

THE REAL BATTLE IN LIFE

The following points were shared by Norimasa Saito, SGI North America Bureau director, at meetings he attended during his recent visit to the United States, including the mentor-and-disciple relationship study conference held Nov. 18–20 at the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

❖ It is important to win in our daily lives. What I mean by winning is achieving each of our specific goals. First be determined to win, you can then specify your personal goals one by one. I personally have some 33 things I am praying deeply to achieve. With a strong determination to win and an earnest desire to accomplish each goal, your prayer as you chant daimoku will be focused. This means you will tap greater wisdom, giving you insight about how to face your problems, and bring forth more courage to do what you need to do.

❖ When you need to achieve a major breakthrough in your life, I suggest you start with what is most essential, and that is faith. In other words, you can first ask yourself whether you have a personal determination or pledge you aim to fulfill for the sake of kosen-rufu. I think we should each have our own specific pledge or goal for kosen-rufu. We should be able to say to ourselves that “This is what I will achieve for kosen-rufu” or “I will help this person begin practicing Buddhism” or “I will help this person develop into a capable leader for kosen-rufu.”

❖ Since Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for the happiness of all humanity, our lives should be geared to the objective of all people’s happiness. The Daishonin did not establish the Gohonzon simply so that we can wear nice clothes or own a fabulous car. We need a higher sense of purpose, and when we have a higher sense of purpose, our prayers about personal matters are more easily answered.

❖ Then, it all boils down to effort. When your life is well geared to the objective of kosen-rufu, you are contributing to the purpose for which the Gohonzon was established, which means you belong to the world of the Gohonzon or Buddhahood. Firmly positioned in this world of great fortune and dynamic rhythm, we then take the actions necessary to win in our personal struggles. In this way, the protective functions of the Mystic Law will become clearly apparent in our day-to-day existence. In Buddhism, this approach is called the “Strategy of the Lotus Sutra.”

❖ President Toda described the two types of circumstances in which we derive benefit from our Buddhist practice. The first occurs at the very initial stage of our Buddhist practice. It arises naturally from the pure faith and pure joy we experience over the fact that we have encountered the Gohonzon. Of course, this is always a source of benefit and fortune.

The other type of benefit comes from our earnest prayer. In “On Rebuking Slander of the Law and Eradicating Sins,” Nichiren Daishonin writes, “I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the Lotus Sutra (Gohonzon) and the ten demon daughters (Buddhist gods) will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 444). At a time of crises, or any crucial juncture in our lives, such determined prayer is necessary. And the Daishonin describes the sweeping power of such prayer when he says, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like a gale” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 742).

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❖ At times we may feel overwhelmed by our personal problems. However, we have to realize that Buddhism teaches us to expand our capacity rather than trying to get rid of our problems. Some problems may be with us for quite some time. However, as our life-capacity and our capability grow, we can more easily cope with our problems.

❖ Down the center of the Gohonzon is written “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren.” In a sense, this expresses Nichiren Daishonin’s encouragement to us that we, too, should put our innate Buddhahood in the center of everything. When we manifest and solidify our inherent Buddhahood through our daily practice of faith, all the other nine worlds within our lives—which are represented by various Buddhist figures present on the Gohonzon—will be illuminated by the Mystic Law. Put another way, everything in our daily lives will fall into place and we will enjoy the real protection of the Mystic Law in everything we do. When, based upon this, we fulfill our personal goals, we thus deepen our confidence in the power of the Gohonzon and in our own inner greatness.

❖ Suppose you have a leader in the organization who is difficult to work with. Or someone who you just do not like. I would say that the first step in dealing with this is to elevate and develop your state of life to the point where you will not be swayed or discouraged by that person’s presence. Your direct connection with the Gohonzon, the Gosho and the heart or spirit of the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai should be your foundation. If everyone surrounding such a leader is growing in faith and demonstrating the joy of faith in their attitude and behavior, this leader’s shortcomings and weak points will be overshadowed. It is also ideal if you, as a concerned member, can talk straight to him or her and reconfirm what both you and the leader need to do to improve the situation. But if such straightforward one-to-one dialogue can’t take place for various reasons, it may be advisable to ask a higher leader to meet with all involved to discuss the situation. In any event, a strong sense of responsibility to improve the situation and the pursuit of dialogue are key.

❖ We have to remember that the organization of the Soka Gakkai was created by a humanistic bond between its first president, Tsunesaburo Maki-guchi and his disciple, Josei Toda. The world of the SGI should be one of humanism and humanity. It is always important to remember that human-to-human bonds are the basis of this organization for kosen-rufu. It is our constant challenge to deal with negative elements that sneak into the kosen-rufu movement and in each case to create a “win-win” situation for the advancement of each individual’s faith and happiness.

❖ In this defiled age of the Latter Day of the Law, when negativity prevails and destructiveness is commonplace—as the current condition of the priesthood expresses—it is vital for us to grasp the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, who states in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” “Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil” (WND, 15).

❖ What “this one evil” represents differs according to the times. In the days of Nichiren Daishonin, the Nembutsu sect, which robbed the people of Japan of life-affirming hope and energy, clearly represented “this one evil.” Also, Ryokan, a high priest of the Ritsu sect who held a personal grudge against Nichiren Daishonin, and Hei no Saemon, head of the military under the Kamakura government who was also emotionally biased against the Daishonin, fulfilled the function of “this one evil.” In the time of President Makiguchi and Mr. Josei Toda, the Japanese militarist government, which forced Shintoism upon the entire populace of Japan and brought the nation to devastation, constituted “this one evil.” In modern times, when the kosen-rufu movement has advanced on a global scale under the

leadership of SGI President Ikeda, political leaders and elements of the media in Japan have been engaged in attempting to destroy the Soka Gakkai. And since 1990, Nichiren Shoshu High Priest Nikken Abe displayed his true nature as that of the devil king of the sixth heaven and joined the ranks of those fiercely attempting to destroy the SGI's precious kosen-rufu movement. His life thus manifests the function of "this one evil."

❖ The real battle in life, as well as in the temple issue, is the fierce struggle between the function of the devil and the function of the Buddha, as indicated by Nichiren Daishonin when he said, "I have been waging war against the ten armies of the devil..." (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1224). It is important to realize that this devil can take any shape, can possess our lives and even enter into our organization. Buddhist practice to attain Buddhahood means a ceaseless battle against the function of this devil within us and in our environment.

❖ However, the devil will cease to function once we successfully identify it as such. To cite an analogy, while a perfectly made counterfeit bill can fool many people, no one will accept a bill that is obviously a fake. Since the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood does chant the same daimoku to the same Gohonzon and on the surface, dressed in robes, presents an air of nobility, they can effectively deceive people. The fact is, however, Nikken has been doing everything possible to destroy the SGI's kosen-rufu movement, and the many priests who chose to follow him represent the function of "this one evil." No person today in the realm of Buddhism is so vehemently destructive as Nikken. His flagrant demolition of the Sho-Hondo, the edifice of peace that his teacher, the former high priest, Nittatsu, once declared to be the High Sanctuary of True Buddhism at the time of kosen-rufu, is clear evidence of this.

❖ This is the time for us to sharpen our "sword" of faith. We can say that "this one evil" represents our fundamental darkness or ignorance, which prevents us from clearly perceiving and identifying a devilish function for what it is. The part of ourselves that prevents us from wholeheartedly fighting against the function of "this one evil" actually is "this one evil" within ourselves. When I recognized this aspect within my own life, I came to realize that I did not yet understand the true nature of the temple issue even though I thought I did.

❖ Conversely speaking, I can now see that once I am fully engaged in my battle against "this one evil" within myself, I can have all my "ten thousand prayers" answered. Since nothing is wasted in Buddhist practice, the current temple issue must have profound and great significance for our individual Buddhist practice and for our ultimate happiness.

❖ In understanding the mentor-disciple relationship, we should first bear in mind that this relationship exists in the realm of humanism and compassion. It is a beautiful bond of humanity, camaraderie and true friendship.

❖ As the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, Nichiren Daishonin is the mentor or teacher of all humanity. As such, he inscribed the Gohonzon as the object of devotion for the happiness of all people. The compassionate way of life he exemplified put him in the position of mentor in the hearts and minds of those who practice his teaching.

❖ We should not have a rigid view or understanding the mentor-disciple relationship. It is a very simple concept. Today, through showing great actual proof in promoting kosen-rufu, President Ikeda has come to be cherished by many as the mentor in faith and practice. The mentor-disciple relationship is something formed from the seeking spirit of the disciples. In Buddhism, a mentor never appoints himself or herself as a mentor.

❖ The basis of this relationship is a wonderful human bond. It is a spontaneous rela-

tionship, not a forced one. If you regard President Ikeda as your mentor in faith, it is helpful to ask yourself “What would President Ikeda do if he were in my shoes?”

❖ Unless we are concerned with the objective of kosen-rufu, we can’t achieve oneness with our mentor. This is because kosen-rufu — securing happiness for humankind through disseminating the humanistic principles of Buddhism — is the life of Nichiren Daishonin, and it is also the sole purpose and intent of President Ikeda. Making his heart, his spirit and the common goal of kosen-rufu our own, is the primary point in pursuing the mentor–disciple relationship. While President Ikeda is devoted to kosen-rufu on a global scale, we can be devoted to the same goal in our communities. Even though the scope of our activities differs, we can work beautifully together like concentric circles with the same center or focal point of faith. I feel I have personally learned from his example how great a Buddhist can be. As the Daishonin states in “The Three Kinds of Treasure,” “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND, 852).

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