

## THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF ALL: ARROGANCE

Our greatest challenge is to never become arrogant, the SGI president says in this speech commemorating SGI Day, Jan. 26. 'Human society is a seething pool of pride and jealousy,' he states. 'We must not allow ourselves to be swallowed up by its murky, swirling waters and, as a result, lose our faith.'

There was a woman of no particular name or repute. Nichiren Daishonin took up his brush specially for her and wrote her the following letter of encouragement: "In this turbulent world [rampant with persecution], evocative of howling winds buffeting the grasses and lightning striking terror in people's hearts, it is most wondrous that you have maintained your trust in me.

"It is said that if the roots are deep, the leaves will not wither," he went on, "and if there is a gem in a spring, the water will never be exhausted. Likewise, your faith is always fresh and resolute, probably because the roots of your faith are deep, and the gem of courageous faith shines in your heart. How respectable and admirable this is!" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1479).

All of you attending this conference, held in commemoration of SGI Day, are connected with one another by profound karmic ties and possess a sublime mission.

Representatives of the women's division, representatives of our SGI interpreters and translation staff, and representatives of the nurses groups and doctors division: I have quoted this passage from the Dai-shonin's writings as an expression of my deepest admiration and appreciation for your sincere efforts.

A new biography [in Japanese] of China's "Mother of the People," Madame Deng Yingchao, is due for release soon by Ushio Publishing. The title is *Deng Yingchao — As a Wife, As a Comrade*. The author, Kazuteru Saionji, sent me a copy just from the printers, and I immediately sat down and read it. I found it most impressive.

I am deeply honored that in the prologue he has mentioned my meeting with Premier Zhou [in 1974] and the story behind the planting of the Zhou Enlai Cherry Tree at Soka University. He has done so with particular warmth and insight.

Mr. Saionji shared a deep friendship with Premier Zhou and Madame Deng. More than 40 years ago, the couple extended a warm welcome to his family, just having moved to Beijing. Mr. Saionji was then a junior high school student.

The first time he visited the Chinese prime minister's residence, a woman with bobbed hair served him some tea. He fully assumed that she was the maid, until Premier Zhou came out and introduced her as his wife. Mr. Saionji was very surprised. That's because, he said, Madame Deng was so normal and down-to-earth: She was plainly dressed, and there was nothing self-pretentious or haughty about her. In fact, he went on, she looked just like any other ordinary, middle-aged woman you could find anywhere.

This was one of the great things about Madame Deng. There is always something refreshing about genuine character.

Nobody is better than anyone else. Arrogant individuals, who think they are special, have lost their integrity. They are degenerate and corrupt.

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## **We must always have the desire to improve ourselves, never coming to a standstill, never stagnating.**

What was one thing that Madame Deng continued to call for, with unremitting passion, in the last years of her long, heroic life? It was this: Leaders, conquer your pride! She took every opportunity to strictly teach the young leaders of the future the correct path of leadership.

Allow me to share some of her words: “The contribution of a revolutionary must be unlimited.” “You must be modest and humble. You must do your work well, without haughtiness or impatience.” “The task of opposing privilege must be led by our comrades. For this purpose, a revolutionary spirit is necessary.” “The people are the protagonists; the people are our teachers. We must never harbor even the slightest sense of superiority toward the people.” “To connect closely with the people, to base ourselves on the people, to unite with all whom it is possible to unite with — this is our struggle’s starting point.”

Madame Deng battled tenaciously to prevent leaders from becoming proud and boastful.

In Buddhism, a person’s greatest enemies are pride and arrogance. Today I will quote from the Daishonin’s writings to warn against these traits.

The Daishonin says about the world of the Latter Day of the Law, “We are now living in the latter age when people are shallow in wisdom and puffed up with pride” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 254). He also describes it as an age where people’s thoughts are “filled with jealousy” (MW-6, 177).

Just as these passages state, in this Latter Day in which we dwell, human society is a seething pool of pride and jealousy. We must not allow ourselves to be swallowed up by its murky, swirling waters and, as a result, lose our faith.

The Daishonin stresses this repeatedly. For example, he says, “On the path of attaining Buddhahood, [you should] chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo without arrogance or attachment to biased views” (MW-6, 208).

It is important that we always maintain a seeking spirit toward Buddhism. We must always have the desire to improve ourselves, never coming to a standstill and stagnating in our present situation.

It is also essential that we combat evil people who are driven by envy and arrogance.

In the past, there have, unfortunately, been people in our organization who grew conceited or jealous over such things as intellectual ability, organizational position, profession, academic background, power or wealth. As a result, they lost their faith.

There have also been traitors, who not only abandoned their faith but sought to destroy the pure world of faith of the SGI. Intoxicated by the puniest “treasures of the body” and “treasures of the storehouse,” they forgot all about the foremost “treasure of the heart” — faith itself.

That is why it became impossible for them to respect members of pure-hearted faith and to remain in the SGI, a realm of earnest, wholehearted devotion to spreading the Dai-shonin’s teachings. It is vital that we see these individuals for what they are.

## **The hearts of arrogant people are paralyzed and twisted by conceit.**

The Lotus Sutra clearly details the kinds of people who persecute and oppress its prac-

tioners. These are the three powerful enemies in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter and the four kinds of believers of overbearing arrogance in the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter. All of them are described as “arrogant.”

*The three powerful enemies are lay people ignorant of Buddhism, cunning priests and false saints in league with corrupt secular authorities. The four kinds of believers of overbearing arrogance include monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.*

Conceit invariably lies at the root of these persecutors’ actions. The sutra says that they “suppose they have attained what they have not attained” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 193) — in other words, they mistakenly believe that they have already attained the highest state of enlightenment. It also describes them as “proud and boastful in heart” (p. 193).

The third of the three powerful enemies are false saints — people who present themselves as paragons of virtue while in reality having no commendable qualities at all. They look down on the people and regard with enmity the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, who fight on the side of the people.

They are ruled by conceit. And it is also conceit that turns backsliders into faith destroyers.

The hearts of false saints are base, yet they pretend to be of the utmost integrity. They don’t do gongyo seriously, yet they pretend to have faith. They don’t put the Daishonin’s teachings into practice yet stridently urge others to do so. They have no ability, yet they use their positions to strut around self-importantly. They only care about looking good and have no respect for others.

In short, the hearts of arrogant people are paralyzed and twisted by conceit. The arrogant are unable to look honestly at themselves or reflect upon their behavior. They are utterly without shame.

### **Arrogant people look down on others because their own hearts are ugly.**

Another characteristic of false saints is “despising and looking down on all humankind” (p. 193). In other words, it’s contempt for others.

False saints look down on people because their own hearts are ugly: Their own inner ugliness prevents them from respecting others. No matter what fine words they may spout, in their hearts they don’t believe the Lotus Sutra’s teaching that all people can attain enlightenment.

It is, therefore, even more unlikely that they can comprehend the hearts of people earnestly striving to spread the philosophy of the Daishonin’s Buddhism for the happiness of themselves and others. All that such arrogant individuals believe in is worldly honor and gain. To them, religion and people are just tools.

The Lotus Sutra warns of false saints, saying: “Greedy for profit and support, / they will preach the Law to white-robed laymen / and will be respected and revered by the world / as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers” (pp. 193–94).

### **Arrogant people lie.**

Another characteristic of conceited people is a tendency to tell lies. In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the Daishonin cites the Great Teacher Miao-lo: “Concealing shortcomings and boasting of virtues define arrogance” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 718).

People consumed by pride lie brazenly in hiding their flaws and in broadcasting as their own virtues they don’t in fact possess. They are vain and hypocritical. What’s more, they are not even ashamed of their deceit, feeling not the slightest compunction or remorse.

Arrogant people are masters at the art of twisting the truth. People of this kind lay their own faults at the door of the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. For example, false priests exploit religion and covet personal recognition and profit.

Instead of reflecting on their baseness, they criticize the activities of the practitioners of the Law as “motivated by a desire for fame and wealth” — the very thing of which they are guilty. And they repeat their evil slander to many people, including high authorities and government officials.

Unable to look hard at their own flawed characters, they instead attack others. Unable to destroy the evil within their hearts, they instead try to destroy others. This is the nature of arrogant people.

It is vital that we do not allow these destructive devilish forces to run rampant. We have to fight rigorously against them and defeat them.

Should we compromise with them even a little, the foundation of kosen-rufu will crumble. And if that happens, there will be no bright hope for the future of humanity. We must completely fight against evil. That is Buddhism. That is faith.

Only if we practice Buddhism with the determination to wage an all-out struggle against evil can we ensure the eternal development of the kosen-rufu movement.

## **Arrogant people always want to be better than others.**

In terms of the Ten Worlds, the life-state of arrogant people corresponds to the world of Anger [which *ashura*, contentious demons of Indian mythology, typify]. Arrogant individuals are driven by a desire to be better than others. They have a perverse desire to outdo others at all costs, to feel superior to them.

Regarding the world of Anger, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai writes in *Great Concentration and Insight*: “Since the mind of a person in the world of Anger desires in every moment to be superior to everyone else and cannot bear to be inferior to anyone, he belittles and despises others and exalts himself, just as a kite [a small hawk] flies high and looks down. Moreover, he outwardly displays benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and good faith, and develops minor goodness of the mind yet puts into practice the way of *ashura*” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430).

Arrogant people are controlled by the desire to win against others. They fail to pursue the spiritual struggle of trying to win against themselves and their weaknesses.

Hence, there is no improvement in their life-condition. The more they plot and scheme to outdo others, the further their lives plummet.

Arrogant people are extremely busy in their disreputable pursuits: telling bald-faced lies, falsely advertising themselves as people of virtue, concocting schemes to persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra...and the list goes on. They put a huge amount of energy into these activities.

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But in the end, all their efforts are in vain. These people fail to transform their life-condition, they hurt others, and they fall into a state of hell. All those whom they have duped into believing their lies and charades fall down with them.

We must absolutely not be deceived by such people. We must not be taken in.

Also, cowardice is the true nature of the arrogant. Because they are puffed up with pride, they perceive themselves as gargantuan. *Ashuras* have been described as 84,000 *yojanas* tall, with the waters of the four great oceans not even reaching past their knees. [A *yojana* was a unit of measurement in ancient India, equal to the distance that the royal army was thought to march in a day.]

However, in the Daishonin's writings we see an *ashura* who, when confronted with the possibility of battling a superior opponent — the great Taishaku, one of Buddhism's tutelary gods — shrinks to an infinitely small size, hiding in a lotus flower in a nearby pond. That tiny self is the reality of all *ashuras*.

The Daishonin declares that arrogant individuals will always tremble when they meet a powerful foe.

*The Daishonin writes, "An arrogant man will be overcome with fear when he meets a strong enemy, just like the haughty ashura who shrank and hid himself in a lotus flower blossoming in Munetchi Lake when reproached by Taishaku" (MW-1, 35).*

When a genuine votary of the Lotus Sutra appears on the scene, arrogant people fear having their true colors exposed. They are terrified of having their careful mask of saint-hood, integrity and pious devotion to faith torn away. That is why they turn on the votary of the Lotus Sutra with hostility and seek to destroy him or her.

### **Only those who fight with the heart of the lion king can attain enlightenment.**

The world today is full of such people. But in the end, justice will definitely prevail.

The Daishonin clearly states, "The rulers and people who despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra seemed to be free from punishment at first, but eventually they were all doomed to fall" (MW-1, 241). This is the Daishonin's declaration that arrogant, evil-hearted people, those who despise the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and seek to destroy kosen-rufu, will definitely come to ruin. That these words are true is clear when we look at the fate of those who have attempted to destroy the SGI.

Only with the heart of the lion king can justice and truth triumph. Only those who fight with the heart of the lion king can attain enlightenment. Those who don't will find true enlightenment eluding them, irrespective of how long they've practiced Buddhism. The Daishonin states that those who actually attain Buddhahood are "fewer than the number of dust particles one can place on a fingernail" (MW-3, 251).

### **If you establish a noble state of being in this lifetime, you will enjoy eternal freedom.**

Returning to Mr. Saionji's biography of Madame Deng Yingchao, I want to share an anecdote that appears in it: A young Zhou Enlai says to Deng Yingchao, who was known by her friends as Comrade Xiaochao (Little Chao): "Everyone wants to know how you

manage to stay so bright and cheerful all the time. They wonder how you do it.”

Deng Yingchao responds gaily: “I’m an optimist at heart. Besides, if we look gloomy, it’ll infect everyone else. These are really hard times, but I believe we must show through our attitude that our revolution will lead to a bright future. I want everyone to have confidence in our victory.”

Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao always thought of the welfare of all. They always strove to inspire and encourage others.

The motto of this selfless couple was “Even if just a foot soldier, I will do my best where I am at this moment.” I pray that all of you will also carry through with this noble spirit in your local communities. I hope you will work cheerfully and vigorously for the victory of your comrades in faith.

Please establish a noble state of being in this lifetime, so that you may enjoy the path of eternity, happiness, true self and purity throughout the three existences.

Once you attain Buddhahood, you will be able, in lifetime after lifetime, to freely be reborn wherever you wish and there pursue the mission of your heart’s desire. Strongly proclaiming this, I close my speech today.

Thank you very much for traveling from far away, in this cold weather, to attend this gathering.

*SGI President Ikeda’s speech at a representatives conference commemorating SGI Day, Jan. 26, held in Shinjuku, Tokyo, Jan. 27.*