

**What We Are All About
STANDS TO REASON
Lessons for today from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin**

By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor

If I do not call forth these three enemies of the Lotus Sutra, then I will not be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. Only by making them appear can I be a votary. (“The Teaching, Capacity, Time and Country,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, pp. 20–21)

From May 1261 to February 1263, for almost two years, Nichiren Daishonin was exiled by the government — this was the Izu exile. Under the influence of Pure Land priests, government officials sent him to the Izu Peninsula, where Pure Land membership was heavy. And during this exile, the Daishonin wrote this letter clarifying how the three powerful enemies were providing the opportunity for him to prove his true identity.

He had been kicked out of Kamakura, but on the spiritual level, he made this exile a great return — a return to the Lotus Sutra. He took solace in studying the sutra again, especially the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter. It’s there that the three powerful enemies first make their appearance in the world. Actually, they aren’t called the three powerful enemies in the Lotus Sutra (Miao-lo in his *Annotations on “Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra”* coined the phrase), but they’re each clearly introduced there.

Restudying the sutra, the Daishonin reminded himself that only by making these powerful enemies come forth could he be a true votary, a true devotee to the cause of Buddhism. In the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter, it is the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the votaries, who introduce the three powerful enemies and vow to Shakyamuni to call them forth in the future. These enemies’ appearance was to the Daishonin the greatest proof that he was practicing Buddhism correctly — the greatest proof of who he was, what he was all about.

The Daishonin “called them forth” first by writing the “Rissho Ankoku Ron” in 1260, then through his vigorous propagation efforts in Kamakura. He knew he would infuriate the Pure Land sect this way, and that its arrogant priests would come to be his powerful enemies, trying to stop correct Buddhism. He knew he was risking his life, and he also knew that, as a votary, he had to do it.

If we, too, consider ourselves votaries of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattvas of the Earth, those with courage and justice, we, too, need to face the three powerful enemies — and have the spirit to call them forth. SGI President Ikeda obviously has this spirit. He recently stated simply, “I have called forth the three powerful enemies just as the Gosho teaches.”

Isn’t the Daishonin suggesting in this letter that, just as for him, the three powerful enemies are deeply related to the identity of each of us who practice this Buddhism, to the mission we each have? From this can’t we infer that the temple issue is part of our lives, part of who we are?

We recently celebrated the fifth anniversary of President Ikeda’s poem “The Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land” (Jan. 27), in which he encourages SGI-USA members to seek our roots as true votaries — roots, he said, that are deeper than any other heritage we have ever had. Perhaps the most important way to seek these roots at the present time is by being involved in the temple issue, by facing the powerful enemies of the day, by calling them forth. In doing so, we’re sure to find out more about what it means to be votaries. In other words, more about what it means to be Buddhists.

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