

## TREASURES OF THE HEART

### Essentials for proper self-control and personal brilliance

We value many things in life, particularly that which enhances and improves the quality of our lives in some way. Nichiren Daishonin divides life's "treasures" into three categories: treasures of the storehouse, treasures of the body, and treasures of the heart. He writes, "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. Strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 238) Thus the Daishonin teaches that life's most important commodity—that which most greatly enhances the quality of our lives—is treasures of the heart.

### To pursue material treasure alone is to lead a miserable life

"Treasures of the storehouse" are material treasures. They include such things as property and financial wealth. They are, for the most part, life's external adornments. These are things that almost all of us want—treasures we are naturally attracted to, often feel we need, and to which there is usually attached monetary value. And while we tend to seek these things, most of us realize that focusing on them exclusively or excessively can be futile, or even detrimental.

"Treasures of the body" are attributes that endow our person, such as skills, knowledge, educational background, etc. They also include perceptions that are attached to or associated with us, such as social standing, reputation, position and fame. In contrast to treasures of the storehouse, treasures of the body are perhaps more stable and lasting. Nevertheless, simply possessing them does not ensure happiness, and when such attributes are misused even a little, they can lead a person to ruin or to the ruin of others.

Nichiren Daishonin referred to those of great skill or learning who failed to use those skills wisely as "talented animals."

The human heart, left to its own devices, tends to lean toward the exclusive pursuit of wants and desires. When, spurred on by this "hungry heart," people focus their energies on obtaining treasures of the storehouse and treasures of the body, they are never satisfied. It is quite as Cicero said, "The thirst of desire is never filled, nor fully satisfied."

Psychological research is finding more and more that people whose primary focus in life is the attainment of "extrinsic goals"—externals such as wealth, property, fame or status—tend to be less happy. In general, they are said to experience higher levels of anxiety, suffer more from illness, and have less of a sense of fulfillment.

Shakyamuni Buddha said that "the mind is wavering and restless, difficult to guard and restrain. . . . But it is a great good to control the mind; a mind self-controlled is a source of great joy" (*The Dhammapada*, verse 34–35).

The most respected figures in early Buddhism were those known as *arhats*. Literally, the Sanskrit word *arhat* meant "deserving," or "worthy," but it was also interpreted as meaning "killer of the robber." In other words, an arhat was a Buddhist sage who had defeated the "robber" of earthly desires within his heart and mind.

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Shakyamuni also said, “If a man should conquer in battle a thousand and a thousand more, and another man should conquer himself, this would be the greater victory, because the greatest victory is over oneself...” (*The Dhammapada*, verse 103).

No matter how many “treasures of the storehouse” and “treasures of the body” one amasses, nothing of these may remain in the aftermath of an unexpected event. And certainly after one has been visited by what Buddhism calls the four sufferings—birth, old age, sickness and death—these external treasures lose all meaning. The sense of loss one feels at parting with such treasures can even become a cause for further suffering. In this light, it is easy to see why the ability to win over ourselves—over our weakness that makes us vulnerable to defeat by our own desires—is the most important treasure we can possess. This is the treasure of the heart.

We can define “treasures of the heart” as the mental and spiritual capacities to achieve mastery over oneself and to have genuine concern for others.

This equates to such attributes as a solid sense of fulfillment, a brightness of spirit, a warm and attractive personality, self-control, conviction, a sense of justice, courage, empathy and compassion.

Or, it may be viewed as an indestructible spiritual state—the state of absolute happiness—that allows a person to surmount even life’s most fundamental sufferings. A winner in life is a person who amasses treasures of the heart.

The Roman philosopher Seneca, tutor to the infamous Emperor Nero, was unjustly sentenced by imperial order to commit suicide. Just before the end, he turned to his family and is reported to have said, “There is no need to worry. There is something that surpasses the riches of this world and I will leave as an example, the moral life I have lead.”

Even though facing a tragic and unjust death, at the final moment, he gave expression to the treasures of the heart he had accumulated through the way he lived. He also stated that he had led a full life. “Death,” he said, “is so little to be feared that through its good offices, nothing is to be feared” (*Moral Essays*, book 1, XXIV).

Though not persecuted in the same way as Seneca, we may perceive the sufferings of birth, aging, illness and death, which assail us all, as inherently unjust. In a sense, we all fall victim to the tyrannical emperor of death. The question is whether we can face this ultimate suffering of death with composure and confidence.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote that because the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death are the greatest of life’s sufferings, we can use them to “adorn the [treasure] tower of our beings” to the greatest extent. In other words, through our practice of the Mystic Law, we turn the greatest of life’s sufferings into life’s greatest assets—we develop treasures of the heart.

Ultimately, treasures of the heart mean the strength, wisdom and good fortune not to be done in by desires and suffering. It indicates the condition of Buddhahood potential within us, which we aim to bring forth and develop through Buddhist practice. And when we become rich in treasures of the heart, on that basis we also enrich our treasures of the storehouse and treasures of the body. In fact, we gain the ability to use these other two treasures to enhance our happiness and that of others.□

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