

**‘NEW YEAR’S GOSHO’: PURIFYING OUR LIVES
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The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei was born of a woman of low station, and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one’s mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one’s heart and makes one worthy of respect. — The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 1137

This is an excerpt from a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Lord Omosu’s wife to thank her for a New Year’s gift. The letter is dated Jan. 5, but the year is not known. What is clear is the Daishonin’s conviction in the infinite potential that human life contains, regardless of the circumstances.

In this famous passage from the “New Year’s Goshō,” Nichiren Daishonin uses poetic imagery to demonstrate how the wonderful and sublime state of life known as Buddhahood arises from within the lives of ordinary people.

He does this through the examples of the lotus, the sandalwood, cherry blossoms and the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei.

Like the lotus blossom, the life condition of Buddhahood is pure and pristine; like the sandalwood, it is replete with the fragrance of benefit. It emerges from an ordinary person, who, like the soil or the muddy pond, is neither particularly special nor pure. The beautiful cherry blossom emerging from the rough wood of the cherry tree and the lovely Yang Kuei-fei (who was the concubine of an emperor) being born of a commoner illustrate the same analogy. (Actually, another explanation has it that, rather than being of low social station, Yang Kuei-fei’s mother was a woman of rather ordinary appearance—in either case, the point is the same).

The example of the moon rising from behind the mountains goes a step deeper. Not only does the moon rise up from behind the mountains, it then illuminates them. A mountain that was obscured in darkness beautifully reflects the light of a full moon that rose from behind it; in a similar manner, we ordinary human beings are illuminated by the world of Buddhahood that arises from within our lives. This is the very meaning of the word *enlightened*. When the pure potential for enlightenment that lays dormant within our hearts, like the moon behind a mountain, emerges, every aspect of our lives—our appearance, our behavior, our speech—begins to take on the beautiful hue of enlightenment. We become truly attractive, respectable human beings in the deepest sense.

The Daishonin makes this idea concrete beginning with the next phrase, “Misfortune comes from one’s mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one’s heart and makes one worthy of respect.”

This indicates the function of karma, which means action—specifically the three categories of action described as thought, word and deed. Actions of thought include our will and emotions. Actions of word (literally, actions of the mouth) mean our speech or how we communicate with others. Actions of deed refer to our conduct or behavior. These actions constitute causes that invite either negative effects (misfortune) or positive effects (becoming worthy of respect).

The Daishonin's statement that "misfortune comes from one's mouth" stems from the many examples in history of personal or social tragedy brought about by careless speech.

Buddhism places emphasis on the human heart and mind. Nevertheless, a casual or careless comment that may have no ill intention behind it can lead to hurt feelings and mistrust. And mistrust is a first step toward misfortune.

On the other hand, even words that are carefully chosen will fall short if they are not backed up by sincerity—that is, if what is in our heart is at odds with what we are saying. When our heart is truly pure—when we consistently bring forth the Buddhahood in our hearts—our words and actions naturally express joy, hope and confidence. And when we chant and pray sincerely for another person to be happy, to live long and to prosper, and take action toward that end, we will gain that person's trust. In addition, our pure desire for the happiness of others and for kosen-rufu—the happiness of humankind—imbues our lives with great fortune and happiness.

In "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," SGI President Ikeda comments: "When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu in thought, word and deed, then everything without fail turns into great benefit. However, if we simply act like we are working for kosen-rufu, but harbor negativity in our hearts, our good fortune will be frittered away."

A strong and sincere prayer for kosen-rufu—a prayer to share the benefit of our Buddhist practice with others—constitutes a truly pure heart. Actions that come from this pure heart will surely make us "worthy of respect."