of their sufferings and impart true joy, while proclaiming the truth from the very depths of their lives out of genuine concern for others.

Through our efforts at dialogue, through our actions, we are fundamentally changing a society that lacks compassion and is awash with false friendship.

We are transforming the destiny of our society, which has a tendency to be discriminatory and lacking in compassion. We are sending the sunlight of spring to a society that is locked in a frigid winter. We are thawing people’s hearts with a warm current of humanity.

I am confident that, without a doubt, the Daishonin most highly praises all of you who are steadfastly carrying through with the bodhisattva practice of compassion as true disciples and as “followers who share my spirit.” □

1. “The Opening of the Eyes” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 186–237; MW-2, 59–188), written in February 1272 when the Daishonin was 51. Editor’s Note: The Gosho text here may differ in places from what appears in the *Major Writings* or other previously published translations. This is so that the wording of the English text will accord more smoothly with the modern Japanese translation of the original Japanese Gosho. (The author is using a modern Japanese rendering of the classical Japanese original as the basis of his lectures in this series.)

2. “Nehangyo Sho.”

3. Translated from the Japanese: *Leo Tolstoy, Torusutoi nikkisho* (Diaries of Leo Tolstoy), trans. Yoshitaro Yosemura (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1935), p. 112.

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