

SPIRIT OF THE 'NEW YEAR'S GOSHO'
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To celebrate the new year is to delight in growth and renewal. We gather with friends and family to reflect on the year gone by and to set goals for the year to come. We pledge to quit smoking, read more often, exercise and so on. It is a day of optimism and hope. It is a celebration of spring, even in the heart of winter. Nichiren Daishonin writes, "A person who celebrates this day will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east, and the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1137).

In the Daishonin's time, the new year began closer to the physical beginning of spring. Throughout the "New Year's Gosho" he speaks of lotus flowers blooming, cherry blossoms emerging, the movement of the moon and other springtime metaphors. However, there is much more to this letter than paying homage to the changing seasons. In this letter, written to a lay believer, the Daishonin outlines an essential aspect of Buddhist practice in the SGI.

To openly embrace responsibility for our own happiness is one of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. This is like the spirit of the new year. We do not gather together on New Year's Eve to blame things in the year past for our troubles. Instead we look to the coming year as an opportunity for change.

"Misfortune," the Daishonin states, "comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect" (WND, 1137). Likewise, the lotus emerges from the mud and the people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo awaken their Buddha nature. We who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism know that we create our own fortune just as surely as we are responsible for our own suffering.

SGI President Ikeda has often said, "Buddhism is action." Buddhism, in a sense, does not wait for winter to end. It jumps right into spring. It is in a constant state of reform. Likewise, in our own hearts, in intimate relationships, in our families and in the SGI-USA, we are consistently growing.

It is easy to say: "I would be happy if only my spouse was not so lazy." "I wish my boss treated me better." "I would like my district if the meetings were not so boring." Everyone has problems and dislikes, but to remain idle is not Buddhism. If we merely sit by the sidelines and complain, we are not practicing with the spirit of the new year.

On the other hand if we sincerely chant for wisdom, openly engage those around us in dialogue and take action, we will surely overcome such minor difficulties. We can face all aspects of our daily lives with pride instead of bitterness.

Occasionally, the problems we face in life can be repetitive and discouraging. We find ourselves confronting the same difficulty over and over with seemingly no change in sight. For example, one might desire to quit a destructive habit only to slip back into it, attempt after frustrating attempt. In such times it's easy to slide into the swamp of pessimism and apathy.

But we all know that no battle is won without the determination to win and not be defeated. The nature of New Year's Day, and the tradition of making resolutions, gives us an extra shot of optimism. Sometimes we need only a little more hope to keep us going.

We practice Buddhism so that we can always get back up and fight again. A persistent

little voice inside emerges telling us that we are stronger than our most terrible struggles. As President Ikeda says: “There is no pessimism in Buddhism — not in the past, present, or future. There is only optimism” (*Faith Into Action*, p. 127). No one who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is ever permanently deadlocked or defeated. The Daishonin also says, “The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees...” (WND, 1137).

Rekindling optimism, confidence and courage in the face of difficulties is in a very real sense an offering of the Law displaying our inner beauty. Our happiness, in turn, can serve to support and encourage others for whom New Year’s Day is just another day in a cycle of seemingly inescapable suffering.

In the coming year we have the option to triumph or to falter, to grow or to stagnate. We can challenge and overcome all obstacles through our strong practice of faith, or we can retreat and sink beneath our worries. We can show the greatness of the Daishonin’s Buddhism or we can hide, timid and uninspired. We have this choice, not just at the dawn of Jan. 1, but at each moment of every day to come.