

The Basics of Faith by SGI President Ikeda

In this issue we introduce an occasional series of excerpts from President Ikeda's guidance over the past few years grouped together in various categories.

Obstacles

Even though we have faith, we cannot avoid painful, sad or unpleasant things in the course of life. Yet, through the principle “earthly desires are enlightenment,” we can definitely manifest a state of “delight” in our lives; this is the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. By advancing based on faith, we can definitely change a life of suffering into a life of great joy.

Regarding “delight the hearts of the assembly,” Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, said:

When we practice faith in earnest for ten years, our lives become truly pure. Our skin, the look of our eyes, our actions all become soft and pure, and yet come to possess a certain dignity. This is the benefit of the Gohonzon. When this happens we feel delight in our hearts; this is the meaning of “delight the hearts of the assembly.” (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 126)

Nichiren Daishonin says, “Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161). The central meaning is that we should regard suffering and joy as inescapable facts of our existence.

Without hardships, life would be bland and colorless. People learn from hard work; hard work provides nutrients needed to cause the flower of joy to blossom. Suffering and joy are like two sides of a coin. When we recognize this truth, we manifest the true strength of the human being and the true profundity of life. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 127)

The Daishonin says, “The greater the hardships befalling him [the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law], the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith” (MW-1, 9); and “The three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 244)....

There is a saying that “while a block of marble is an obstacle to the weak, it becomes a steppingstone to the strong.”

Strong people make the most of obstacles. The stronger we are, the more joyful our lives. It all comes down to life force, spiritual energy. And these fundamentally derive from the powers of faith and practice. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, pp. 128–29)

Worth is not found in joy alone. Nor is success the only valuable outcome. Suffering is the mother of realization; worries and failures, so long as we are not defeated by them, enable us to deepen our faith. Our sufferings become the raw material with which to construct our happiness. This is the principle of “earthly desires are enlightenment.” Earthly desires, like other phenomena, are themselves the true entity.

Fundamentally, for people with faith in the Gohonzon, everything that happens is a benefit. This is the difference between those who believe in the Mystic Law and those who

do not. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 152)

The Lotus Sutra declares, “This sutra is hard to uphold” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 180). In other words, those who embrace the Lotus Sutra are certain to encounter difficulties.

The “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” states, “Those who embrace the Lotus Sutra should do so with the awareness that they will meet persecution without fail” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 742).

Unless we strive to surmount obstacles, we cannot become Buddhas. Nor can we accomplish kosen-rufu. For that reason, tenaciously enduring all, I continue to fight with the stand-alone spirit against the hardships and persecutions that assail us. (Feb. 21, 1997, *World Tribune*, pp. 11–12)

You cannot truly grow if you are always flattered and spoiled by those around you. You must resolve never to avoid hardship. If anything, you should have the spirit to go out of your way to find and challenge difficulties. The ultimate victors in life are those who have undergone and triumphed over hardships. Life is long. There is no need to be impatient. The important thing is to steadily and surely build a solid self. Since you uphold faith in the Mystic Law, whatever may happen, you can propel yourself in the best possible direction. I hope you will advance with that conviction. (April 11, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 13)

In activities for kosen-rufu, absolutely no effort is wasted. Everything is engraved in our lives and enables us to establish a diamond-like and totally free state of life. In overcoming our weaknesses and exerting ourselves daily for our friends, we have already achieved victory as human beings. Ultimately, our victory or defeat in life is not decided by someone else — we decide it. A person who steadfastly adheres to the path he or she has chosen is a winner. (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 135)

When people encounter great obstacles, it’s a sure sign they are creating tremendous positive change. This is true today as it certainly was in Nichiren Daishonin’s time. (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 205)

“Suffer what there is to suffer,” the Daishonin says. Suffering is inevitable in life. Therefore, we need to be prepared for hardship and to have the inner fortitude to rise above our worries and anxieties. We have to cause the “serene light of the moon of enlightenment” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1262) — the world of Buddhahood — to shine in our lives. Then earthly desires are transformed into enlightenment and we can use everything that happens in life to fuel our happiness. (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 244–45)

Just as a river courses over rocks and stones, life is full of problems and sufferings. If the river flows strongly, the rocks and stones will not only be submerged but eventually be eroded and washed away. The profound inner joy and dynamic vitality of a life dedicated to achieving the mission of peace known as kosen-rufu resembles the powerful flow of a river. With the joy of faith, one can calmly sweep away and triumph over all sufferings, no matter how numerous they may be. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 160)

President Toda said: “Faith is a never-ending battle against impasse. It is a struggle between the Buddha and devilish functions — between negative and positive forces. This is

the meaning of ‘Buddhism is concerned with winning.’ Everyone encounters an impasse at some point in life. However, the power of the Gohonzon is immeasurable, as vast as the universe itself. Our lives, too, have infinite potential. Everything hinges, therefore, on whether we allow our inner determination to become deadlocked. When we truly grasp this point, the path to victory is already open.” (Sept. 19, 1994, *World Tribune*, p. 13)

Standing Up Against Authoritarianism

President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi said: “Generally speaking, people who pride themselves on being good or extraordinarily good are most concerned with whether someone superior to them in character may appear. Or whether a method other than theirs will be proven superior. In that case, the higher a person’s position, the more directly he or she is destined to make the causes for great or extraordinarily great evil.” (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 208–09)

Nichiren Daishonin asserts, “It is important to speak with even greater conviction to those who slander the Mystic Law” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1123). The Daishonin was as dauntless as a lion king when it came to speaking out for truth and justice. He urges his followers, “Be as fearless as Nichiren when he faced Hei no Saemon [the most powerful official of the day]” (MW-1, 140). (March 21, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 10)

All too often, as history testifies, people of the greatest justice and integrity are persecuted most harshly by those with evil aims. This, too, is a common theme in Buddhism. In the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin writes, “This world is the province of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven” (MW-1, 135). Human society, in other words, is dominated by the corrupting nature of power. Throughout his life, the Daishonin waged an unremitting struggle against authoritarianism. He says, “Minor persecutions and annoyances are too numerous even to be counted, but the major persecutions number four” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 96). (May 23, 1997, *World Tribune*, pp. 13–14)

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood today, similar to the Tendai school in the Daishonin’s time but incomparably more reprehensible, has trampled upon the founder’s spirit. Neglecting practice and whiling away their lives in dissipation, they have thoroughly defiled the spirit of Buddhism. Therefore, we have struggled dauntlessly against them. Fighting evil is proof of a true disciple of the Daishonin. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 149)

From the time he majestically proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the entire world in 1253, the Daishonin struggled without rest for the happiness and peace of all the people. His persecution at the hands of the authorities grew particularly severe after he produced his letter of remonstrance, the “Rissho Ankoku Ron” (On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism) in 1260.... Yet, no matter how great the difficulties he encountered, the Daishonin says that he “never once felt inclined to retreat” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1224). “The battle goes on even today” (MW-1, 101), he calmly states. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 2, pp. 125–26)

Nichiren Daishonin observes that even though people of power can destroy Buddha images or temples, they are powerless to destroy Buddhism itself (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 182). And it is impossible for someone’s spirit to be destroyed from without. As long as we have beautiful unity, the world of the Mystic Law is absolutely indestructible. (*Lectures on the*

“Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra, vol. 3, p. 62)

What matters most is that we fight thoroughly against injustice with a lofty, dauntless spirit. While waging a determined struggle against evil that nearly cost him his life, Nichiren Daishonin cried out [to Shijo Kingo, as they were being led to the execution grounds at Tatsunokuchi], “You should be delighted at this great fortune” (MW-1, 181). (*Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 243)

Not only do people fail to do what is correct, they tend to react emotionally and negatively toward a person of justice. This is human nature. In particular, arrogant authorities cannot bear to have anyone stand up to them and speak out for justice. This is because they regard themselves as superior to everyone. This is an unchanging principle. (June 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 20)

Hope

Among the many treatises written by Mr. Toda, there are some which deal with “hope.” In these treatises Mr. Toda emphatically declares that hope or aspiration is indispensable in life.

As evidence of this, he referred to the lives of great people in ages past who, neither succumbing to hardships nor allowing the fire of aspiration to be smothered, managed to maintain their dreams. Thus, Mr. Toda taught us the importance of persistently harboring hope.

In comparison with these great men, ordinary people are able to lose hope in the face of minor failures or obstacles and then to stagnate. They are prone to either losing the vitality needed to endure the rigors of life or to retreating backwards, harboring resentment toward others and sinking into self-pity and complaining.

We must not lose hope in life no matter what the difficulties. Though you may temporarily suffer from illness or experience a financial crisis, an inextinguishable fire of hope should always remain resplendent in your heart. (*Buddhism in Action*, vol. 3, pp. 287–88)

A life with hope is strong. A life without hope leads to defeat. Aspiration is the power of one’s life and those who always cherish splendid dreams are happy. For example, there are not a few people who, though living in opulent surroundings, are burdened by incessant family struggles because family members and relatives are on bad terms. However fortunate and blessed a person may appear outwardly, inwardly he may well be experiencing distress on account of, say, a lack of warmth in his human relations. Certainly a person’s life cannot be judged solely on the basis of appearances. (*Buddhism in Action*, vol. 3, p. 288)

It may be said, after all, that it is an exclusive privilege of human beings to be able to live life with aspiration. The human race alone can live in happiness in a garden-like world filled with hope.

There is nothing so splendid as a life which is endowed with hope and conviction extending from the present into the eternal future. Thus, to “live up to the noble cause of kosen-rufu “ is the essence of the vast teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and constitutes the ultimate summation of Mr. Toda’s guidance. (*Buddhism in Action*, vol. 3, p. 289)

In contrast, a practice of dedicating oneself to giving guidance and encouragement, in which, illuminated by the True Law we embrace, one earnestly takes care of and gives

instruction to many people on the correct practice of Buddhism, is by far the more noble. Nichiren Daishonin teaches us in his various writings that we should march on with confidence because all the Buddhas of the three existences and the ten directions, together with the heavenly deities, will without fail protect the Law. Therefore, I ask that you persist in walking along the grand path of kosen-rufu, filled with hopes and dreams. (*Buddhism in Action*, vol. 3, p. 290)

The Mentor/Disciple Relationship

Ancient China produced many gifted philosophers who traveled far and wide preaching the Way. Even when they lost all hope for integrity in government, they continued to devote themselves to educating the young. For these thinkers, the point of education was not so much teaching or instructing, but cultivating and fostering.

The teachers of antiquity demanded from their students both self-discipline and an unquenchable motivation to learn. A passage in Confucius's *Analects* reads:

I do not open up the truth to one who is not eager to get knowledge, nor help anyone who is not anxious to explain himself. When I have presented one corner of a subject to anyone, and he cannot learn the other three from it, I do not repeat my lesson. (*A New Humanism*, pp. 23–24)

My final point is the central importance of character, another name for human wholeness or completeness....

[M]y mentor in life and second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, emerged from a two-year imprisonment by the forces of Japanese militarism to initiate a new humanistic movement in Japan. In his efforts he always focused on raising people of character, one person at a time, from among the populace. I have many fond memories of this compassionate man, whose love for youth knew no bounds and who encouraged us to be great actors on the stage of life. Indeed, the power of character is like the concentrated energy of an actor who has given himself or herself entirely over to the performance of the part. A person of outstanding character will always, even under the most difficult of circumstances, retain an air of composure, ease, even humor, like an accomplished actor playing a part. This is nothing other than the achievement of self-mastery or self-control. (*A New Humanism*, p. 174)

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