

BRIGHT IDEAS

The following is the second half of a speech by SGI President Ikeda at the 19th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held concurrently with the 4th Kanagawa Prefecture General Meeting, at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, Feb. 3 (continued from the March 27 issue).

Arrogance Denigrates the Law

Why has the world of Japanese Buddhism tended to be so corrupt and to deviate so significantly from the original teachings of Buddhism? Nichiren Daishonin clearly states that it is because disciples took their mentors lightly.

The Great Teacher Dengyo established the head temple of the Tendai school of Buddhism at Mount Hiei, which became a leading center of Japanese Buddhism for many centuries. However, Dengyo's successors were influenced by the growing popularity of the Shingon school and decided to incorporate its teachings into their own school [going against Dengyo's spirit and intent].

Describing one such priest, the Daishonin writes: "He felt that his teacher, the Great Teacher Dengyo, had not gone into the matter [of the relative merits of the Shingon and Tendai teachings] in sufficient detail, that he had not remained for an extended period in China and hence had acquired only a rough understanding of the Shingon doctrines" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 153).

In other words, these later successors thought that they knew better than Dengyo, that they were more learned, and that their mentor had simply failed to understand. These were their sentiments. It was a sign of the purest arrogance. And so, enthralled by the popularity of Shingon, they turned their backs on the instructions of their mentor, the Great Teacher Dengyo.

In fact, however, Dengyo was thoroughly acquainted with Shingon and had taught his followers to avoid it based on his knowledge. This is a key point. The Daishonin relates this history in the Goshō "The Selection of the Time."

Because the disciples did not understand the greatness of their mentor, Mount Hiei in effect turned into a center of the Shingon school, its priests ultimately becoming "archenemies of the founder Great Teacher Dengyo" (cf. *Goshō Zenshu*, p. 369). At the very time they should have been loudly refuting erroneous doctrines, Dengyo's disciples failed to act. Finding fault with their mentor, they justified their actions as right and proper, and so avoided confrontation and possible persecution. These disciples were cunning and self-serving.

Something similar had occurred in the Chinese T'ien-t'ai (Tendai) school, too. After the death of the school's founder, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, new sutras were introduced to China from India. Naturally, not having been familiar with these texts, T'ien-t'ai had not discussed or rejected them. His successors foolishly believed these sutras to be superior to the Lotus Sutra and ended up embracing erroneous teachings.

The Daishonin writes: "Since this was a text that T'ien-t'ai had never seen, his followers in these later times, shallow as they were in wisdom and understanding, seemed inclined to accept this allegation [of its superiority over the Lotus Sutra]" (MW-4, 193)

The disciples were foolish and cowardly, and they were capable neither of understanding the greatness of their mentor nor of proving the validity of his teaching. As a result, the

pure flow of T'ien-t'ai's teaching was sullied. The Daishonin explains this in the Gosho "Repaying Debts of Gratitude."

Unless You Fight Evil, You Will Be Overcome by It

While trading on their mentors' authority and veneration to win people's respect, these priests inwardly scorned their mentors and did nothing to challenge erroneous teachings. In fact, they were themselves thoroughly swayed by them.

Unless you fight evil, you will be overcome by it. Unless you fight the devilish nature of power, you will be possessed by it. The Daishonin clearly indicates this important principle in his writings.

I am not just talking about something that happened centuries ago in the world of Buddhism; we find ample evidence of the same corruption today. Therefore, I hope you will earnestly study the Gosho.

If we were to lose the spirit of founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and of Josei Toda, the SGI would be in dire straits. Kosen-rufu could not be achieved. This would be a betrayal of our mentors and an unpardonable desecration of the Daishonin's legacy.

With that in mind, I am exerting every ounce of my strength and being, determined to stay in good health as long as I can, so that I can continue to lead our movement and teach members about the spirit of mentor and disciple.

Disciples Who Betray the Mentor-Disciple Way

In Nichiren Daishonin's time, too, there were arrogant disciples. They criticized him, blaming the harsh persecution he encountered on what they saw as an error in his approach to spreading his teaching.

The Daishonin writes: "Some of my disciples foolishly think, 'Our teacher says that he is spreading the Lotus Sutra. But not only does he fail to spread the teaching, he has encountered great persecution. This is because he says such things as "Shingon ruins the nation, Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering, Zen is the teaching of devils, and Ritsu is traitorous." This is like insulting someone during a reasonable discussion'" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 585).

These people failed to understand that the very fact that the Daishonin encountered great persecution, even though he was innocent of any wrongdoing, constituted proof of his identity as the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin says that such people will suffer in a state of hell even longer than the followers of erroneous teachings.

He writes: "The pitiful thing is that these perverse people must suffer in the depths of hell even longer than the Nembutsu believers" (MW-1, 42).

Such is the gravity of betraying the path of mentor and disciple. The Nikken sect is guilty of this offense. Its adherents blatantly ignore the teachings of the Daishonin and his successor Nikko Shonin and other great predecessors. They are self-seeking. Buddhism no longer exists within the priesthood, which has cast aside the path of mentor and disciple. They have become archenemies of Nichiren Daishonin.

The Path of a Disciple

In November 1941, one month before the Pacific war began, President Toda gave a lecture titled "The Path of a Disciple." At that time, nationalism — like a torrent that has burst its banks and washed away everything in its path — had inundated Japanese society.

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We find indications of the same thing beginning to happen again in Japan today. Many people are concerned that Japan is now veering down the dangerous path of nationalism, with its democratic institutions becoming hollow.

For this reason, society stands in great need of a popular movement to empower people and put them in charge of their own future. Many observers view the Soka Gakkai as a champion of the spiritual realm that is waging a battle against the corrupt forces of power. The very future of Japan, I submit, will depend on the success of our efforts.

President Toda described the path of a disciple as follows:

Nikko Shonin had not the slightest desire to surpass or better Nichiren Daishonin. Likewise, our duty is to faithfully follow, put into practice and manifest in our lives President Makiguchi's teaching.... Mr. Makiguchi is our mentor and we are his disciples.... What can we possibly hope to achieve if we merely try to imitate his manner of speaking? We would be casting away the precious essence of his spirit.

Disciples have to follow the path of a disciple. Both in word and deed, we have to reveal the mentor's teaching with our lives.

This is President Toda's injunction to us. While sounding simple enough, when great persecution arose, only Mr. Toda succeeded in carrying this out. Other disciples not only abandoned their faith, but cursed and abused President Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. The fickleness of the human heart is frightening.

Interested only in self-preservation, these followers denounced their mentor. This is bogus faith. It represents a life dominated by Animality.

There have also been many individuals who tried to make themselves appear important by imitating my speech and gestures. All of these people, however, eventually lost their bearings in faith.

The Gakkai Spirit Resides Here

While all Mr. Makiguchi's other disciples capitulated to the authorities, President Toda alone held to his convictions. Moreover, he felt such deep appreciation to his mentor that he could say:

In your vast and boundless compassion, you [President Makiguchi] let me accompany you even to prison. As a result, I could read with my entire being the passage from the Lotus Sutra, "Those persons who had heard the Law / dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, / constantly reborn in company with their teachers" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 140). The benefit of this was coming to know the essential purpose of a Bodhisattva of the Earth, and to absorb with my very life even a small degree of the sutra's meaning. Could there be any greater happiness than this?

He made this famous statement at the third memorial (second anniversary) of Mr. Makiguchi's death. What sublime and noble words! This is the Soka Gakkai's proud path of mentor and disciple and the path of Buddhism.

Mr. Toda declares that there is no greater happiness than undergoing persecution together with one's mentor. What a contrast to the attitudes of President Makiguchi's other disciples.

Encountering obstacles and persecution is an inevitable part of propagating the correct teaching of Buddhism. The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states that the sutra's votary will be cursed and spoken ill of (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 193). The Daishonin reiterates this point time and again in the Goshō. And yet, once difficulties arise, there are always people who, fearing persecution, turn around and condemn the mentor to whom they are so deeply indebted. They use their mentor as a shield, and thereby seek to deflect

and escape attack. What cowardly behavior!

My Treasures Are the Gohonzon, My Mentor and Sincerity

I, in turn, single-handedly protected President Toda. In every instance, I supported him.

The tradition of making February a month for propagation activities began from my determination to respond to my mentor's expectations.

It was 1952. Mr. Toda had been inaugurated as the second president the year before, but little headway was being made in the area of propagation. There were many senior members who had a high opinion of themselves, but who weren't taking any action toward achieving President Toda's goal. And so it was that President Toda resolved, "It's time to let Daisaku take the lead."

This was a stern directive from my mentor. Determined not to let him down, I made his purpose and vision my own and exerted myself with all my might. And I immediately succeeded in breaking through the deadlock, opening a way forward in our efforts to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism. From there, the great path of kosen-rufu that exists today unfolded.

President Toda always said: "If I ask Daisaku to do something, then I know I don't have to worry." "When Daisaku's involved, victory is certain." This oneness of mentor and disciple is the essence of the Soka Gakkai.

Nichiren Daishonin and President Toda are constantly in my thoughts. The Gohonzon, President Toda and sincerity are my "three treasures."

I have won through sincerity. Striving to lead the most upright life, while enduring the harshest criticism and abuse, I have won through faith. I have won as a human being. From the standpoint of Buddhism, from the standpoint of the three existences of past, present and future, I am confident that I am the greatest victor.

Buddhism is not about leading a self-centered existence. If we do not base our lives on the Law, we are not practicing Buddhism.

The great German writer Friedrich von Schiller writes, "The brave man thinks upon himself the last." This is analogous to the spirit of not begrudging one's life taught in the Lotus Sutra. This means treasuring the Law more highly than one's life. The Law and kosen-rufu are central. The SGI, therefore, is extremely important.

When you have the spirit of "I want to do something for kosen-rufu," benefit is forthcoming. But if there are those who think "I'm going to have the SGI do something for me," they are abusing the world of faith. They are in the life-state of Hell. This, indeed, was the mind-set of all who betrayed us in the past.

Appearances Alone Do Not Amount to Victory

I would like to talk further for the benefit of young people in particular.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of India's great independence leader Mahatma Gandhi (who was assassinated on Jan. 30, 1948). During the struggle to free his country from colonial rule, Gandhi traveled around the country on foot, visiting village after village.

This is similar to how we travel about to do home visits and share the teachings of the Daishonin with others.

For the sake of his country's future, Gandhi stressed to the Indian people the importance of self-reliance: "You are free the moment you cease to depend on others. This freedom, which is the only real freedom, none can take away from you," he said.

In other words, he was saying we should not depend on others. Gandhi taught people to live with lionlike courage, impressing upon them that they could not afford to leave things up to others, that they had to stand up for themselves and fight for justice.

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Having practiced the Daishonin's Buddhism for 50 years, I understand what he meant. Ultimately, the only way forward is by developing self-reliance, forging a stand-alone spirit. That is the only path to victory. As President Makiguchi was fond of saying, "A single lion is worth more than a thousand sheep." I hope you will never permit appearances or rhetoric to take the place of action in our organization.

Gandhi proclaimed that to be dominated by fear is the most miserable and wretched of all conditions. Therefore, he urged people not to be afraid of anything. He declared his hatred of fear, and he questioned why people were intimidated by others. He also said, "Cowardice is perhaps the greatest vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence."

Gandhi prized courage above all, deeming it the most important spiritual requirement for a human being. Cowardice, ultimately, debases and hurts us. We must not be cowardly; we must not succumb to fear.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is a teaching of courage. The SGI has developed to the extent it has because of the unflagging courage of its members.

'I Will Accomplish It'

Gandhi also stressed the importance of being resolute in one's determinations:

A man, who says that he will do something "as far as possible" betrays either his pride or his weakness, though he himself may attribute it to his humility. There is, in fact, not a trace of humility in such an attitude of mind.

In short, he asserts that someone who makes halfhearted pronouncements is either arrogant or cowardly.

President Toda often took people to task for prefacing their determinations with dubious, self-effacing remarks like "I don't have any real ability, but...." He would demand, "Why don't you just come out and say, 'I will do my very best,' 'I will really give it my all,' or 'I will stick with it to the end'?"

I think that this is what Gandhi was getting at. He was telling people that, first of all, they should declare, "No matter what difficulties it may entail, I will accomplish it!" That, Gandhi instructed his disciples, is the sign of strength.

There are now just three years until the start of the 21st century. Let us make the 21st century the Century of the SGI! One and all, let us live vigorously and exuberantly, confidently overcoming every challenge that presents itself. Let us keep striving, realizing victory in every sphere. Let us lead long, brilliant, triumphant lives!

May each of you demonstrate magnificent actual proof of the power of genuine faith in your own life.

Good Fortune and Benefit in Lifetime after Lifetime

I will share one more point before closing.

All of you are contributing to the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law — the fundamental law of the universe. By doing so, you are creating in your lives the causes to be reborn as outstanding leaders in unlimited spheres of endeavor in lifetime after lifetime. This is borne out by the Goshō and the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, there are countless planets in the universe like the Earth. We may even be reborn on one of these and become great leaders of the propagation of the Mystic Law there.

Therefore, please be confident that all the efforts you are making or struggles you are undergoing at present are training so that you can become leaders of outstanding humanism in the future, and that you are also accumulating the greatest possible good fortune.

Buddhism elucidates the law of cause and effect. This is the strict law of life.

Consequently, no effort is ever wasted in Buddhism. Please always remember that all of your efforts in faith will become the source of your eternal good fortune and benefit.

Since our lives are eternal, having neither beginning nor end, we are destined to be reborn again and again, appearing in different existences over eternity. Therefore, rather than having to remain repeatedly in a state of hellish suffering, it makes sense that we strive to make great causes in this lifetime. By applying ourselves to our Buddhist practice, we develop a state of being where we can dedicate ourselves to carrying out the Buddha's will and decree in lifetime after lifetime.

I am praying for your good health.

Our great youth division has risen! How happy this makes me. For you, my young friends, I will continue exerting myself to open a path to the 21st century.

Thank you very much for today!

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