

Study Material for March • April “The Opening of the Eyes”

(The following passage is taken from the book Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, pp. 59–72, and can also be found in The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, pp. 186–87.)

JUSTICE is like the sun. A society that lacks justice is as though shrouded in darkness. No one can stop the sun from rising. No cloud can hide the rays of the sun indefinitely. “Opening the eyes” means causing those whose hearts are steeped in darkness to recognize the existence of the sun of justice.

I, Nichiren, am sovereign, teacher, father and mother to all the people of Japan. But the men of the Tendai sect [who do not refute the misleading sects] are all great enemies of the people. As Chang-an has noted,¹ “One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent.”

One who has not set one’s mind upon the way can never free oneself from the sufferings of birth and death. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 187)

The Buddha Illuminates the World With the Three Virtues

NICHIREN Daishonin says that he is “sovereign, teacher, father and mother to all the people of Japan.” The three virtues—sovereign, teacher and parent—indicate the state of life, brilliant as the sun, of a true person of justice.

A passage of the Gosho “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” comes immediately to mind:

If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. (MW-4, 272)

High Priest Nichikan interprets this passage as referring to the Daishonin’s three virtues. “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity” indicates his immense compassion, or virtue, as the parent. “It has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan” indicates the power to open people’s minds or inner eyes, i.e., the teacher. And, “it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” indicates the sovereign who struggles to ensure that the people do not slip into misery.²

“The Opening of the Eyes” begins: “There are three categories of people that all human beings should respect. They are the sovereign, the teacher and the parent” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 59). The purpose of this writing is to clarify the true virtues of the sovereign, the teacher and the parent. Nichiren Daishonin perfectly

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possesses all three.

In a general sense, the sovereign, teacher and parent might be thought of—to put it in modern terms—as the three necessary attributes of leaders. The virtue of the sovereign lies in protecting people; this corresponds to an unwavering sense of responsibility. The virtue of the teacher lies in guiding people; this is the shining wisdom to guide people along the path of happiness. And the virtue of the parent lies in lovingly raising people; this is a warm, if strict, compassion.

A sense of responsibility, wisdom and compassion—are not these the most important qualities for leaders, and for all people, to possess? If even a few more leaders possessed these three attributes, it would contribute immensely to easing tension and the general happiness of humankind. But the fact of the matter is that the tendency of all too many leaders in society is just the opposite.

THE antithesis of the virtue of the sovereign is irresponsibility. We have leaders who carry on in a self-aggrandizing and high-handed manner, but who avoid addressing difficult issues, using the rationale that “Someone else will take care of it,” or that “Things will somehow work themselves out.” They order other people around, and then try to shirk responsibility. Even though they may have the appearance of leaders, they do not qualify as such. They lack the requisite virtue.

The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains the three virtues of the essential teaching. “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” (LS 16, 230) indicates the virtue of the sovereign who works resolutely to ensure the peace and tranquillity of the land or community for which he or she is responsible.

“Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting” (LS16, 229) indicates the virtue of the teacher. As indicated by the word *constantly*, meaning “without rest or interruption,” a teacher unstintingly uses his or her voice to help others.

The virtue of the parent is indicated by the line, “I am the father of this world” (LS16, 231). The parent loves people because they are children of the Buddha who will one day become Buddhas, and takes action on their behalf.

Leaders also must have the ability to provide training, protection, guidance and instruction. When someone has a problem, they need to provide kind guidance as well as necessary instruction. By so doing, they can ensure that people do not become deadlocked.

A genuine leader protects people when they are tired, and nurtures them by providing training appropriate to their levels of development. If people are given strict training under circumstances that require protection instead, they will go under. And if they are protectively coddled when instead they need guidance, they will stop growing.

If we relate these desirable leadership attributes to the three virtues, the ability to protect corresponds to the virtue of the sovereign, the ability to provide guidance and instruction to the virtue of the teacher, and the ability to provide training to the virtue of the parent. The determination, prayer and strength to help people become happy are the keys to outstanding leadership.

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IN connection with the characterization in “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” of the virtue of the sovereign as “blocking off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering,” High Priest Nichikan asks, “How could the opening or closing of roads be left up to a retainer? [Matters of such importance must be attended to by the sovereign.]” The virtue of the sovereign lies in closing off paths of evil and opening up paths of good.

“I want to close off the path leading to Hell.” This was the spirit with which Josei Toda declared his opposition to the use of nuclear weapons: “Anyone who threatens the right to live is a devil, a Satan and a monster.”³ To resolutely close off the path to war and open up the path to peace— this is the virtue of the sovereign, and the responsibility of leaders.

The SGI, as the true inheritor of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, has opened a path of peace spanning the globe. Twenty years ago, when China and the Soviet Union were in conflict and the Americans and the Soviets were mired in the Cold War, who could have imagined the state of the world today? The Soka Gakkai, despite storms of criticism, has bravely taken action to close off the path to confrontation and open the path to friendship.

“There must never be World War III!” We have prayed and taken action with a sense of responsibility to see that such a calamity never comes to pass. Toward that end, we have developed a movement of peace, culture and education based on Buddhism.

Broadly speaking, creating a land of peace and tranquillity —as in the passage, “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil”—indicates the virtue of the sovereign. Education represents the virtue of the teacher. And culture, because it fosters people’s inner lives, relates to the virtue of the parent. We are extending this path of the three virtues throughout the entire world.

ONCE a path is opened, those who come after can travel along it with composure and ease. Nichiren Daishonin, as the Buddha of the Latter Day possessing the virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent, opened a path to the enlightenment of all people. For this we owe him our eternal gratitude.

To extend and expand the path that the mentor has graciously opened is the mission of disciples. And the path that the Daishonin opened now spans the entire world. Through the struggles of our fellow members — the wondrous Bodhisattvas of the Earth — the great path of happiness now runs through 128 countries. The sun of justice has begun to rise. I am absolutely convinced that the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, accords the highest praise to those who dedicate themselves to this noble task.

In the Goshō passage we will study next, the Daishonin says that the followers of the Tendai school are great enemies of the people. While aware that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost teaching, they not only failed to combat evil but took the side of those persecuting the Daishonin.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi said, “Of all the Nichiren schools existing today, Nichiren Shōshū, it would seem, most closely resembles the Tendai school of the Daishonin’s

time.”⁴

He was exactly right. The members of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, who have repeatedly obstructed kosen-rufu, a sacred undertaking for the people’s happiness, are indeed great enemies of the people. History has now shown the concordance of their actions with the Daishonin’s assertion in “The Opening of the Eyes.”

Encountering Great Persecution Is the Highest Honor

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, was cursed by all the followers of non-Buddhist teachings and labeled as a man of great evil. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai was regarded with intense enmity by the three schools of the south and seven schools of the north, and Tokuitsu of Japan criticized him for using his tongue to try to destroy the five-foot body of the Buddha.⁵ The Great Teacher Dengyo was disparaged by the monks of Nara, who said, “Saicho⁶ has never been to the capital of T’ang China!” But all of these abuses were incurred because of the Lotus Sutra, and they are therefore no shame to the men who suffered them. To be praised by fools—that is the greatest shame. Now that I have incurred the wrath of the authorities [and am now in exile], the priests of the Tendai and Shingon sects are no doubt delighted. They are strange and shameless men. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 187–8)

JUSTICE is certain to meet with persecution, just as the sun is sure to be obstructed by clouds. Difficulties are the proof of justice. Encountering great persecution is the highest honor.

Even Shakyamuni was derided as a “person of great evil.” The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai was showered with abuse by the ten powerful schools of his day. And he was still being vilified 200 years later. The priest Tokuichi of Japan’s Hosso school went so far as to say: “What a foolish thing you have done, Chiko (T’ien-t’ai). You have slandered Shakyamuni’s lifetime teaching and brought confusion to the world.”

The Great Teacher Dengyo was reviled by the schools of Nara. They said, “While Saicho says that he went to China, he quickly came back without having visited the capital after only studying a short time in the provinces.”

T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo re-ceived such criticism because they advocated the Lotus Sutra, because they issued the call to return to the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, of Shakyamuni. Those who do not take action will face neither criticism nor slander.

On the other hand, those who thought they were only criticizing T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo were in fact trampling on the spirit of Shakyamuni. The more such individuals slander the sutra’s votaries, the more they are in effect slandering the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, such individuals entirely fail to realize this. No one is more foolish or pitiful.

Those who delighted when the Daishonin—a person of justice whose actions exactly matched with the Lotus Sutra — was sent into exile and the correct

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teaching was attacked were the true fools.

“To be praised by fools—that is the greatest shame.” President Makiguchi made this his motto. He was persecuted by the military powers and betrayed by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. Yet he laughed this off.

Lecturing on “The Opening of the Eyes,” President Josei Toda said:

Based on these words, Mr. Makiguchi did not regard it as shameful to undergo criticism or persecution for the Lotus Sutra. He died in prison for his beliefs because he propagated Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of the Three Great Secret Laws, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, based on the conviction that to be praised by fools is the greatest disgrace and to be praised by the great sage [Nichiren Daishonin] is the greatest glory. I believe that he provides the foremost model for all who embrace faith in the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.⁷

And he cried out to youth:

In the struggle for the Law in the polluted Latter Day, your desire should be to win the Daishonin’s praise as brilliant young warriors. For a person of wisdom, to be praised by fools is the greatest disgrace. To be praised by the great sage is the greatest honor in life.⁸

THESE words, which presidents Makiguchi and Toda both made their motto are also the Soka Gakkai motto. To put this golden motto into practice is the eternal spirit of the Gakkai.

Let us in the SGI advance in a manner befitting the SGI! Let us proceed straight ahead along this path, along the glorious path of Soka! If people want to laugh, let them laugh. If people want to vilify us, let them go right ahead.

Can such individuals reveal a means for others to become happy? Can listening to what they have to say bring people relief from suffering? No, definitely not.

The Soka Gakkai is a lion— completely fearless. It is enough that we conduct ourselves in such a manner that we win the praise of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. Future generations will definitely celebrate our efforts.

Even As an Exile, the Daishonin Felt Immense Joy

Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in the *saha* world, Kumarajiva journeyed to the Ch’in dynasty in China,⁹ and Dengyo likewise went to China [all for the sake of the Lotus Sutra]. Aryadeva and Aryasimha sacrificed their bodies. Bodhisattva Yakuo burned his arms as an offering, and Prince Shotoku stripped off the skin on his hand [and copied the sutra on it].¹⁰ Shakyamuni, when he was a bodhisattva, sold his flesh to make offerings, and another time, when he was a bodhisattva named Gyobo, he used his bone as a pen [to write down the Buddha’s teaching].

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T'ien-t'ai has said that "the method chosen should be that which accords with the time." The propagation of the Buddhist teachings should follow the time. For what I have done, I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 188)

Shakyamuni chose to be born in the *saha* world, a world fraught with suffering, to expound the Lotus Sutra. To translate the Lotus Sutra, Kumarajiva traveled from Central Asia to China, undergoing many hardships along the way. And in pursuit of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, the Great Teacher Dengyo made the journey over treacherous seas from Japan to China.

In each case, a great sense of purpose produced action. An irrepressible spirit gives rise to action.

BODHISATTVA Aryadeva and the worthy Aryasimha, who inherited Shakyamuni's teaching, admonished evil rulers and laid down their lives for the teaching. It is also related that Bodhisattva Medicine King (Yakuo) burned his elbows as an offering to the Buddha, and that Prince Sho-toku of Japan peeled the skin off his hand for use as paper on which to copy the titles of sutras.

In a previous existence when Shakyamuni, as a bodhisattva, was practicing to attain enlightenment, he once sold his own flesh to make an offering to the Buddha. Another time, as Gyobo Bonji, he is said to have used his skin as paper, his bone as a pen and his blood as ink in order to copy down the Buddha's teaching.

The form that Buddhist practice takes differs according to the time. Buddhism "accords with the time," but the fundamental path and spirit do not change. The main point is to wholeheartedly dedicate oneself to the Law and to people's happiness.

The True Law has been handed down thanks to the painstaking efforts of such people. It has been conveyed through a relay of individuals who have each taken action according with the time in which they have lived. This is itself a great achievement in Buddhist history.

But Nichiren Daishonin says that those who spread the Mystic Law in the Latter Day are far nobler than even these practitioners of the Former and Middle Days of the Law. All of you are courageous and noble people of mission opening a path where none has before existed, spreading the Dai-shonin's Buddhism amid storms of obstacles and calumny. The Daishonin cannot but praise you. Let us be confident that Shakyamuni, Many Treasures (Taho) Buddha and all Buddhas of the ten directions also greatly extol our efforts to spread the Mystic Law in a manner that accords with the Latter Day.

The Daishonin concludes "The Opening of the Eyes" on an exultant note: "For what I have done, I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy." This is his great

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declaration of a spiritual victory that shines in human history.

THE Daishonin was an exile, completely without freedom. He was confined to the tiny island of Sado, a kind of natural prison.

President Toda once said, "In modern terms, exile to Sado is comparable to being banished to the Sahara Desert." And yet, the Daishonin's spirit was that of a king. No one could put his heart in chains. No sword of persecution could make the slightest nick in his spirit.

From the vantage point of the sun of *kuon ganjo*, as from high above, he surveyed with perfect composure even the most violent storms of persecution. The pride and conviction to thoroughly dedicate ourselves to the Mystic Law enables us, too, to attain such greatness, to rise to the summit of such glory. We are advancing bathed in the resplendent golden sunlight of the Dai-shonin's immense spiritual struggle. □

1. In his annotations on the Nirvana Sutra.
2. *Ho'on Sho Mondan* (Commentary on "Repaying Debts of Gratitude"), p. 438.
3. At the Fourth Tokyo Youth Division Athletic Meet, held at Mitsuzawa Stadium in Yokohama, in 1957.
4. At the fifth general meeting of *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai* (Value-Creating Education Society; the forerunner of the Soka Gakkai) in 1942.
5. His statement appears in the *Chuhen Gikyo*, which is cited in Dengyo's *Shugo Kokkai Sho*.
6. Saicho is another name for Dengyo.
7. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Works of Toda Josei), vol. 6, pp. 459–60.
8. "Precepts for Youth" in 1951.
9. Kumarajiva accepted an invitation from Yao Hsing, king of the Later Ch'in dynasty, and came to the capital, Ch'ang-an, in 401. There he participated in the translation of numerous Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese.
10. A similar statement is found in the *Shotoku Taishi Den Shiki*, a work by the Tendai priest Kenshin (1130–92).

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