

DON'T FOUL OUT OF THE GAME OF LIFE
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A Perspective on Excerpts From "Rissho Ankoku Ron" (On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism), The Thesis of Remonstrance by Nichiren Daishonin.

i n t r o d u c t i o n

In the opening lines of the "Rissho Ankoku Ron" (On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism), Nichiren Daishonin paints a dire picture of thirteenth-century Japan. But it is no exaggeration. Official records¹ of the time confirm abnormal numbers of fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, famines and great religious and civil strife.

The Daishonin had already established his Buddhism in April of 1253 and to him, the cause of the relentless suffering of the people was clear. At the risk of his own life, he submitted this work on July 16, 1260, to the most powerful man in Japan, Hojo Tokiyori, and challenged the existing power structure of the country. Supported by scripture from Buddhist sutras, he urges the country to abandon Buddhist practices that had turned against the very essence of Buddhism itself—practices that defiled the lives of the populace and the land in which they live. What the Daishonin saw as he looked out across the land is in many ways no different from the view we have of our world as we look through the window of the mass media.

The thesis is written in the form of questions and answers exchanged between a host and a guest (see sidebar p. 13). The host symbolizes Nichiren Daishonin and the guest, Hojo Tokiyori. Tokiyori, having retired as regent of the Kamakura shogunate government, still held the actual reins of power and, therefore, represented the government. In this writing, the Daishonin predicts more terrifying calamities, specifically revolution and invasion, if the nation continues to embrace false doctrines. Later, these were fulfilled with factional infighting within the Hojo clan in 1272 and when the Mongols attacked Japan twice, in 1274 and 1281.

The Daishonin introduces the "three proofs" as a way to measure the validity of a teaching. They are documentary, theoretical and actual proofs. For the Daishonin, documentary proof was the Lotus Sutra.

Implicit in the "Rissho Ankoku Ron" is theoretical proof, although he did not expand upon it. Hence this article will approach the thesis from the standpoint of philosophy, not doctrine. Actual proof, results in the lives of practitioners, is the most important of all.

PART 1:
BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

In recent years, there are unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the [coun-

try] and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and in every family someone grieves.... Famine and epidemics rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes. Corpses pile up in mounds like observation platforms, dead bodies lie side by side like planks on a bridge.” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], pp. 3–4)

This passage reads like the six o’clock news on a really bad day. In an interesting parallel with present times—with the spiritual uncertainty and social confusion we see as we enter the third millennium of the Christian Era—Nichiren Daishonin was writing at a time when the Buddhist world had entered the third age of its history known as the Latter Day of the Law. This was the period that Buddhist sutras described as an evil age when Buddhism would no longer have the power to help people. It was an age the onset of which many people feared.

As our world approaches the end of the second millennium of Christian history, many are also filled with fear and uncertainty. While specific circumstances differ, as we shall see, the underlying spiritual crisis is not much different for us than when the Buddhist world faced its own “millennium fever.”

Sutras divide the years following the establishment of Buddhism by Shakyamuni into three time periods, although there are several views on the length of these periods. The Daishonin adopted the explanation found in the Sutra of the Great Assembly, which describes five consecutive five-hundred-year periods following the death of Shakyamuni Buddha. The first two five-hundred year periods are regarded as the Former Day of the Law, and the following two five-hundred year periods as the Middle Day of the Law.

The fifth five-hundred year period is regarded as the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, which continues indefinitely. The concept of the three time periods explains that as time passes, the conditions and capacity of the people also change, and an appropriate teaching is needed for each of the three periods. The Daishonin explains his view in a later work, “The Selection of the Time”:

In the Daijuku Sutra [Sutra of the Great Assembly], Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One,... predicts the future. Thus he says that the first five hundred years after his passing will be the age of enlightenment,² and the next five hundred years, the age of meditation (making one thousand years). The next five hundred years will be the age of reading, reciting and listening,³ and the next five hundred years, the age of building temples and stupas⁴ (making two thousand years). Concerning the next five hundred years after that [The Latter Day of the Law], he says, “Quarrels and disputes will arise among the adherents to my teachings, and the Pure Law will become obscured and lost” (MW-3, 85).

The first period saw the wide propagation of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings in India and a great culture and civilization arose based on the revitalizing power of this profound philosophy. Yet Buddhism eventually declined in India and was replaced by Hinduism, which evolved from ancient Brahmanism.

During the Middle Day of the Law, the second millennium of Buddhist history, Buddhist sutras and teachings were transported to China as a result of commerce along the Silk Road.

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Buddhism showed its remarkable ability to adapt and evolve with changing times, different cultures and the people's capacity. As it took root, it became the spiritual driving force for another great cultural revival lasting many centuries in China. Yet as effective as these teachings were in that time and place and for those people, they also eventually lost their vitality.

As the power of Buddhist practice declined a second time in the closing years of the second millennium, the resulting spiritual vacuum led to an era of increasing anxiety and suffering. Many Buddhist scholars concluded that the feared third millennium, the Latter Day of the Law that was to last for 10,000 years and more, was at hand. This would be a time, many concluded, that would see the beneficial power of the Buddhist practice disappear and the world enter a dark and fearful era when the evils of human nature would dominate. In this spiritual atmosphere, the coming millennium was viewed with great fear and anxiety.

Also, in the second millennium, Buddhism had been widely exported from China into Japan where the conditions of the times fed these fears. Disasters, epidemics, pestilence and civil strife occurred with frightening regularity prompting renewed and vigorous efforts by monks, peasants and court officials to offer prayers and conduct religious rituals with heightened intensity. Yet, these efforts were to no avail. The country was in turmoil and the people suffered greatly.

One Buddhist priest, Nichiren Daishonin, was prompted to ask, "Why is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed?" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 4) In his "Securing the Peace of the Land" thesis, he answers these questions.

We are now standing on the brink of a new millennium. How remarkably similar are our circumstances. The last fifty years of so-called peace since the Second World War has seen hundreds of regional wars cause the death of millions of people and misery for many times more. We still hear such vulgar terms as ethnic cleansing and hate crimes.

Not so many years ago, some thought most diseases could be cured by the dawn of the twenty-first century, but we are still plagued by many old ones as well as new ones. Furthermore, the possibility of terrorist forces using disease as a weapon against humanity is unfortunately not a remote one.

Every day people die of starvation, including children. Meanwhile the wealthy nations use up the lion's share of the earth's precious natural resources at an alarming rate and with environmental destruction that threatens the viability of our planet as a haven for human life. And the list goes on.

Some believe these events are leading to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and the coming Day of Judgment. Some see the new millennium as a benchmark foreordained from the day of Jesus' birth. Yet, some point out the arbitrary nature of marking millenniums. For instance, there is evidence that a calculation error made by a sincere but misguided Christian monk some 1400 years ago has us already entered into the third millennium by about three years. According to this account, we entered the third Christian millennium in 1997. (see box p. 12)

Of course, given the subjective nature of human methods for marking the passage of time, in terms of the five-billion-year age of our planet, next year is, in fact, no more significant than any other.

But the idea that these troubled times are not ordained provides little consolation. Sincere people dedicate themselves with great religious fervor, offering prayers with ever-increasing intensity, turning back to fundamentalist hopes of salvation. Others search for spiritual sol-

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ace in a variety of “new age” movements. Many disregard religion and seek solutions in politics alone, or bemoan the state of politics while feeling helpless themselves to change things.

Some even hunker down in survivalist camps, or themselves stockpile food and weapons, hoping to ride out the difficult times they see coming.

With hearts as heavy with fear and anxiety as people in Japan more than 700 years ago, we too raise our eyes to the heavens and ask: “What is wrong? What will become of us?”

Under remarkably similar, if not more miserable, circumstances, Nichiren Daishonin found cause for great hope for the future. He and his followers faced the coming age not with fear but with hope and confidence. Amid the destitution of his time, he envisioned a new spiritual energy that would become the foundation for building a new, humanistic culture. One that would include all people—indeed, all creatures and the entire planet—in its embrace. In “The Selection of the Time,” he explains, “But that which is to come after ‘the Pure Law has become obscured and lost’ is the Great Pure Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the heart and core of the Lotus Sutra. This is what should be propagated” (MW-3, 87–88).

His thesis provides a convincing and detailed analysis of the problem, exposing the root cause of the people’s plight and the beneficial medicine of a spiritual reformation that will lead to a peaceful society—a peaceful land. This is the essential message and purpose of the “Rissho Ankoku Ron.”

PART 2: TURNING OUR BACKS ON THE TRUTH

I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have searched rather widely in the scriptures for an answer. The people of today all turn their backs on what is right; to a man, they give their allegiance to evil. This is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return. And in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities that arise one after another. I cannot keep silent on this matter. I cannot suppress my fears. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 5)

In this passionate passage, Nichiren Daishonin summarizes his conclusions. He makes two important statements: 1) People ignore or refuse to recognize what is right and give themselves over to evil (what is false); 2) Because people believe and, therefore act in ways that are at variance with what is right or correct, the positive functions (“sages and benevolent deities”) inherent in life and the environment become inactive, and negative functions (“devils and demons”) come to the fore.

The Daishonin follows this bold assertion with a detailed and thorough analysis. He quotes extensively from Buddhist sutras. Because of the vast number of sutras and teachings based upon them, there was widespread confusion over what was the correct practice of Buddhism. He wished to demonstrate that the current understanding of the Buddhist teachings was flawed, and he used the body of Buddhist writings known to his contemporaries to prove his point. He did so by comparing the points and predictions made in the sutras to the actual state of the world, and specifically Japan, at that time. His aim was to correct mistaken views about Buddhism and reveal the correct Buddhist teaching for the Latter Day of the Law that had the power to bring about a peaceful and secure society.

The Daishonin chose three standards for determining the relative merit of Buddhist

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doctrine, stating “I, Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact” (MW-6, 111). Ultimately, of course, it is actual proof—whether or not a philosophy actually works in the lives of those who put it to the test—that is the most important proof.

What motivated the Daishonin to write this thesis? He states, “I cannot keep silent.” He could not keep silent because the people were suffering terribly and he knew how to relieve their suffering. He had to speak out.

In the Japan of the Daishonin’s lifetime, religious, political and military authorities were closely aligned. Speaking out in criticism of the powerful forces dominating Japanese society was quite literally to risk one’s life. These conditions prompted the great nineteenth-century Japanese thinker and educator Fukuzawa Yukichi to comment on the nature of Buddhist influence in his *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*:

If you inquire into the basis of this power [of the Japanese Buddhist establishment], you will find it is not religious. They have simply borrowed the government’s power. Ultimately, they are nothing else but a branch of secular authority.

Buddhism has flourished, true. But its teaching has been entirely absorbed by political authority. What shines throughout the world is not the radiance of Buddha’s teachings but the glory of Buddhism’s political authority.” (qtd. in *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 202)

Thus, the Daishonin was not speaking out of personal interest in making his declaration “I must speak out.” It is a bold statement of his profound compassion and uncompromising courage.

With this in mind, let us discuss “right” and “evil” as used by the Daishonin in the above passage. Science, reason and our own experience tell us that certain natural laws exist; for example, the law of gravity. Laws in science are not the same as theories or hypotheses. When theories are verified by scientific experimentation (by the proof of actual fact) then we begin to refer to a theory as a law. For example, the law of gravity exists and, at least in the universe of human experience, works as we expect it to. Because the theory of gravity has been shown to work in every case, it has become known as a law.

The law of gravity is something that is true and right in the sense that it correctly describes and predicts the phenomenal world. Knowing of and living according to this law can benefit our lives. Even infants, ignorant of this law, are aware of it and come to put their faith in it as they learn to walk and deal with the world around them. Their faith in the law of gravity is not blind faith, it is reasoned and realistic faith based on observation.

Imagine, however, if someone were to ignore this law, choosing to believe that there is no gravity. What can we predict for such a person? Calamity and disaster with every step off a curb or attempt to float from a rooftop. Ignoring the truths or laws of life and putting one’s trust and faith in things that are not true—such as the denial of gravity—are to embrace the “evil” mentioned in the above passage. In this sense, evil may be viewed as beliefs or choices that are harmful to the individual or to others—that which destroys happiness and brings suffering.

Similarly, Buddhism postulates that there is a law of life. Like gravity, it is not something created by Buddhists but the actual way that all existence—including human life—works. And in the same way that Isaac Newton didn’t invent gravity but identified what had

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always existed, Buddhism has discovered and identified the law of life that has always existed but has not been understood.

To illustrate, imagine that you are a member of a championship soccer team (what most countries call football). Imagine also that your team is mistakenly assigned to play in an American-style football game. You may be a good athlete, in prime physical shape with a good mental attitude, and you exert yourself to the best of your ability. But you don't know the rules of the game! You are playing by the wrong rules. You can't succeed, no matter how sincerely you exert yourself. In fact, the harder you try, the more misery you may bring upon yourself. You will be flagged for various violations of the rules. You will be unable to achieve goals. You will likely be injured or foul out of the game entirely.

Living is similar in that it doesn't matter how capable, sincere or hardworking you are if you don't know the rules of life—the truth or law by which life functions. You will be unable to attain the greatest victory in life—enlightenment or absolute happiness. Quite the contrary, in spite of your many efforts, you will find “disasters and calamities that arise one after another.”

This is the substance of the Daishonin's conclusion. The reason disasters and calamities arise one after another is because people turn their backs on a correct understanding of life and instead embrace ways of life that overlook or misperceive the law of life. In other words, the root of the problems plaguing society both then and now is confusion in the inner realm of life, confusion about the true nature of life itself. This accords with not knowing the rules of the game of life. And when one does not know the rules, playing the game harder isn't the answer—living in accord with the law of life is.

Scientists have explained in mathematical terms how the law of gravity functions. The law of life as explained in Buddhism teaches us that our state of life is reflected in myriads of ways—both positive and negative—on the different levels of our individual body and mind, our relationships with others and with the natural environment.

This law of life is revealed in the Lotus Sutra. The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is a “right” or “correct” teaching because it reveals the truth about life and those teachings that contradict it or don't express it completely are false or misleading. The Daishonin was fully aware of this law, and it forms the basis of his explanations and conclusions. Armed with this knowledge let us move deeper into the “Rissho Ankoku Ron.”

PART 3: “THE THREE POISONS” AND “THREE CALAMITIES”

The Daijuku Sutra [Sutra of the Great Assembly] says: “Though the ruler of a state may have for countless existences in the past practiced the giving of alms...if he sees that my teaching is in danger of perishing and stands idly by without doing anything to protect it, his country will become the scene of three inauspicious occurrences. The first is high grain prices, the second is warfare, and the third is epidemics.” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 10–11)

Here and in several other passages, Nichiren Daishonin writes of “the three calamities” that will befall people when they hold false or erroneous beliefs. The three calamities of high grain prices, warfare and epidemics represent all calamities that threaten human survival, disrupting the harmony within our life—both body and mind—and in our relationship with others and the land.

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“The three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness” are impurities of the inner realm of life. These three originate in the “fundamental darkness” inherent in life, or, simply put, our fundamental ignorance of the law of life, and cause human suffering. They are regarded as the most prevalent illusions of all. They are the “evil” the Daishonin decries when he says that the people “give their allegiance to evil.”

Furthermore, the three calamities are manifestations of disharmony within life and in its relationship with the rest of humanity and the natural environment. They are closely related to the “three poisons” in the inner realm of life (see box p. 19).

The desire to hoard necessities drives prices up. Thus, the calamity of high grain prices is caused by the poison of greed—the belief that one’s own needs are paramount to those of others. Inflation—a calamity caused by greed—represents all calamities of the land such as food shortages, for example.

Warfare is caused by the poison of anger and represents calamities in our relations with others. People operating in anger believe their view and their view alone is correct.

Epidemics result from the poison of foolishness, of living unwisely without considering the law of cause and effect, and represent calamities of the inner realm, lack of harmony between our own mind and body. In other words, because people are ignorant of the law of life, they do not know how to live correctly and therefore illnesses—physical, mental and spiritual—spread.

If people are susceptible to the workings of the three poisons within themselves, they cannot live in harmony with the law of life. The effects will be evident within the individual, society and environment as the three calamities.

The only calamity not already occurring in Japan at the time this thesis was submitted was that of war—foreign invasion and internal strife. Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Why do I say this? Because, of the seven types of disasters described in the Yakushi Sutra [Sutra of the Buddha of Medicine], five have already occurred. Only two have yet to appear, the calamity of invasion from foreign lands and the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain. And of the three calamities mentioned in the Daijuku Sutra [Sutra of the Great Assembly], two have already made their appearance. Only one remains, the disaster of warfare. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 37)

Thus, his motivation was to avert war. And this war he could easily predict, not because of any clairvoyant or paranormal powers, but as easily and surely as you and I can predict the sun will rise tomorrow morning—simply because he understood the workings of life, the law of causality.

Similarly, if we examine the world today, we see the effects of greed, anger and foolishness. We too can predict with confidence that unless something is done, natural disasters, warfare, starvation and epidemics will continue to wreak suffering. We too should feel that we “cannot keep silent.”

It is, or should be, the purpose of education, philosophy and religion to enable people to control the “three poisons” so they can eliminate suffering. Unfortunately this is not the case, so it is natural that the world is full of calamities and disasters, suffering and unhappiness.

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PART 4: INCORRECT VIEWS OF LIFE ARE THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

If people favor what is only incidental and forget what is primary, can the benevolent deities be anything but angry? If people cast aside what is perfect and take up what is biased, can the world escape the plots of demons? Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better to simply outlaw this one evil [doctrine] that is the source of all the trouble!" (MW-2 [2nd], 20)

First, it should be noted that Nichiren Daishonin's call to "simply outlaw this one evil [doctrine]" was done in the context of the times. Religion in thirteenth-century Japan had become, in effect, institutionalized within a corrupt government that suppressed a suffering populace. By "simply outlaw this one evil [doctrine]," the Daishonin was urging the government to stop using religion as a tool of suppression—a tool to make people apathetic and submissive. By "outlaw" he was implying not so much a government ban, but a removal of official government sanction and patronage.

Where there is freedom of religious expression, religious truth can be determined in the marketplace of ideas. Today, the validity or value of beliefs can be illuminated through social discourse. False assumptions and beliefs will tend to "outlaw" themselves when thoroughly discussed and examined in the context of individuals' and humanity's needs. In that sense, religious freedom implies not only the freedom to believe as one wishes, but the freedom to investigate beliefs and discuss and verify their validity against the standards of documentary, theoretical and actual proofs.

In the Daishonin's time, the Pure Land teachings of Honen had an immense influence upon society. Honen, the founder of the Pure Land sect, urged his followers to obtain rebirth in a Pure Land after death. But more critically, he urged them to "discard, close, ignore and abandon" all other teachings, including the Lotus Sutra.

Honen advocated belief in what the Daishonin saw as an imaginary or other-worldly Buddha—Amida. He taught people to despise the real world, discard hope for any satisfaction in this life, and long for rebirth in an imagined "pure land." Nichiren Daishonin saw these beliefs as misleading and detrimental to the morale of the people and the nation. It was such erroneous and destructive beliefs and the effects they cause in the lives of the people that the Daishonin strove to eliminate. Without government sanction, the prevalent sects would not support themselves when people found there was a greater truth available to them. President Ikeda writes:

Nichiren made this point to urge the government to cease its protection and patronage of Zen, Pure Land and other Buddhist schools and to sever the corrupt ties existing between government and religion. In contemporary terms, what Nichiren was talking about accords with the principle of separation of church and state. He rejected the idea that the fate of religion should be dependent upon the whims of the state. With this conviction, Nichiren strove to spread the True Law by examining the validity of each teaching through debate and dialogue among the different Buddhist schools.

When a given religious order seeks the patronage of the state, it is a clear sign of its degeneration. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 235)

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There are other mistaken beliefs that people give their allegiance to—put their faith in—that are contrary to the law of life. For example: beliefs that deny a person’s highest potential, that diminish the sanctity of life; beliefs that take people’s focus away from improving their lives in the present to awaiting some reward in an afterlife; beliefs that do not respect the lives of other human beings; beliefs that enslave people to the whims of religious demigods; etc.

All of them fail to focus our efforts on purification of the inner realm, manifestation of our inherent greatness (Buddhahood) and respect for that same greatness in others. These beliefs can neither lead people to lasting happiness nor protection from calamity and disaster.

President Ikeda writes in his narrative *The Human Revolution*:

If someone believes in something that’s mistaken, no matter what it is, it’ll drag that person into the depths of misery. The same holds true for a group of men, society, even a whole nation. To mistake a fallacy for the truth and believe it is the most horrible thing in the world. No amount of good intentions or hard work will help people then. If they believe in something false or unscientific, they can’t help but invite misfortune. It’s inevitable.

Some may place their trust in a specific doctrine, or in science, religion, their country, their business, their relatives, their friends, in their convictions, or in medicine or technology. Human beings can’t act unless they believe in something. Unconsciously, even one who flaunts his atheism acts on the basis of some belief. All human affairs are no more than the sum of actions rooted in faith.

Belief is not something apart from life. Nor is it confined to a select group of people. The important thing is the extent to which we are aware of what we believe in. Most people never even question if the substance of their belief is absolutely correct. Right or wrong, just or evil—they ignore it and go merrily on their way. Here, right here, is the root of unhappiness. (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 100–01)

People are hungry for the truth. They yearn for it and the relief from suffering that living wisely brings. The recent interest in New Age religions and self-help movements attest to this fact. As we approach the new century, it seems clear that we are at the beginning of a great spiritual journey and awakening. What people seek is a way of life that is at once sound in reason, is relatively easy to practice and provides verifiable proof in their daily life. Religion is, therefore, both the problem and the solution. It’s a matter of discerning between a false one and a correct one.

Buddhism sees life as an ongoing struggle between our fundamental darkness and our fundamental enlightenment—between that which denies the greatness of life and that which confirms and cultivates it. Buddhism recognizes that the key to winning that internal battle is to live in harmony with the law of life.

PART 5: REFORMATION OF OUR BELIEFS: THE HUMAN REVOLUTION

Therefore you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]. If you do

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so, then the threefold world will become the Buddha land, and how could a Buddha land ever decline? The regions in the ten directions will all become treasure realms, and how could a treasure realm ever suffer harm? If you live in a country that knows no decline or diminution, in a land that suffers no harm or disruption, then your body will find peace and security and your mind will be calm and untroubled. You must believe my words, heed what I say! (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 40)

Since calamities and disasters arise from believing something to be true or correct, which is, in fact, false or in error, Nichiren Daishonin concludes that if we wish to create a peaceful society we must reform the beliefs we hold in our hearts. We must turn away from beliefs that are false—that do not enable us to purify ourselves of the “three poisons”—and reorient our belief system to recognize and embrace the reality of life. It is our desires and actions influenced by the “three poisons” that result in suffering.

The crisis we find ourselves in today leaves us conflicted over the great civilization humanity has created, on one hand, and the evil that continues to exist within it, on the other. It makes us wonder who we are. On a broad scale, this wondering has led to a sort of global identity crisis.

In his 1999 peace proposal submitted to the United Nations on January 26, President Ikeda states:

At the heart of the SGI movement is the effort to develop a new cosmology and to address the identity crises head-on.

This cosmology provides answers to fundamental questions inherent in our very humanity. Moreover, it provides a framework —accessible to all—for resolving the identity crises and transforming our *fin-de-siècle* chaos into a world where all human beings can find meaning for their existence. (May 1999, *Living Buddhism*, p. 27)

This new cosmology involves the transformation of delusion into wisdom. This reformation or transformation is called human revolution. Human revolution is the reformation of one’s beliefs, of one’s faith: an essential realignment of our world view and the purpose of life. This, the Daishonin concludes, is the key to personal happiness, social harmony and a peaceful land.

PART 6: HOW TO ACCOMPLISH A REFORMATION OF THE INNER SELF

In his “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” Nichiren Daishonin teaches us how to establish a peaceful society through the reformation of our inner selves. We may not be aware that our practice is contributing to world peace, but the Daishonin explains that the power of the Law to purify our lives makes it so. “Though I may be a person of little ability, I have reverently given myself to the study of the Mahayana [Lotus Sutra]. A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles, and the green ivy that twines around the tall pine can grow to a thousand feet.” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 25) In a passage from another writing he also states: “Since the Law is supreme, the Person is worthy of respect.” (MW-1, 264). By awakening to the law of life, ordinary people such as we can transform ourselves into Buddhas, thus taking a journey or accomplishing a task that we could not do otherwise.

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In the thesis he says, “The dove has changed into a hawk, the sparrow into a clam! How gratifying! You have transformed yourself through your association with [me] a friend in the orchid room, just as the mugwort growing in the hemp field becomes straight” (MW2 [2nd ed.], 36). We see the importance of good influences in terms of finding a good teacher. The mentor-disciple relationship is implicit in this passage.

By inscribing the true object of devotion, the Gohonzon, the Daishonin made it possible to actualize the spirit of this thesis. He took it out of the realm of theory and put it into actuality. Thus, when we put our faith in the Gohonzon, the Lotus Sutra of the Later Day of the Law, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the process of “reforming the tenets we hold in our hearts” is activated.

I hope we may set about as quickly as possible taking measures to deal with these slanders against the Law and to bring peace to the world without delay, thus insuring that we may live in safety in this life and enjoy good fortune in the life to come. But it is not enough that I alone should accept and have faith in your words—we must see to it that others as well are warned of their errors! (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 41)

Because people are not in harmony with the law of life, they fall under the influence of the three poisons and behave in ways that bring misery upon themselves and the land in which they live. But through practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism, they can strengthen the law within them, master their negative impulses and establish a positive state of life that will be reflected in the environment—a process of inner or human revolution.

The process of human revolution is the most essential and effective contribution one can make toward a peaceful society. But we must realize that our own human revolution necessitates an awareness of our responsibility to teach others.

President Ikeda writes:

The key to establishing peace and prosperity in our world, as expressed here, lies in the human heart—in people’s prayers for order and tranquillity in society—and in each person establishing a solid self-identity through the process of human revolution. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 245)

Henry David Thoreau writes: “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.”⁵ In a world filled with millions of people battling thousands of evils, we can be the ones to strike at the root. □

1. *Nihon Rekishi Daijiten* (Encyclopedia of Japanese History) and *Azuma Kagami* (Mirror of the East).
2. Age of Enlightenment: The period when many people are sure to attain enlightenment through practicing the Buddha’s teachings.
3. Age of reading, reciting and listening: The period when studying, reciting the sutras and listening to lectures on them constitute the central practice.
4. Age of building temples and stupas: The period when many temples and stupas—a kind of shrine—are built.
5. *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, John Bartlett, 1980, p. 559

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THE MILLENNIUM? YOU MISSED IT.

The January 18, 1999 issue of *Time* magazine reports: "Whenever the millennium is, it's not really next year, even if that's when just about everybody will be marking it. The party crowd pounding back beers in Times Square, the doomsayers bunched in armored yurts, all of them will greet the millennium at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31. But by more careful calculations, the millennium began a few years ago. A large part of the misunderstanding stems from Dionysius Exiguus—Latin for "Dennis the Short"—a 6th century monk who should be thought of as the original millennium bug. Dennis laid down the basis for the calendars we use today by figuring how far in the past Christ's birth was. As it turns out, he was off by several years. Historians now place the Nativity no later than 4 B.C., the year King Herod died. By that reckoning, the third millennium would have commenced no later than 1997. You missed it." (January 18, 1999, *Time*, p. 62)

OUTLINE OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN THE "RISSHO ANKOKU RON"

The "Rissho Ankoku Ron" is written in the form of a dialogue between a host and his guest. The host signifies Nichiren Daishonin and the guest Hojo Tokiyori, the recipient of the thesis and the de facto ruler of Japan at that time. The reader should take care to distinguish the guest's statements from those of the host since the guest mostly represents errors and misconceptions in Buddhism (except for his last statement) while the host corrects them. The following is an outline of the dialogue between the host and his guest:

GUEST Q#1: The guest notes that in recent years, natural disasters, famine and epidemics have occurred again and again. The people exhaust themselves in prayer and rituals, while others strive to make certain that government at the national and local level is carried out in a benevolent manner. Yet, despite these efforts, "Famine and epidemics rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes.... Then why is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed?" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 4)

HOST A#1: "I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have searched rather widely in the scriptures for an answer. The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; to a man, they give their allegiance to evil. This is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return. And in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities that arise one after another" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 5). There are three main points to his answer: 1) Because people believe in and therefore act in ways that are at variance with the law of life, 2) the positive functions inherent in life and the environment can no longer manifest, and 3) negative functions come to the fore.

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GUEST Q#2: The guest asks the host (Nichiren Daishonin) to cite documentary proof in support of his statement.

HOST A#2: In response, the Daishonin cites four sutras: the Konkomyo, Daijuku, Ninno and Yakushi sutras. These passages explain that calamities and disasters arise from the disorder of a person's inner realm caused by embracing falsehood. Then he restates the three elements of his original answer. He says that the passages are very clear—"what person in ten thousand could possibly doubt their meaning? And yet the blind and the deluded recklessly trust to heretical doctrines and fail to recognize the correct teachings" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 11).

GUEST Q#3: The guest is angry and demands to know how the Daishonin can say Buddhism is declining in Japan when it has long since spread throughout the country and people everywhere pay homage to the priests and temples. He says: "How, then, can anyone say that the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime are despised or that the three treasures of Buddhism have ceased to exist? If there is evidence to support such a contention, I would like to hear all the facts!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 12).

HOST A#3: In reply, the Daishonin says that although the temples and priests are widely respected by the people, they do not keep a correct understanding of the true intent of Buddhism but instead cling to erroneous interpretations that mislead the people. He quotes from several sutras and then concludes: "When we look at the world in the light of these passages of scripture, we see that the situation is just as they describe it. If we do not admonish the evil monks, how can we hope to do good?" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 14).

GUEST Q#4: The guest, growing more indignant, is shocked and offended that the Daishonin could speak ill of priests who are widely respected. "If they were in fact evil monks, then the wise ruler would put no trust in them," he claims. He then asks, "To whom are you referring when you speak of 'evil monks'?" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 15).

HOST A#4: The Daishonin unhesitatingly identifies Honen, founder of the popular Pure Land school, whom many considered a saint. He goes on to point out the contradictions between Honen's teachings and the Buddhist sutras. The Daishonin is most critical of Honen's teaching to abandon the Lotus Sutra. By teaching people to abandon the Lotus Sutra (which has the power to help all people manifest their inherent Buddhahood) and instead rely upon other sutras (which teach people to rely on external power), Honen's teachings will lead people to incessant suffering, not to the Buddha land as they promise. Thus, the Daishonin concludes with this answer: "If people favor what is only incidental and forget what is primary, can the benevolent deities be anything but angry? If people cast aside what is perfect and take up what is biased, can the world escape the plots of demons? Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil [doctrine] that is the source of all the trouble!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 20).

GUEST Q#5: The guest is truly enraged because the Daishonin has now criticized a

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person respected and revered by people everywhere. The guest feels the Daishonin has now become deliberately unreasonable. The guest says: "When you pile up such grave offenses, how can you hope to escape punishment? I am afraid even to sit here in your company. I must take up my staff and be on my way!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 22).

HOST A#5: The Daishonin, soothing his irate guest, begins his reply by saying, "Insects that live on smartweed forget how bitter it tastes; those who stay long in privies forget how foul the smell is." People can get used to anything and think it natural. He appeals to the guest, "Listen to my explanation of how this confusion arose and let us discuss the matter in detail" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 22). Nichiren Daishonin explains that people accepted the teachings of Honen without comparing carefully to the Buddha's teachings, without realizing that they contradict the Buddha's original intent. This was true not only for the Pure Land school, but also of other schools of Buddhism in the Daishonin's day. He uses both historic examples and sutra references to prove his case. By disregarding the Buddha's teachings, these new schools no longer reflected the original teaching of Buddhism. Hence, they could only mislead the people away from the truth and toward falsehood. The Daishonin says: "You should neither doubt this nor consider it strange. The only thing to do now is to abandon the evil ways and take up those that are good, to cut off this affliction at the source, to cut it off at the root!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 25).

GUEST Q#6: The guest looks mollified, but is not entirely convinced yet. He points out that there are many Buddhist scholars and eminent members of the clergy, yet none of them has made such statements. He says: "You, on the other hand, a person of humble position, think nothing of spewing out offensive accusations. Your assertion goes too far and your behavior is unreasonable" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 25).

HOST A#6: The Daishonin replies that one's status or authority cannot determine the truth of one's argument. Its validity must be judged on its merits. He asserts that since his argument is based on the Lotus Sutra, it is valid no matter how incapable he may be. He states that, "A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles, and the green ivy that twines around the tall pine can grow to a thousand feet" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 25).

GUEST Q#7: The guest is becoming convinced and speaking more mildly now, but he still has some doubts. "Between you and Honen, I cannot tell which is wise and which is foolish, or determine whose assertions are right and whose are wrong." He continues, "Now if you know of any means whereby disasters can be prevented and troubles brought to an end, I would like to hear about it" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 27). The guest points out that it's easy to complain about others. Show me your plan for peace, he demands.

HOST A#7: In response to the first part of the question, the Daishonin quotes several sutras to demonstrate who is right and who is wrong. In response to the second part, he quotes several sutras and points out the importance of stopping the slander of the true teaching of Buddhism—the Lotus Sutra. "If we

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hope to bring order and tranquillity to the world without further delay, we must put an end to these slanders of the Law that fill the country!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 34).

GUEST Q#8: The guest asks if the Daishonin means that these priests should be killed in order to stop the slander. Doing so would also amount to slander.

HOST A#8: The Daishonin points out that his intention is not to denounce the individuals, but it is the act of slander that he hates and wishes to eliminate. This can be done by denying those priests the alms upon which their livelihood depends, thus forcing them to stop slandering.

GUEST Q#9: The guest is moved by this reply and, filled with respect, replies that he is now convinced. He has forsaken his earlier views, and his ears and eyes have been opened to the truth. And since all people wish for peace and security, we should quickly put an end to the financial support of those priests propagating incorrect views.

HOST A#9: The Daishonin is filled with delight: "The dove has changed into a hawk, the sparrow into a clam! How gratifying! You have transformed yourself through your association with [me,] a friend in the orchid room, just as the mugwort growing in the hemp field becomes straight." (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 36). But, just as we can grow through association with good influences, we can also be discouraged by contact with negative ones. The Daishonin expresses his concerns about whether the guest will be able to keep his resolve.

Next the Daishonin urges quick action because of the various calamities and disasters befalling the nation of which two—foreign invasion and internal strife—have yet to occur. He worries about the suffering and plight of the people. "It distresses me that they should be so confused about right and wrong, and at the same time I feel pity that, having embraced Buddhism, they should have chosen the wrong kind. With the power of faith that is in their hearts, why must they recklessly give credence to heretical doctrines? If they do not shake off these delusions that they cling to but continue to harbor distorted views, then they will quickly leave this world of the living and surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 38).

It is not enough to simply reject what is false. The truth must be taught in order to replace it. "Therefore you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 40). This inner transformation is the basis for establishing a peaceful world.

Guest Q#10: The guest agrees. He sees now that slander of the true Law is the root cause of suffering. With the Daishonin's help, he has dispelled the ignorance from his mind. And the guest concludes the entire dialogue with a call to action: "I hope we may set about as quickly as possible taking measures to deal with these slanders against the Law and to bring peace to the world without delay, thus insuring that we may live in safety in this life and enjoy good fortune in the

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life to come. But it is not enough that I alone should accept and have faith in your words—we must see to it that others as well are warned of their errors!” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 41).

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