

**YOUTH STUDY JULY 2001**  
**SECURING A NEW CENTURY**  
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**The following is part one of a two-part essay on “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”**

Once there was a traveler who spoke these words in sorrow to his host...Famine and epidemics rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes. Corpses pile up in mounds like observation platforms, and dead bodies lie side by side like planks on a bridge...[W]hy is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed?

The host then spoke: I have been brooding alone upon this matter, indignant in my heart, but now that you have come, we can lament together. Let us discuss this question at length...

I have pondered the matter carefully with what limited resources I possess, and have looked a little at the scriptures for an answer. The people of today all turn their backs upon what is right; to a person, they give their allegiance to evil. This is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return. And in their stead devils and demons come, and disasters and calamities occur. I cannot keep silent upon this matter. I cannot suppress my fears (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 6-7).

The essay “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” is one of the most famous of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. It was written while the Daishonin was in his 30s and was the first major scholarly essay he wrote after he began to teach Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In many ways, it marks the formal beginning of his effort to bring peace and happiness to society and the people through propagation of the true Law.

The entire essay is written in a question and answer format, with a “traveler” seeking to understand why his country—13th century Japan—was suffering so much. At the time, Japan was in economic and political turmoil, and disease, famine and death were common. The dominant religion in Japan was Buddhism, and since the religion promises peace and prosperity, the traveler was wondering why the nation was in such difficulty. The “host” represents the Daishonin, who explains to his guest that although Japan seems to embrace Buddhism, actually the teachings that most of the people embraced were not Buddhist at all. He explained that the suffering that people were experiencing was the result of embracing an incorrect view of life. The point of this essay, then, is to show that by practicing the correct teaching and upholding the correct view of life, a person can not only become happy themselves, but can actually help to transform society.

But what lessons does this essay teach us, who live in the United States in the 21st

century? The format of this essay—discussion between a skeptical “guest” and a confident “host”—is the spirit of propagation through patient dialogue and is kind of an example or exercise to model. By the end of the dialogue, the guest is fully convinced and embraces the Daishonin’s teachings, accepting Nichiren as his teacher and mentor.

In the first question the traveler wonders: “What is wrong? What error has been committed?” In general, the view of the traveler represents an erroneous view that the Daishonin will refute and correct, but in this first question, we see a spirit of honest and open seeking.

Today of course, very few people would ask why disasters or tragedies occur. When we watch the news and hear of another shooting spree at a high school, or of some horror committed in some distant country, do many people ask “Why?” or do most people wince, shrug and say it’s “just life.”

In asking “What is wrong? What error has been committed?” a belief is expressed that things shouldn’t be that way; that if people are suffering and the world is in disarray, it’s not the natural state of affairs—it’s because something is wrong. More to the point, asking these questions expresses hope that there is some way to correct what is wrong, to fix the error and to find a way for us to create a better world where atrocities don’t happen. We need to return to this kind of attitude, to ask ourselves when we see the world we live in: “What is wrong? What error has been committed,” not to look for false answers, but to see the ways in which we are responsible and can take responsibility for the world in which we live.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is the conviction and spirit of propagation that the Daishonin expresses in this essay related to a spirit of tolerance?

2. What do most people look to as the basis for their happiness? In your view, does society embrace a “correct view” or an “incorrect view”? What are the “misleading teachings” of contemporary America?