

**AUGUST STUDY MATERIAL**  
**“THE SELECTION OF THE TIME”**  
**(WND, PP. 579–80, GOSHO ZENSHU, PP. 287–88)**

The following is an excerpt from “The Selection of the Time,” the study material for August study meetings in the SGI-USA.

**In the secular texts it says, “A sage is one who fully understands those things that have not yet made their appearance.” And in the Buddhist texts it says, “A sage is one who knows the three existences of life — past, present, and future.”**

**Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge. The first time was the first year of the Bunno era (1260), cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month, when I presented my *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* to His Lordship, the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, by way of the lay priest Yadoya Mitsunori.<sup>1</sup> At that time, I said to the lay priest Yadoya, “Please advise His Lordship that devotion to the Zen school and the Nembutsu school should be abandoned. If this advice is not heeded, trouble will break out within the ruling clan, and the nation will be attacked by another country.”**

**The second time was the twelfth day of the ninth month of the eighth year of the Bun’ei era (1271), at the hour of the monkey (3:00–5:00 P.M.), when I said to Hei no Saemon-no-jo: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan! Immediately you will all face ‘the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain,’ or strife among yourselves, and also ‘the calamity of invasion from foreign lands.’ Not only will the people of our nation be put to death by foreign invaders, but many of them will be taken prisoner. All the Nembutsu and Zen temples, such as Kencho-ji, Jufuku-ji, Gokuraku-ji, Daibutsu-den, and Choraku-ji, should be burned to the ground, and their priests taken to Yui Beach to have their heads cut off. If this is not done, then Japan is certain to be destroyed!”**

**The third time was the eighth day of the fourth month of last year (the eleventh year of the Bun’ei era), when I said to Saemon-no-jo: “Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler’s domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart. There can be no doubt that the Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering, and that the Zen school is the work of the heavenly devil. And the True Word school in particular is a great plague to this nation of ours. The task of praying for victory over the Mongols should not be entrusted to the True Word priests! If so grave a matter is entrusted to them, then the situation will only worsen rapidly and our country will face destruction.”**

**[Hei no Saemon-no-jo] Yoritsuna then asked, “When do you think the Mongols will attack?”**

**I replied, “The sacred scriptures do not indicate the time. But the signs show that heaven is extremely angry. It would appear that the attack is imminent. It will probably occur before this year has ended.”**

**Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements. Rather it was in all cases the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni that had entered into my body. And having personally experienced this, I am beside myself with joy.**

**This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life taught in the Lotus Sutra. What does the Lotus Sutra mean when it says, “This reality [the true aspect of all phenomena] consists of the appearance...”<sup>2</sup> “Appearance,” the first of**

**the ten factors of life, is the most important of them all; this is why the Buddha appeared in the world. “Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes.”**

**Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru. When I, Nichiren, first took faith in the Lotus Sutra, I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust in all the country of Japan. But later, when two people, three people, ten people, and eventually a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, and a million people come to recite the Lotus Sutra and transmit it to others, then they will form a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment, an ocean of great nirvana. Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Selection of the Time” is one of Nichiren Daishonin’s ten major writings selected by Nikko Shonin in his “On the Matters That the Believers of the Fuji School Must Know” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1604–05). Among the ten major writings, it ranks as one of the five major writings along with “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” “The Opening of the Eyes,” “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” and “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.”

The Daishonin wrote “The Selection of the Time” in 1275. It was entrusted to a believer named Yui who lived in Nishiyama of Suruga Province (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). The recipient is believed to have been related to the family of Nikko Shonin’s mother, Myofuku-ama. The Daishonin was fifty-four and living on Mt. Minobu at the time of this writing. He had settled in Minobu the previous year to educate disciples and establish a foundation for the future propagation of his teachings. As with a number of his other important works, “The Selection of the Time” is written in the format of a dialogue between the Daishonin and a hypothetical questioner.

In October 1274, the Mongols had launched some 900 warships carrying 25,000 men in a massive amphibious attack on the southern islands of Japan. Untimely storms frustrated the attempt. But the invasion — the first in Japan’s history — threw the nation into profound anxiety. To the Japanese it was one more stark indication that they were indeed living in the Latter Day of the Law, the dreaded “degenerate age,” when Buddhism would decline and enlightenment would be virtually impossible to attain. “The Selection of the Time,” however, sets forth a quite different view of the Latter Day, asserting that it is the time when the True Law will spread far and wide. Nichikan (1665–1726), the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, says in his commentaries that there are two major points in this work: One, that the Mystic Law implicit in the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter of the Lotus Sutra shall spread without fail in the Latter Day, and two, that Nichiren Daishonin, the teacher of the Buddhism of Sowing, is the Buddha who enables all people of the Latter Day to attain Buddhahood.

This treatise begins with the statement, “When it comes to studying the teachings of Buddhism, one must first learn to understand the time” (WND, 538). While the concept of time in Buddhism will be discussed in greater detail later, “time” here indicates the time when a Buddha appears in this world to teach the Law that will lead people to enlightenment. The Daishonin explains elsewhere that there are five criteria to take into account in propagating Buddhism: 1) a correct understanding of the teaching; 2) a correct understanding of the people’s capacity (i.e., what teaching will enable them to attain Buddhahood); 3) a correct understanding of the time, 4) a correct understanding of the nature of the country; and 5) a correct understanding of the sequence of propagation, that is, the teachings previously propagated in that country.

In this writing he explains the importance of understanding the time. He traces the propagation of Buddhism, mentioning how great scholars and sages, inheriting the teachings of

Shakyamuni, propagated the Buddhism that befitted their times. In the first 500-year period after Shakyamuni's passing or the first half of the Former Day of the Law, the Buddha's disciples such as Kashyapa and Ananda propagated the teachings of monastic Buddhism. During the second 500-year period or the latter half of the Former Day of the Law, the Buddhist teachers such as Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu propagated the teachings of altruistic Mahayana Buddhism. During the Middle Day of the Law, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai systematized the theoretical teachings of the Lotus Sutra in China, and Dengyo brought them to Japan. (For more discussions on the concept of "the three periods" and the dating of Shakyamuni's death, please see "Nichiren Daishonin and the Three Periods of the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law," *Living Buddhism*, January 2001, pp. 23-25.)

Scholars of the Daishonin's time generally held that the Latter Day of the Law had begun in 1052 A.D. The Lotus Sutra speaks of it as a time when people's lives would be clouded by illusion, and the Great Collection Sutra (Jpn *Daijukkyo*) states, "It will be an age of conflict, and the Pure Law will be lost." The decadence and turmoil that marked the Buddhist world during the later Heian period (795-1158) in Japan seemed to lend credence to the sutra's predictions. In the Kamakura period (1185-1333), natural disasters, social upheaval and the two invasion attempts on the part of the Mongols further strengthened people's sense of foreboding that the terrible "degenerate age" was upon them. (For more discussion on the "Latter Day of the Law," please see "The Latter Day of the Law: The End of the World or a New Dawn of Hope?" *Living Buddhism*, December 1999, pp. 6-7.)

"The Selection of the Time," however, views the Latter Day as a time when the Mystic Law implicit in the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra will spread throughout the world and benefit all people. It also identifies the Daishonin with Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who, according to the Lotus Sutra, will appear in the Latter Day of the Law and spread the sutra's teaching. From the viewpoint of traditional Buddhism, the Latter Day is an evil age when Buddhism falls into decline. But from the standpoint of the Daishonin's Buddhism, one could not choose a more fortunate time to be alive.

## COMMENTARY

**In the secular texts it says, "A sage is one who fully understands those things that have not yet made their appearance." And in the Buddhist texts it says, "A sage is one who knows the three existences of life — past, present, and future."**

Secular texts" here indicates non-Buddhist teachings such as Confucianism and Brahmanism, which regard a sage as one who foresees events in the future. Sages, according to some traditions, were thought able to hear voices from the heavens inaudible to ordinary people, and instruct people according to what they heard. These non-Buddhist teachings, however, were limited in enabling people to fathom the workings of the causal law and the eternity of life, because they tended to view the human being merely as an agent of an eternal, enlightened force in the universe rather than its embodiment.

Buddhism reveals the law of causality that permeates both time and space and gives rise to all activities of nature and the human being. Through a profound understanding of this universal principle, a sage, in Buddhism, saves people from suffering and guides them to happiness. In other words, a sage is another name for a Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin thoroughly understood the law of causality as well as the eternal nature of life. Through his penetrating insight into the kinds of causes people were making in the depths

of their lives, he was able to foresee the course that lay ahead not only for individuals but for society, and not only in the immediate circumstances, but into the future.

In “Letter from Sado,” therefore, the Daishonin states: “Although I, Nichiren, am not a sage, I am equal to one, for I uphold the Lotus Sutra exactly as it teaches. Furthermore, since I have long understood the ways of the world, the prophecies I have made in this life have all come true. Therefore, you must never doubt what I have told you concerning future existence” (WND, 302).

Throughout history, many religious leaders have made predictions about the future. How, then, is Nichiren Daishonin different from these religious prophets and what is the significance of his predictions?

First, the Daishonin observed the present in light of the essential law of life and the universe, and then predicted future events on the basis of his clear insight of this law. Using the example of science, a person who becomes deeply aware of the laws of physics and mathematics that govern the movement of the cosmos can predict the positions of the planets at a given time in the future with relative ease. Armed with such knowledge, such an individual can confidently predict the occurrence of eclipses or other observable astronomical events. In the past, people may have thought such a person possessed supernatural powers, but it was in fact insight into a basic law of nature that enabled the future to be predicted in such a way. The Daishonin says in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” where he predicts the occurrence of internal strife and foreign invasion, “I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have looked a little at the scriptures for an answer” (WND, 7). In “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” he says, “We must conclude that the Lotus Sutra is the only bright mirror we should have, and that through it we can understand the heart of all the sutras” (WND, 692). From those passages, we can see that the Daishonin based his predictions on the teachings expounded in various Buddhist scriptures, especially the Lotus Sutra, which contains the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. His predictions did not come from any mysterious occult power or divine inspiration, but from his thorough grasp of the Buddhist wisdom that sheds light on the workings of life.

Second, the Daishonin did not make predictions to gain fame or establish himself as a religious leader, but as a “votary of the Lotus Sutra” who was striving to spread the Buddhist wisdom for the sake of humankind. Predictions or prophecies are usually judged solely in terms of whether or not they are fulfilled. To understand the significance of the Daishonin’s prophecies, however, we must view them from the deeper perspective of their purpose, which was to awaken the people to the True Law so that they could establish peace and happiness. The Daishonin’s concern for the people found its expression in his valiant efforts at propagation and fearless remonstrations with the authorities. His compassion, in other words, gave rise to penetrating wisdom that allowed him to see the future.

The practice and understanding of the Daishonin’s Buddhism help us develop the wisdom to discern, in the present moment, the causes of future effects as well as the effects of past causes by observing the present reality. A passage from the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra (Jpn *Shinjikan gyo*) reads, “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (WND, 279). But this does not mean we can intellectually decipher the intricate web of causes and effects in minute detail. We may not be able to foretell everything that will happen in the future in the manner of a prophet. To understand the causal law in our lives, however, means to gain the wisdom to know what cause to make for our happiness.

As we deepen our faith in the Gohonzon and begin to develop the wisdom to perceive the law of cause and effect in our lives, we can accept our present circumstances and problems with more confidence — confidence that we can make causes now to change problems for the better. We come to realize that whatever effect we are experiencing in the present is the result of a cause that we ourselves made in the past, instead of blaming others for our difficulties. In this way, we naturally take full responsibility for our lives — in the sense that we clearly see our problems for what they are and find solutions within us.

**Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge. The first time was ... when I presented my *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* ...**

Nichikan explains in his commentary that the Daishonin’s statement, “Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge,” expresses his conviction as the foremost “sage” in the entire world. In other words, he is the Buddha to expound the Mystic Law in the Latter Day of the Law. Based on a thorough grasp of the Buddhist teachings and his profound understanding of the causal law, he made verbal predictions of the outbreak of internal strife and foreign invasion on three different occasions when he remonstrated with the authorities.

The first was when the Daishonin submitted his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent and the effective ruler of Japan at that time. On July 16, 1260, the Daishonin asked Yadoya Nyudo, a government official, to deliver the treatise with the message: “Please advise His Lordship that devotion to the Zen school and the Nembutsu school should be abandoned. If this advice is not heeded, trouble will break out within the ruling clan, and the nation will be attacked by another country.”

Internal strife and foreign invasion are among the “three calamities and seven disasters” described in various sutras. The three calamities occur at the end of a *kalpa* (according to ancient Indian tradition, an extremely long period of time). There are two categories of the three calamities: the three greater calamities of fire, water and wind, which destroy the world, and the three lesser calamities of high grain prices or inflation (especially caused by famine), warfare and pestilence, from which human society perishes. The seven disasters include war and natural disasters, and are generally held to arise as a result of slandering the true teaching of Buddhism. They are mentioned in the Medicine Master Sutra (Jpn *Yakushi kyo*), the Benevolent Kings Sutra (Jpn *Ninno kyo*) and other sutras and differ slightly according to the source.

After studying the Medicine Master, Great Collection, Golden Light (Jpn *Konkomyo kyo*) and Benevolent Kings sutras, the Daishonin concluded that of these various disasters and calamities, two — internal strife and foreign invasion — had yet to occur. In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin states: “Because, of the seven types of disasters described in the Medicine Master Sutra, five have already occurred. Only two have yet to appear, the calamity of invasion from foreign lands and the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain” (WND, 24).

Although the Daishonin had already stated his predictions in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” he conveyed these especially important points verbally so that when Hojo Tokiyori read it he could keep them in mind.

**The second time was ... when I said to Hei no Saemon-no-jo: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan!”**

In January 1268, an envoy from Kublai Khan arrived in Kamakura with a message demanding

that Japan declare its loyalty to the Mongol Empire. The envoy was sent back empty-handed, and the government began to prepare for war. Nichiren Daishonin then wrote “The Rationale for Writing ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land’” (WND, 161–64) and sent it to the little-known Hogan, a priest who appears to have been active in government circles. In this letter the Daishonin explains the circumstances leading to his writing of “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” and points out that the arrival of the Mongol emissary has substantiated the prophecy of foreign invasion made in that treatise.

In October, he sent letters to eleven high-ranking political and religious leaders, including Hojo Tokimune and the priests Doryu of Kencho-ji temple and Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple, pointing out that the predictions in his treatise were now being fulfilled and demanding the opportunity to demonstrate the validity of his teachings in public religious debate. However, his appeal fell on deaf ears.

In “The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra,” the Daishonin describes the situation as follows:

“In actuality, however, priests of the other schools cursed and deceived my messengers. The government officials ignored or refused to reply to my letters, and even when they did reply, they deliberately neglected to report the content of my letters to the regent. Their behavior was highly irregular. ... I risked my reputation and life to remonstrate with the authorities. But just as a high wind creates high waves or a powerful dragon brings forth torrential rains, so my admonitions called forth increasing animosity. The regent’s supreme council met to discuss whether to behead me or banish me from Kamakura, and whether to confiscate the estates of or execute my disciples and lay supporters, or to imprison or exile them to distant places” (WND, 764).

Earlier in 1271, Japan had suffered a prolonged drought and the government ordered the priest Ryokan to pray for rain. The Daishonin challenged him, saying that if Ryokan’s prayers could produce rain in seven days he would become Ryokan’s disciple, but that if his prayers failed, Ryokan should embrace the Lotus Sutra.

Ryokan gladly agreed and began his prayer ritual, but instead of rain, damaging and persistent gales arose. Humiliated, he refused to keep his promise and instead began using his influence among the wives and widows of top government officials to spread rumors about the Daishonin. As a result, Nichiren Daishonin was summoned for interrogation at the hands of the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, Hei no Saemon, on September 10, 1271.

The Daishonin took this opportunity to remonstrate with Hei no Saemon, predicting the outbreak of internal strife and foreign invasion if the government punished him unlawfully. He warned Hei no Saemon:

“If you ignore this advice and punish me unreasonably...the entire country will have cause to regret your decision. If you condemn me, you will be rejecting the Buddha’s envoy...there will occur what is called the calamity of internal strife, rebellion within the ruling clan. This will be followed by the calamity of foreign invasion, attack from all sides, particularly from the west” (WND, 765).

The Daishonin describes Hei no Saemon’s response, saying, “Hearing this, the magistrate Hei no Saemon, forgetting all the dignity of his rank, became wild with rage...” (WND, 765).

Hei no Saemon, having no justification for deciding upon the Daishonin’s sentence himself, let the Daishonin go. Two days later, on September 12, the Daishonin sent Hei no Saemon a letter called “On the Day before Yesterday” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183) to remonstrate with the government again. But by that afternoon, official policy toward the Daishonin had been decided, and Hei no Saemon and several hundred warriors rode to the Daishonin’s dwelling at Matsubagayatsu and arrested him. Soldiers vandalized the Daishonin’s small hut.

But the Daishonin confidently declared to Hei no Saemon: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. Doing away with me is toppling the pillar of Japan! Immediately you will all face ‘the calamity of revolt within one’s own domain,’ or strife among yourselves, and also ‘the calamity of invasion from foreign lands’” (WND, 579). This is the second time that the Daishonin refers to himself as one who “gained distinction by having such knowledge” (WND, 579). On that night, the Daishonin knelt before the executioner’s sword.

In the paragraph above, Nichiren Daishonin says, “All the Nembutsu and Zen temples...should be burned to the ground, and their priests taken to Yui Beach to have their heads cut off” (WND, 579). The Daishonin’s seemingly violent, intolerant statement regarding the prominent Buddhist sects of his day is purely a rhetorical device to impress Hei no Saemon with the gravity of the offense of slandering the Lotus Sutra.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin explains the meaning of the Nirvana Sutra that describes the killing of slanderous monks. The Daishonin writes:

“My only hatred is for the act of slandering the Law. According to the Buddhist teachings, prior to Shakyamuni slanderous monks would have incurred the death penalty. But since the time of Shakyamuni, the One Who Can Endure, the giving of alms to slanderous monks is forbidden in the sutras teachings. Now if all the four kinds of Buddhists within the four seas and the ten thousand lands would only cease giving alms to wicked priests and instead all come over to the side of the good, then how could any more troubles rise to plague us, or disasters come to confront us?” (WND, 23)

As he clearly explains in this passage, the Daishonin’s prime focus is on clarifying people’s attachment to misleading teachings so that they may establish a correct understanding of life. So long as people support a corrupt religious authority, financially or otherwise, with good intent or out of ignorance, they not only remain blind to the supreme truth of Buddhahood, but also commit the same offence of destroying Buddhism from within.

Nichikan explains the symbolic meaning behind the Daishonin’s reference to the cessation of alms-giving to evil priests and their beheading in terms of the four ways of teaching (Jpn *shishitsudan*), which is expounded in Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Jpn *Daichido ron*). According to Nichikan, to prevent slanderous priests from receiving alms means to teach according to an individual’s capacity, thus enabling that person to increase any good karma accumulated in past existences. The admonition to behead slanderous priests is meant to awaken people from their illusions so they can free themselves from the three poisons: greed, anger and foolishness (WND, 1277). This involves teaching those caught up in greed to recognize the impurity of their attachment, those dominated by anger to practice compassionate acts and those blinded by the poison of foolishness to perceive the causal law. In light of the Daishonin’s own explanation and of Nichikan’s interpretation, it becomes clear that withdrawing support for corrupt priests is the active process of self-awakening and self-purification that has not only an immediate financial impact on the corruption of the priesthood, but also a significant influence on what matters most — our own happiness.

**The third time was ... when I said to Saemon-no-jo: “Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler’s domain, I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart.”**

On March 8, 1274, a government envoy arrived at Sado Island with a pardon for the Daishonin. No reasons were given for the government’s action, but it appears in retrospect that officials were concerned about the arrival of a Mongol emissary and the abortive coup of Hojo Tokisuke —

events which seemed to bear out the Daishonin's earlier predictions.

On April 8, Hei no Saemon requested an interview with the Daishonin. This time the atmosphere was courteous. The government even offered to build him a temple and to place his school of Buddhism on an equal footing with all other schools. But the Daishonin refused. "Since I have been born in the ruler's domain, I must follow him in my action. But I need not follow him in the belief of my heart," he declared.

In this passage, the Daishonin displays the strength and nobility of spiritual freedom and independence. He stood undaunted against those in power who sought to use religion to further their own ends by threatening persecution or coaxing with sweet words. While most religious leaders of his day succumbed to persecutions or relinquished their spiritual independence in return for protection from the authorities, the Daishonin stood firm for spiritual freedom, which is essential to happiness. Here the Daishonin demonstrates people's ability to be free even while under physical restriction. In his action we can clearly see that true freedom is not the ability to do anything that pleases us. If we seek only selfish pleasures while ignoring others' suffering, we will become enslaved to our own desires rather than being free. On the other hand, even if our circumstances seem to restrict us — financially, materially or health-wise — as long as we have the determination to take faith in the supreme truth of our innate Buddhahood, we can enjoy freedom. Freedom, the Daishonin teaches us here, is not a matter of our circumstances, but of our choice.

During the interview, Hei no Saemon asked Nichiren Daishonin when he thought the Mongols would attack Japan and if it were possible to attain enlightenment through any of the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin replied to each of his questions by quoting relevant passages from the sutras, and he predicted that the Mongols would strike within the year. Six months later, his prediction was born out. This was the third of his "three important pronouncements" (WND, 579).

Nichiren Daishonin calls these three occasions the "three important pronouncements" because his predictions were completely fulfilled. One hundred days after the Daishonin's exile to Sado Island, Hojo Tokisuke was killed for plotting a revolt against his younger brother Tokimune. Tokimune succeeded his father Tokiyori as the head of the Hojo clan and became the regent or military ruler — the Daishonin's prediction of internal strife had indeed materialized.

Regarding the prediction of foreign invasion, the Mongols struck in massive numbers in October 1274, three years after the Sado exile. Their ranks included fifteen thousand Mongolians and Chinese, five thousand Koreans and five thousand colonials from subjugated lands. The invading force also included six thousand mariners aboard three hundred warships, three hundred swift boats and three hundred water supply vessels, all constructed by the Koreans on the order of Kublai Khan.

The odds overwhelmingly favored the Mongol force, whose close-order tactics and use of gunpowder rendered the Japanese warriors, with their bows and arrows and reliance on hand-to-hand combat, almost defenseless. At first, the Japanese losses were staggering, and the Mongols seemed unstoppable. The would-be conquerors swept through the islands of Tsushima and Iki, and by the middle of the month were pressing their attack in Kyushu, the southernmost island of the Japanese archipelago.

The main part of the invading force struck at the port city of Hakata, the first and only barrier to Kyushu's political center at Dazaifu. When things looked bleakest, however, a sudden storm sank more than 200 of the Mongols' battleships. Staggered by their losses, the invaders withdrew to Korea.

In May 1281, seven years after the first invasion attempt, the Mongols launched a second

attack. The islands of Tsushima and Iki were occupied again, and a Mongol army of fourteen thousand soldiers attacked Hakata for the second time. Once again, however, most of the fleet was sunk by a typhoon and the forces withdrew.

As for Hei no Saemon, he twice received the Daishonin's remonstrations as previously mentioned. But he did not listen to the advice and continued to persecute the Daishonin and his disciples. In September 1279, Hei no Saemon arrested twenty farmers of the Atsuhara area who had become followers of the Daishonin. Based on false charges he imprisoned them at his estate. Later he had three brothers (Jinshiro, Yagoro and Yarokuro) beheaded, and banished the rest.

In 1284, when Hojo Sadatoki became regent, Hei no Saemon became steward to the main family of the Hojo clan. He arranged the death of Akita Jonosuke, who sat on the Regent's Council, thus seizing the reins of government for himself. His influence at one point seemed to surpass even that of the regent. But in 1293, fourteen years after the Atsuhara persecution, he and his son Sukemune were beheaded by Regent Hojo Sadatoki for their alleged revolt against the government. The execution took place at Hei no Saemon's own estate, where he beheaded the three farmers from Atsuhara. His eldest son Munetsuna, who informed the government of his father's plot, was exiled to Sado Island.

**Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements. Rather it was in all cases the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni that had entered into my body.**

This paragraph indicates Nichiren Daishonin's sublime state of life as a person fully awakened to his innate Buddhahood, which is symbolized as "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni." By saying "Yet it was not I, Nichiren, who made these three important pronouncements..." the Daishonin declares that he did not make the predictions as a deluded man, but as one awakened to "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" within his own life.

Nichikan interprets "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" as the eternal Buddha of limitless joy, or the original Buddha. Also called the Buddha of absolute freedom, this indicates a person who derives limitless joy from the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin here sets an example for all of us. We too have "the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni" deep within our lives. To understand the Daishonin's identity as the eternal Buddha of limitless joy is not to view him as a transcendental being removed from our mundane reality. Rather, it is to see that our lives are eternally endowed with the very same quality, to see that our lives are worthy of infinite respect as we struggle in our mundane reality.

In this passage, the Daishonin seems to separate his physical or earthly existence ("I, Nichiren") from his enlightenment to his supreme inner dignity ("the spirit of the Thus Come One Shakyamuni"), but the crux of the passage lies in the fact that the Daishonin was aware that the core of his life was Buddhahood. Furthermore, the Daishonin was able to tap into this potential and make concrete changes in the way he lived — specifically in this case, making the "three important pronouncements" in his attempt to steer the Japanese society from the course of self-destruction. As the Daishonin writes, "Through the example of one person, all living beings become equal" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 564). Through his own example, he attempted to help all people become aware of the same potential they possess. By doing so, he was following the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni says, "Shariputra, you should know / that at the start I took a vow, / hoping to make all persons / equal to me, without any distinction between us" ("Expedient Means," Chapter 2, *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 36).

**This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life taught**

**in the Lotus Sutra.... “Appearance,” the first of the ten factors of life, is the most important of them all; this is why the Buddha appeared in the world.**

At the beginning of this paragraph, the Daishonin says, “This is the all-important doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.” The sentence shows that Nichiren Daishonin embodied the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life or the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is called the oneness of the Person and the Law.

Because Nichiren Daishonin manifested the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as an ordinary person, his life became the embodiment of the supreme Buddhist truth. Based on his profound insight into the workings of life, the Daishonin became aware of what awaited the nation of Japan as a whole. In this sense, he made his predictions to dispel people’s illusion and doubt about their true potential. The basis of the Daishonin’s behavior was always his profound compassion for the people. And his wisdom was the expression of his compassion.

The rest of this passage may be interpreted in many ways. According to Nichikan’s commentary, “appearance” refers to the emergence of the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, also called the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. They are the bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra whom Shakyamuni entrusts with the mission of propagating the sutra after his passing.

They are described in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In this chapter, countless bodhisattvas from other worlds ask for permission to propagate the Lotus Sutra in this world after the Buddha’s death, but Shakyamuni refuses, saying that this world already has bodhisattvas who will carry out this task. Then the earth trembles and a host of magnificent bodhisattvas emerge, each with his or her own retinue of followers.

Nichikan also interprets “appearance” as an omen and considers the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as the sign that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread throughout the world in the Latter Day. Regarding this point, the Daishonin says: “Thus the six auspicious happenings described in the ‘Introduction’ chapter of the Lotus Sutra are great omens exceeding in magnitude any other major signs appearing in the entire life of Shakyamuni Buddha. And the omens described in the ‘Emerging from the Earth’ chapter are immeasurably greater in magnitude than these” (WND, 440).

While the other bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching fail to understand the significance of the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Shakyamuni in the Lotus Sutra is able to see its meaning. This is why the Daishonin states at the end of the paragraph, “Wise men can see omens and what they foretell...” As Shakyamuni foretells in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin appeared many centuries after Shakyamuni’s death and began to spread the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the sutra.

**Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru. ... Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!**

Little streams come together to form the great ocean, and tiny particles of dust accumulate to form Mount Sumeru.” We can interpret this passage as emphasizing the importance of focusing on individuals in our Buddhist movement for peace rather than the masses. The real happiness of each person is a building block for a peaceful society and is of the utmost importance.

While this is easy to say, it is difficult to realize, especially when the happiness of one person seems to conflict with the convenience and advantage of others. So many wars have been fought to protect the interests of nations at the sacrifice of the happiness of the common people. Many religions, as they have spread and developed, tend to protect structure, authority and dogma

before individuals. Through this passage, however, we can see that in the Daishonin's Buddhism, the happiness of each person is in itself the goal; everything else is simply a means to support this goal.

Next Nichiren Daishonin describes his existence, saying, "I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust..." Here the Daishonin seems to encourage us to reverse our conventional thinking process. We tend to think that people's individual influences are small (or even meaningless) and that only when they are accumulated do they begin to have any influence on society. But the Daishonin points out that within his seemingly insignificant existence ("a single drop of water" or "a single particle of dust") exists the realization of a peaceful society ("a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment" or "an ocean of great nirvana"). Here the Daishonin celebrates the immense power of one awakened person.

By saying that vast numbers of people will come to recite the Lotus Sutra and transmit it to others, the Daishonin encourages us to exert our utmost in practice for ourselves ("recite the Lotus Sutra") and for others ("transmit it to others"). The Daishonin goes on to say, "Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood!" Sometimes it is difficult to discern exactly what leads us to happiness in our lives. Searching for happiness, people often try changing their external circumstances—a new job or relationship—thinking that something else or someone else will make them happy. The Daishonin makes it clear that the only way to genuine happiness, here described as Buddhahood, lies in our inconspicuous yet steady effort to polish our humanity while working for the happiness of others. The happiness we build in this way emanates from within—not because of our external circumstances, but because of how we see ourselves and how we treat others.

Taking the Daishonin's courageous spirit and humanistic action as our guide, we strive sincerely to recite the sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, to develop our inner state. This constitutes practice for oneself. When we communicate the benefit and joy of our Buddhist practice to others through our sincere words and behavior, we are practicing for others. Nichiren Daishonin reaffirms that when we do this, we are traveling along the correct path toward supreme happiness or the attainment of Buddhahood. The important thing is to have strong confidence in this, and continue through the ups and downs of life to advance for the sake of our own and others' happiness. As the Daishonin points out throughout this thesis, the time to transform our society into "an ocean of great nirvana" is now, and to seize this time and become the all-encompassing "single drop of water" ourselves is to understand the meaning of "The Selection of the Time."

*By the SGI-USA Study Department*

1. Yadoya Mitsunori (n.d.) was an official of the Kamakura government. He is said to have been one of the seven individuals permitted access to the lay priest of Saimyo-ji, Hojo Tokiyori, when the latter was on his deathbed.
2. *Lotus Sutra*, chap. 2.