

**GEMS FROM NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS
DEVELOPING OUR TRUST IN THE COMMUNITY
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Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people. ("The Three Kinds of Treasure," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 238).

When Shijo Kingo received this letter from Nichiren Daishonin in September 1277, he was in dire distress. Excellent both in martial arts and medicine, Kingo was trusted by his lord, Ema Mitsutoki. His colleagues, however, grew jealous and made a false report to Lord Ema that Kingo had violently disrupted a Buddhist debate between Sammi-bo, a disciple of the Daishonin, and Ryuzo-bo, a priest patronized by Ryokan, one of the most influential priests in Kamakura and a chief instigator of the government persecutions aimed at the Daishonin.

A devout follower of Ryokan, Lord Ema was outraged by the report and threatened that he would confiscate Kingo's fief unless he renounced his faith in the Daishonin's teaching. The consequences of Lord Ema's threat were serious: It meant that Kingo and his family (his wife and two children) could be driven off their land as outcasts. Soon Lord Ema fell seriously ill, and Kingo, in painful suspense, was charged with the care of his lord.

When Kingo received this letter, he was an object of hatred and jealousy among his fellow vassals, and his reputation, due to the false report, was marred with ignominy. It would have been so easy and tempting for Kingo to give up hope and disregard his job in despair. The Daishonin, however, encourages Kingo that this was the precise moment when he must demonstrate his sincerity at work and care for those around him. Here the Daishonin teaches us the importance of developing trust in society.

Our Buddhist practice is not separate from our lives in society. In this regard, the Daishonin states, "Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-3, 270). He also states, "A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather, one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world may be governed" (MW-6, 142). Contributing to society's improvement while leading a fulfilled life is, indeed, the goal of Buddhist practice.

Buddhism encourages our contribution to society, for it views our lives as interconnected with the environment. We are supported by those around us, and they need our support as much as we need theirs. This concept of dependent origination gives rise to our natural respect and appreciation for others. The Daishonin, in this sense, equates our personal well-being with the betterment of society: "If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 43).

Our interactions with society take place in many different ways, so our sense of community is diverse. It may extend from the neighborhood to the whole world, from the workplace to the SGI. We may also share a sense of community with those who have the same lifestyle or interests.

Whatever community we feel a part of, the Daishonin encourages us to give something back to it with appreciation. And the trust we thus gain in our respective communities is

the concrete proof of our contribution.

The word community derives from the Latin *communis*, of which *com* means together and *munis* means bound or under obligation. In this sense, a community may be viewed as a fellowship of people with a sense of responsibility for their shared lives. As the notion of dependent origination suggests, such a sense of responsibility for the community stems naturally from appreciation. So the Daishonin constantly reminds Kingo of the support he has been receiving from his lord while encouraging him to do his utmost in his lord's service.

Needless to say, having appreciation for a hostile environment or situation is no easy task. It takes a dedicated practice of Buddhism to expand our capacity to embrace others under these circumstances.

But Kingo persevered in his faith and continued to do his best in his lord's service. Lord Ema eventually regained his health due to Kingo's care. As a result, his trust in Kingo was completely restored. Later he received from his lord a fief three times larger than what he used to own. Kingo's sincerity won over malicious rumors and false accusations.

His triumph shows us trust can be earned only through sincere action.

We can spread the Daishonin's teaching to the extent that we can gain trust in the community — whether in our workplace or neighborhood. As the Daishonin states, "All the various teachings of the Buddha are spread by persons" (MW-5, 31); people take faith in Buddhism only when they see its practitioners as trustworthy. In this sense, gaining trust in the community is not only an expression of our Buddhist practice but also the very foundation of the spread of this Buddhism.

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