

THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

A one-volume, 1,200-page edition titled *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* has been published in celebration of November 18, the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's Founding. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* contain 172 of the Daishonin's writings and combines what was previously contained in seven volumes.

In the following two articles, the background and importance of this publication are explained. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda writes the foreword to *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* in which he states that "religion exists to resonate vibrantly within each person. Even if one discusses the happiness of all human beings, if it is spoken of apart from the happiness of a single human being, that is mere theory."

Tomohiro Matsuda is vice general chief of the Soka Gakkai study department and editor-in-chief of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, and shares his thoughts in "A Guide to *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*." Also, please read the "Publisher's Commentary" on page 4 for SGI-USA General Director Fred M. Zaitzu thoughts on this important event leading into the year 2000.

Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's successor, envisioned that the writings of his teacher would be translated in the future for the sake of worldwide propagation. He states: "When the Buddhism of India spread eastward, the Sanskrit texts were translated and introduced in China and Japan, so when the time comes to widely declare the sacred teachings of this country, the Japanese texts are sure to be translated and spread..." (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1613).

FOREWORD TO THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

The publication in a single volume of the translations of 172 writings of Nichiren Daishonin, including his five major works, is indeed wonderful news, not only for members of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), but for all English-speaking people interested in Buddhism. This volume is the translation of works in the Nichiren Daishonin *Gosho Zenshu* (The Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin). Now a good half of the contents of that latter volume has been translated and published in English.

Looking back, I recall that the *Gosho Zenshu* was published in April 1952, about one year after my mentor, Josei Toda, became the second president of the Soka Gakkai. Since then, the members of the Soka Gakkai in Japan have been fond of reading the *Gosho Zenshu* as they have persevered in spreading the Buddhist teachings widely, exactly as the Daishonin willed, for the peace and prosperity of humankind.

Particularly since my visit to the United States in 1960, my first trip outside Japan, the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have transcended national boundaries and spread to numerous countries around the world. Now the number of countries I have visited has also grown to fifty-four.

Today the expansion of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to 128 countries and territories worldwide attests to the realization of these golden words of the Daishonin: "The moon appears in the west and sheds its light eastward, but the sun rises in the east and casts its rays to the west. The same is true of Buddhism. It spread from west to east in the Former

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and Middle Days of the Law, but will travel from east to west in the Latter Day” (p. 401).

A world religion invariably has its sacred scriptures or original texts. In Buddhism, for instance, there are sutras that record the teachings of Shakyamuni; in Christianity, there is the Bible; and in Islam, the Koran.

The scriptures of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism are called the “Gosho.” (“Go” is an honorific prefix and “*sho*” means writings; thus, literally, honorable writings.) These writings have a distinguishing feature that sets them apart from the sacred texts of other religions. It is the fact that the founder, Nichiren Daishonin, wrote those works himself. Though the originals of many of those works have been lost, many important writings, including more than half of those known as the ten major works, have been handed down to the present in their original form. Naturally, with the worldwide spread of this Buddhism a demand has grown for the translation of those works, and efforts are now being made in many countries in that direction.

The Daishonin’s successor, Nikko Shonin (1246–1333), envisioned early on that, for the sake of worldwide propagation, the writings of his teacher were certain to be translated in the future. He declared “Just as when the Buddhism of India spread eastward, the Sanskrit texts were translated and introduced in China and Japan, so when the time comes to widely declare the sacred teachings of this country, the Japanese texts are sure to be translated and spread in China and India. There is no reason to argue over translations that will benefit far-off lands. I alone worry about changes being made according to personal views” (*Gosho Zenshu*).

Buddhism calls our present age the Latter Day of the Law. It is a period described in the sutras as an evil age defiled by the five impurities, in which people’s lives are muddied, and their confusion of thought is extreme. I am convinced that the Gosho is the one book that can dispel the darkness of this period and illuminate the third millennium. I believe it is the Gosho of Nichiren Daishonin that is indeed the scripture for the Latter Day of the Law, the scripture for all eternity.

The Gosho is a work of faith, of philosophy, of daily living, of eternal peace, and of boundless hope. It is set with myriad jewels of guidance. SGI members have read a single passage of the Gosho with their entire life, and not only changed their lives for the better but also achieved their human revolution.

What is the purpose of our studying the Gosho? The answer is expressed clearly in the following passage: “Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvipa. Be sure to strengthen your faith, and receive the protection of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (p. 386).

The main elements of the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism are summed up in this passage. What is important is, first, faith; second, practice; and third, study. Strong faith leads us directly to Buddhahood. And it is practice and study that deepen and strengthen that faith. For us, study must never be a mere accumulation of knowledge. It must be strictly a practical study to deepen one’s own faith and elevate one’s own state of life.

Moreover, the path of practice and study leads to the Gohonzon and to society. Because of practice and study, we face the Gohonzon, recite the sutra, and chant daimoku. With the wisdom and life force gained thereby, we carry out our practice and study in the midst of society. Herein lies what we call the bodhisattva way. That is the action of leading other people toward lasting happiness while striving to establish enduring peace for humanity. That practice begins with the inner reformation of the individual, and through that practice, the substance of our lives is deepened and enriched. The ultimate of those changes is the attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime, or in modern terms, human revolution or self-actualization.

When the Daishonin talks about the Lotus Sutra, it is no longer a mere sacred scripture of the past. How overjoyed those who heard his teachings must have been on learning that the Lotus Sutra is alive in the realities of life, and that it teaches one's own precious dignity. Our attitude when we read the Gosho should be the same.

The Gosho was written in thirteenth-century Japan. No matter what idea one expresses, one can never avoid what the sociologist Karl Mannheim described as "the existential determination of knowledge." That is, it is perfectly natural that ideas be bound by various conditions of the society and age that are quite unrelated to the ideas themselves.

Thus, the Daishonin's writings also reflect the cultural and social conditions of his time. Nevertheless, universal principles both timeless and unchanging are beautifully expressed therein. Our responsibility, I believe, is to read and extract those principles, and bring them to life in the present.

To give just one example, the Daishonin writes, "Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler's domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart" (p. 579). In modern terms, we might say that this well-known passage from "The Selection of the Time" expresses the ideals of freedom of spirit, freedom of religion and freedom of thought.

Because of the pioneering nature of the Daishonin's ideas, he was rejected by the feudalistic society of his time. At the Daishonin's asserting that a debate on the teachings — in other words, discussion — is the only fair means of determining the superiority of a religion, the eminent priests of various schools, who were in collusion with government authorities, responded with violence unacceptable in a religious person.

In that sense, the Gosho is also the record of the Daishonin's confrontation with the leaders of the political and religious worlds of his day. And the motivating power for that unyielding struggle was none other than his strength of spirit. The Daishonin writes: "Everyone in Japan, from the sovereign on down to the common people, without exception has tried to do me harm, but I have survived until this day. You should realize that this is because, although I am alone, I have firm faith" (p. 614).

The Daishonin clearly describes his circumstances during this period in this passage of "Letter from Sado": "It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong. Our contemporary scholars of the various schools are just like them. They despise a wise man without power, but fear evil rulers. They are no more than fawning retainers. Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one's real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren, for example. I say this not out of arrogance, but because I am deeply committed to the correct teaching. An arrogant person will always be overcome with fear when meeting a strong enemy" (p. 302).

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In the midst of that battle with authority and power, in which he never begrudged even his life, the meticulousness of the Daishonin's concern for his followers is absolutely astonishing. In response to the offerings he received from them, he wrote letters to each one, noting the items they had sent, and encouraging them in their faith. And to those believers grieving for the husband or child they had lost, he extended the utmost sincerity, giving them courage and hope to live.

Religion exists to resonate vibrantly within each person. Even if one discusses the happiness of all human beings, if it is spoken of apart from the happiness of a single human being, that is mere theory.

The Daishonin writes: "The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the 'Never Disparaging' chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being" (p. 852).

It is when the fruits of studying the Gosho show in our own behavior that we can say we have truly read it.

Thus I am praying that, with great seeking spirit and deep faith, SGI friends throughout the world will tackle the serious study of the Gosho.

In conclusion, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the staff of the Gosho Translation Committee, who were in charge of the translation and editing of this volume. I also offer my deep gratitude to Dr. Burton Watson, the translator of *The Lotus Sutra*, who made so many invaluable contributions in translation.

Daisaku Ikeda, President Soka Gakkai International

A GUIDE TO THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

By Tomohiro Matsuda, vice general chief of the Soka Gakkai study department, and editor-in-chief of the new English compilation of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. Mr. Matsuda was one of the earliest managing editors of the Seikyo Times, the original name of Living Buddhism.

In this short article, I would like to examine what the Gosho means to us as members of the SGI, and suggest how to make *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (hereafter abbreviated as *The Writings*) a valuable reading experience. I will explain some of the changes made in the latest translation and give a brief history of our work of translating the Daishonin's writings into English.

In 1952, one year after Josei Toda was inaugurated as second president of the Soka Gakkai, the *Nichiren Daishonin Gosho Zenshu* (The Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin) was published by the Soka Gakkai. The members in Japan were overjoyed at this historic achievement, for though they had often heard of the Gosho, most had never actually seen it. A collection of the Daishonin's writings published by another Nichiren school was not easily available to the general membership of the Soka Gakkai. Moreover, it was marred by some vital errors with regard to the reading of certain passages of the Daishonin's handwritten documents. Yet even when their tremendous seeking spirit

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moved them to purchase the Soka Gakkai edition of the Gosho — and it was a substantial investment by those days' standards — most at first found it nearly impossible to read. They were not yet well acquainted with Buddhist terms and concepts, nor were they familiar with medieval Japanese. With the *Gosho Zenshu* in hand, however, they attended lectures given by President Toda, who explained important Gosho in an attempt to clarify the essential meaning of the Daishonin's Buddhism and give them confidence in faith and practice. No reference materials were available in those days, but Mr. Toda's lectures resolved many of the members' doubts and deepened their understanding.

Now, forty-seven years after the publication of the *Gosho Zenshu*, the English translation of exactly one half of the Japanese text has been published in a single volume titled *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. This work will provide precious reference material for the translation of the Gosho into many other languages.

In reading this new publication, I think it is important that we ask ourselves, "What does the Gosho mean to us as members of the SGI?" In my view, the Daishonin's individual writings are meant to be taken as letters personally addressed to each of us. With this attitude we can read them with great joy, just as the Daishonin's followers did in his time. There may be parts we do not fully understand, but we will surely be inspired by the Daishonin's warm words of encouragement. When we find ourselves in the midst of adversity, we will no doubt be filled with courage, hope, and confidence.

Many of us have heard our fellow members cite short passages from the Gosho in recounting their experiences of applying Buddhist practice in overcoming difficulties. The following quotes, for example, have inspired many in the midst of personal struggles and challenges: "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring" (p. 536). "Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows" (p. 1119). "Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (p. 681).

Among the Daishonin's followers, Shijo Kingo had difficult relations with his lord, who was hostile to his faith; Toki Jonin's wife battled with ill health; Ota Kingo was troubled by a skin disease; the Ikegami brothers were opposed in their faith by their father; and the lay nun Myoichi lost her husband and faced the formidable obstacle of raising her children alone in a male-dominated society. Though these individuals lived in thirteenth-century Japan, the nature of their problems differs little from those that people face today. Though the times and society may change, human nature remains essentially the same, as do the problems it gives rise to.

Nichiren Daishonin's writings address the very essence of what it means to be human, and explain how to make the most of that humanity. By studying the Daishonin's longer treatises, such as "The Opening of the Eyes," we can gain a deep understanding of Buddhist principles and doctrine. But it is the brief statements of wisdom and conviction, such as those quoted above, that support our faith and practice in daily life. Also, by reading letters addressed to lay believers such as Shijo Kingo, we can learn the correct attitude with which to carry out our Buddhist practice.

When we read SGI President Ikeda's speeches and other writings, which are based on and frequently refer to the Gosho, we naturally learn how to read and apply the Gosho in our own lives and circumstances.

There is no fixed way of reading the Gosho. Rather than worrying about which Gosho is best to begin with, for example, you can simply start by reading whichever one seems

most appealing. Doing this engages you in the meaningful process of Buddhist study.

Nichiren Daishonin's individual letters and works are arranged in chronological order, though the dates of several are unknown or uncertain. You may find it interesting and instructive to read *The Writings* from beginning through end, so that, generally speaking, you can follow the development of the Daishonin's thought over the course of his life and practice. At the same time, though, it is perfectly fine to pick up and read any Goshō anytime. Each is an independent work, a singular expression of Nichiren Daishonin's enlightened wisdom and compassion. We can therefore read and apply the message of any Goshō directly to our own lives and practice.

The purpose of our study is not simply to increase our knowledge. In his foreword to *The Writings*, President Ikeda cites a very famous passage from "The True Aspect of All Phenomena":

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvīpa. . . . Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase." (p. 386)

President Ikeda then states: "The main elements of the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism are summed up in this passage. What is important is, first, faith; second, practice; and third, study. Strong faith leads us directly to Buddhahood. And it is practice and study that deepen and strengthen that faith. For us, study must never be a mere accumulation of knowledge. It must be strictly a practical study to deepen one's own faith and elevate one's own state of life." (p. xii)

Now let's look at some of the changes made in the latest translation. In reading the above Goshō quotation, you may have noticed some differences in the translation of certain Buddhist terms and concepts. For example, the title "The True Aspect of All Phenomena" replaces the former title, "The True Entity of Life." Both are translations of the Japanese Buddhist term *shoho jisso*. Also, "object of devotion" replaces "object of worship." And, as another example unrelated to the above quotation, the three poisons are now rendered as "greed, anger, and foolishness" instead of "greed, anger, and stupidity." Such changes were made to express Buddhist concepts more precisely and understandable.

You will find that the most sweeping changes have been made in the titles of Buddhist documents and in the names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In the seven-volume series *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, these were rendered in romanized Japanese. The meanings therefore were impenetrable to the English reader. In *The Writings*, all have been translated into English except certain well-known Sanskrit names such as Mahavairocana and Vimalakirti.

For instance, the Kegon Sutra is now rendered as the Flower Garland Sutra, the Hannya Sutra as the Wisdom Sutra, and T'ien-t'ai's Maka Shikan as *Great Concentration and Insight*. Bodhisattva Fukyo is Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and Bodhisattva Kannon is now Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds. Thus we can now understand the meaning of the document titles and the ideals represented by the names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, meanings which, for the most part, are clear to the reader of the Japanese text. For reference, Japanese names and titles and their English equivalents are listed in Appendices

G and H (pp. 1173–1182).

In addition, the names of most of the Buddhist schools have also been translated into English. Examples are the Lotus (Hokke) school, the Pure Land (Jodo) school, and the Flower Garland (Kegon) school. (See Appendix J, pp. 1185–86)

Finally, I would like to describe briefly the history of the Goshō translation project. The first letter we translated was “Reply to Kyo’o,” which appeared in the July 1, 1966, issue of the *Seikyo Times* (now *Living Buddhism*), which at the time was published in Japan three times a month. From then on, we continued to translate Goshō texts for study material and lectures published principally in the *Seikyo Times*. In 1979, volume one of *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* was published, in which we revised earlier translations and added new ones including “The True Object of Worship.”

By 1994, a total of seven volumes had been published, which included 172 Goshō, among them the Daishonin’s five major works. It is these 172 Goshō, with the five major works at their core, that comprise the new volume. The five major works are “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” “The Opening of the Eyes,” “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period after the Thus Come One’s Passing,” “The Selection of the Time,” and “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.”

We have continued our translation work non-stop over the years, first at the Soka Gakkai’s overseas bureau, then at the Seikyo Press, the publications branch of the Soka Gakkai, and later at NSIC, a foundation established in 1974 and dissolved in 1998. We are now carrying on the work of this profoundly significant project at the Soka Gakkai’s Translation Department in its Office of International Affairs. We will continue our work with the conviction and prayer that these translations will help you nourish your faith and strengthen your practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. □