

STUDY MATERIAL FOR MARCH • APRIL “LETTER TO THE MOTHER OF OTO GOZEN” PART 2

The following excerpts from Nichiren Daishonin’s “Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen” and accompanying commentary are from SGI President Ikeda’s book, Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 132.

Among the many disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, there were ten known as the ten major disciples. Among these, Maudgalyayana¹ was the foremost in supernatural powers. He could travel anywhere in the four continents² and in the entire realm beneath the sun and moon, in less time than it takes to cut a single hair. When we inquire into the cause for his gaining such powers, we find that in a past life he would travel as far as a thousand miles in order to hear Buddhism being expounded.

Also, Chang-an, the disciple of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, managed to make his way 10,000 miles³ to become the apprentice of T’ien-t’ai and to hear about the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Dengyo journeyed 2,000 miles⁴ in order to study the *Maka Shikan*.⁵ The Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang⁶ traveled 200,000 miles [from China to India] and acquired the Prajna (Hannya) sutras. [When we consider these examples,] it seems that the length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents the strength of seeking spirit. These people were all men. They were regarded as reincarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas. But you are a woman. And, moreover, you probably are unfamiliar with the comparison between provisional and true Mahayana and other such doctrinal matters.

Your having come all the way here to Sado despite this must be due to the roots of goodness you created in past lives. It is said that in the past there was a woman who so longed for the man she loved that she walked a thousand miles. There are also examples of others who, driven by such passion, transformed themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes.⁷

Nichiren

The third day of the eleventh month

[Postscript:] How Oto Gozen must have grown! Your efforts in service to the Lotus Sutra will no doubt fill Oto Gozen’s entire life with happiness.⁹ (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1222–23)⁸

We Gain Fortune With Every Step We Take for the Mystic Law

HAVING faith produces benefit and good fortune not limited to this lifetime but spanning past, present and future. The eternity of life, the eternal law of cause and effect, is a solemn reality. Believing in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra means living with confidence in this reality.

People who use their legs, who move around for the sake of Buddhism, gain the good fortune and benefit with which to freely travel the world. People who prepare places for Buddhist

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meetings, including those who clean the community and training centers, develop the state of life to dwell in “bejeweled houses” in the future. These examples are not fairy tales. The Mystic Law is wondrous and inscrutable. This is a function of the law of the simultaneity of cause and effect.

Actions taken for kosen-rufu cannot fail to produce effects. If we are confident of this—and to the extent that we have this confidence—effects will manifest without fail. But if our confidence is partially clouded by doubt, then we will only see vague or indistinct results, like the light of a half moon.

The path that the mother and her daughter, Oto Gozen, traveled was not simply a road. It was the path for attaining Buddhahood, the path for accumulating boundless good fortune and benefit.

“The length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents the strength of seeking spirit,” the Daishonin says. Even though it might be difficult, when you thoroughly advance in pursuit of Buddhism, with every step you plant more seeds of good fortune and benefit in your life. These will, as a matter of course, eventually flower and bear fruit.

All of you have worked hard for many years to achieve kosen-rufu. And you continue to take action. How the Daishonin must praise your spirit!

To illustrate how our daily efforts accrue, take the case of someone who delivers the *Seikyo Shimbun* every day to a mailbox on the fourth floor of a building. In just climbing those stairs every day for two years, this person will have ascended to a cumulative height greater than Mount Everest.

Or if a district women’s division leader walks for activities a mile every day for ten years, she will have walked approximately 3,650 miles. In fifteen years she will have covered more than 5,475 miles.

As for the journey from Kamakura to Sado, while there will be some variance depending on how you calculate it and how you determine the specific route taken, the distance, including ascents and descents over mountainous terrain, probably came to between 250 and 300 miles. All the women’s division members are present-day mothers of Oto Gozen. They are people with a mystic mission.

Our spirit changes our being. It changes our lives. Why does the Buddha have an indestructible, diamond-like life? Shakyamuni explains it is because he has steadfastly and thoroughly protected the true Law. Having a strong spirit for kosen-rufu enables us to develop diamond-like lives. The boy who offered a mud pie to Shakyamuni was later reborn as King Ashoka.

There are now many members who have developed the state of life with which to freely travel the world, thanks to having painstakingly walked countless narrow lanes and alleys to encourage friends during the early days of our movement. It may be that those responsible for the sound system at meetings, as a result of the good fortune and benefit they gain thereby, are creating the cause to be reborn as great musicians.

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.

These people were all men. They were regarded as reincarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas. But you are a woman. And, moreover, you probably are unfa-

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miliar with the comparison between provisional and true Mahayana and other such doctrinal matters.

Your having come all the way here to Sado despite this must be due to the roots of goodness you created in past lives. (GZ, 1223)

The individuals the Daishonin mentions, whose names shine in Buddhist history, were courageous people who sought the Law even at the cost of their lives. He says that the mother of Oto Gozen has joined the ranks of these great predecessors. What a landmark teaching this is!

His words fly completely in the face of the accepted beliefs of his day. They erase the formidable distinctions between men and women and among reincarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and ordinary believers who aren't well schooled in Buddhist doctrine. The Daishonin says that the mother of Oto Gozen is certain to become a Buddha. Differences in gender and social status have nothing to do with it, nor is fame a factor. Faith, a seeking mind, is what counts.

Buddhism is a teaching beyond the secular realm. *Realm* in this case means difference or distinction. *Beyond the secular realm* means Buddhism transcending such superficial distinctions. It means seeing the truth of life directly, setting aside all differences. It is to observe one's mind, to see the human being.

Human society, as viewed with this eye of Buddhism, takes on a completely different meaning from that discerned by secular eyes. No longer are the powerful above and ordinary people below. Status does not make people great, and authority does not make them noble. Instead, it is people wholeheartedly dedicated to a lofty ideal who shine the brightest.

Again, as the Daishonin indicates, through "roots of goodness" the bond uniting those who advance together along the path of kosen-rufu is not solely of this lifetime.

It is said that in the past there was a woman who so longed for the man she loved that she walked a thousand miles. There are also examples of others who, driven by such passion, transformed themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes.

Nichiren

The third day of the eleventh month (GZ, 1223)

The Daishonin mentions here a woman who longed so much for a man that she walked a thousand miles—and there are other accounts of women turning themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes owing to such intense yearning. These didn't actually happen, but it seems to me the point is that the person's inner state of life became a rock, a tree or a snake. In this sense, you can think of countless examples of the same thing happening today. These images might seem overly dramatic, but they convey the extreme pain that people go through.

Here the Daishonin is making a comparison: While women of legend turned into stones or snakes because of their longing for someone of the opposite sex, the mother of Oto Gozen will become a Buddha because of her longing for the Lotus Sutra.

In "Letter From Sado," the Daishonin writes: "[Human beings] give their lives for shallow, worldly matters but rarely for the noble cause of Buddhism. Small wonder they do not attain Buddhahood" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 34). Not only have we been lucky enough to be born as human beings, but we have had the rare fortune

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to encounter the correct Buddhist teaching. By firmly establishing in our hearts a strong yearning for kosen-rufu, we can manifest a state of happiness in the eternal dimensions of past, present and future. We can each become a Buddha.

And if we succeed in becoming Buddhas, then we can lead our loved ones to enlightenment, too. Together we can enjoy lives of boundless happiness.

A Mother Sows the Seeds of Happiness for Her Children

[Postscript:] How Oto Gozen must have grown! Your efforts in service to the Lotus Sutra will no doubt fill Oto Gozen's entire life with happiness. (GZ, 1223)

The Daishonin was always concerned about Oto Gozen's development. In a letter several years later ("The Supremacy of the Law"), he says, "I would imagine your daughter, Oto, has become a fine and intelligent young girl" (MW-3, 202). This child had been brought up by a true "mother of kosen-rufu." Surely the growth of such a child is a source of great anticipation and joy.

Elsewhere, the Daishonin expresses delight at the fine growth of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro's son Nanjo Tokimitsu, Abutsu-bo's son Tokuro Moritsuna, Toki Jonin's son Iyo-bo and others.

The Daishonin means here that the mother's good fortune and benefit in having devoted herself to the Lotus Sutra has become her daughter Oto Gozen's good fortune. The good fortune and benefit we create by exerting ourselves in faith will definitely manifest in the lives of our children, grandchildren and all our family members.

Buddhism is the supreme medicine. The Daishonin says that the benefit of faith extends to the "preceding seven generations and the seven generations that followed" (MW-7, 172).

How the Daishonin's words must have put Oto Gozen's mother at ease! For a mother, the future of her child is a matter of the greatest concern. That was probably all the truer for Oto Gozen's mother, because she was raising her daughter alone. The original Buddha promises this mother that her daughter, whose life she certainly held as dear as her own, would become happy. Thus embraced in the Daishonin's mercy, she must have felt as though all her troubles and sufferings had vanished instantly.

Oto Gozen's mother steadfastly maintained her faith. When the Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu, she undertook another journey to visit him. And later, according to one source,¹⁰ with Oto Gozen she visited the Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin, after his painful departure from Mount Minobu. Mother and daughter possessed a pure and honest seeking spirit.

When people were filled with apprehension at the impending second Mongol invasion of Japan, the Daishonin called out to the mother and daughter: "Should any calamity befall us, you should immediately come to visit me here [Mount Minobu], where you will be welcomed wholeheartedly. Should the worst happen, then let us starve together among these mountains" (MW-3, 202).

"Let us suffer this calamity together," he is saying in effect. "Let us eternally share the joys and sufferings of life together."

The Daishonin never forgot the immense sincerity and concern Oto Gozen's mother showed when he was undergoing the greatest of hardships on Sado. He indicates here that he would put his life on the line to protect her and her daughter. Bonds of the heart forged

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in times of great difficulty are eternal. Could there be any greater honor? Could there be any greater treasure? This mother and daughter undertook a journey over mountains and across the sea, and in the end possessed a brilliantly shining jewel in their lives.

As we cross mountains and rivers together in the journey of kosen-rufu, every step of the way a symphony of eternal jewels, eternal dramas and brilliant paintings resounds in our hearts. □

1. Maudgalyayana: Also known as Mahamaudgalyayana.
2. Four continents: Those situated respectively to the east, west, north and south of Mount Sumeru, according to the ancient Indian worldview. They represent the entire world.
3. The distances in this paragraph are intended figuratively, not literally.
4. Some sources indicate that he traveled three thousand miles. In China, Dengyo became a disciple of Tao-sui of the T'ien-t'ai school.
5. *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight): One of T'ien-t'ai's three major works, compiled by his disciple Chang-an. It elucidates, among other things, the principle of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms.
6. Hsüan-tsang (602–64): A Chinese priest of the T'ang dynasty and a translator of Buddhist scriptures. He journeyed to India in 629 to study Buddhism.
7. There are many Japanese fables and legends that portray women whose love or yearning for a man was so powerful that they turned themselves into some nonhuman or inanimate form. This is done either to be close to that person or to wreak revenge on him for being spurned.
8. "Oto Gozen no Haha Gosho" (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1222–23), thought to have been written in November 1273, when the Daishonin was 52.
9. This translation is based on new research on the original writings of Nichiren Daishonin. It differs substantially from the version in the *Gosho Zenshu*.
10. *Gosho Zenshu* appendix, "Deshidannato Retsuden" (List of Disciples and Followers), compiled by the fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko, p. 8.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Date: November 3, 1272 or 1273

Recipient: A woman living in Kamakura with her young daughter, Oto Gozen. Her name remains unknown, but she is thought to be the woman upon whom Nichiren Daishonin bestowed the Buddhist name Nichimyo Shonin or "Sage Sun-Mystic."

Background: The Daishonin, 51 or 52, depending on the dating of the letter, was an exile on Sado at the time he penned this letter. He wrote it to thank the woman for her visit. The original, consisting of three pages, is extant at Cho'on, a temple in Nagasaki, Japan.

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