

ALMSGIVING OF THE LAW BY JOSEI TODA

Josei Toda was the second president of the Soka Gakkai and is responsible for rebuilding the organization after World War II. He was imprisoned during the war for his opposition to Japanese government policies. He died in 1958. February 11, 2000 is the one-hundredth anniversary of President Toda's birth. The following essay is from Toda Josei Zenshu (Collected Works of Josei Toda) vol. 1, pp. 108–110.

Confucius states, “Don’t give others what you don’t want.” These words, though representing a non-Buddhist viewpoint, deserve our attention. It is human nature to recommend or give to others what we ourselves like. If the other person’s taste is the same as our own, he or she will be overjoyed. But if it is the opposite, it will cause that person trouble.

For instance, suppose someone who likes liquor insists that his guests also drink it. If the guests like to drink, they’ll be delighted, but if they would rather just have some sweets, they will be very uncomfortable. Or suppose someone who likes to travel invites someone along who hates to travel. Again, the latter will feel put off. If someone who likes sweets insists on sharing them with someone who doesn’t, wouldn’t that person be annoyed?

There is a story from the age of the Tokugawa shogunate [1600-1865] of a poor man who was presented with a horse. Though having a horse was a luxury, it was also a tremendous burden for him to care for it while living in poverty.

Thus, giving others things that are of your own liking more often than not creates some kind of negative side effect. And it would be overly cautious to refrain from giving others anything that you might not personally like, simply to avoid troubling them. I think that would be a very narrow-minded and passive way to live — I cannot see any spirit in it. This kind of narrow and overly cautious approach to life reminds me of the kind of person who goes to work each day just for the paycheck, never taking on any significant challenge.

Then, should we interpret Confucius’s statement to mean that we should give others that which we ourselves like? No. What I want to stress is that we should give to others what will be of benefit to them. In other words, we should give them value. If I were to put it as Confucius might, I would say, “Give others what will benefit them.”

You might give food to enhance another’s health or to save a starving person. Vegetables or miso might help; much more so might gifts of money. Buddhism calls such actions the practice of almsgiving. Religious sects that concern themselves more with what they can get than what they can give are not practicing almsgiving. True almsgiving is giving something to the people.

Concerning this practice of the almsgiving or offering of material things, deep consideration tells us that this is the age of the Latter Day of the Law, when Shakyamuni’s Buddhism has lost its power and impurity and evil abound. Thus, regretfully, the practice of almsgiving of material goods today only brings about laziness and a dependent attitude on the part of the recipients. Not only that, an offering of material goods is limited in quantity, and cannot be distributed equally among all who need it. It is the way of the world today that the quickest and most aggressive win.

Besides the almsgiving of material goods, there is also the almsgiving of the Law. Today, in the Latter Day of the Law, this means offering the Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret

Laws to others. Those who receive this Gohonzon and maintain a consistent practice with strong faith in it will gain a dynamic, refreshing life-force, as the sutra clearly indicates, and will start a new life in every respect—including at work and in the realm of health. And from those who tap and bring forth this powerful life force, such benefits as money, food and good health will well forth ceaselessly like water gushing from the ground. No material offering, which provides only temporary, limited benefit, can compare to this in its magnificence. □