

Courage To Oppose Injustice: An Expression of Compassion for the People

IN "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin quotes the following passage from the Nirvana Sutra:

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 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" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 186).

The Daishonin quotes this passage in many other writings as well to illustrate the correct attitude toward the corruption of the Buddhist teachings. His message is clear. We must reveal distortions by "the destroyer of the Law" and rebuke him or her to protect the integrity of Buddhism and its practitioners.

But when confronting someone who is clearly attempting to destroy the teachings of Buddhism, we may still feel uncomfortable even though we are following exactly what the Daishonin teaches. The image of a strict and even combative Buddhist conflicts with our image of a person of serene composure helping the distressed.

Through this sutra passage, however, the Daishonin shows us another aspect of being a Buddhist—someone who is unflinching in the face of "the destroyer of the Law." However, we shouldn't confuse a person who is a "destroyer of the Law" with those he has deceived. As demonstrated in many of the Daishonin's letters to the ordinary people, it is essential for those who practice Buddhism to extend their warmth and concern to the suffering and to pray for their happiness. The Daishonin, however, points out that when the integrity of Buddhism and thus the happiness of the people are endangered, Buddhist practitioners should not allow themselves to be victimized. In the short run, to be a victim is an easier path. Victims can always blame others for their misery. By not asserting themselves, they need not put themselves to the test, thus assuring neither a possibility of failure nor responsibility for their lives.

When reading the Daishonin's writings, we can see that he was unyielding when it came to those who would subjugate the people and lead them to unhappiness by distorting the teachings of Buddhism. But when it came to his followers and the populace in general, his compassion was unmatched.

In "The Opening of the Eyes" he states:

When it comes to understanding the Lotus Sutra, I have only a minute fraction of the vast ability that T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo possessed. But as regards my ability to endure persecution and the wealth of my compassion for others, I believe they would hold me in awe." (MW-2, 100)

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The Daishonin encourages us to take an unyielding stance when it comes to the integrity of Buddhism. Both aspects of a Buddhist, being gentle and generous on one hand while strict and strong on the other, derive from the most important Buddhist value—compassion. In this respect, SGI President Ikeda gives us a valuable insight:

To take a strict stance in good and evil and to show generosity toward others—these two things are in no way incompatible and are essentially part of the same whole.

Let's suppose, for example, that someone eats poisonous mushrooms and is rushed to a doctor. Irrespective of whom the patient may be, the doctor naturally exhausts all possible means to save the person and also offers sincere words of encouragement. This, we might say, is an example of "generosity toward others."

It is also likely, however, that the doctor will warn the patient not to eat harmful mushrooms in the future. I am sure there is no doctor who would stand by indifferently while the patient declares, "But poisonous mushrooms are delicious; I want to eat them again." This corresponds to "taking a strict stance toward the Law."

In both these instances, the doctor is motivated by his compassion and commitment to removing the patient's suffering. This is also the behavior of a Buddhist. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 204–05)

Opposing injustice is an expression of one's compassion for the people. In fact, unless we are strong and resolute enough to stand up to injustice, no matter how much kindness we show to others, it is merely cowardice disguised as compassion.

To condemn injustice forces us to reflect on the same tendency within our own lives. It is hypocritical to condemn the wrongs in others without looking at ourselves to see if we are guilty of the same offense. It is far easier to avoid confronting injustice because then we are not forced to examine our own lives.

But, in "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin admonishes us against such cowardice. Only a person courageous enough to oppose injustice can be truly compassionate. □

By SGI-USA Study Department