

**WORDS TO WIN BY
VICTORY OR DEFEAT
BY AL ALBERGATE
SGI-USA VICE GENERAL DIRECTOR**

From “The Hero of the World,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 835–39.

Buddhism primarily concerns itself with victory or defeat, while secular authority is based on the principle of reward and punishment. For this reason, a Buddha is looked up to as the Hero of the World, while a king is called the one who rules at his will. (WND, 835)

Reward and punishment are the means that a government sometimes employs to enforce its policy. Those who support its aims are rewarded and those who go against them are punished. Judgment rests with the ruler or other governing body empowered to administer reward and punishment. Since both are meted out by human beings, justice is bound to be less than perfect—some people will contrive to be rewarded without merit, while others will be punished without fault.

The world of Buddhism, however, cannot be manipulated in this way. Its basis is not reward and punishment, for Buddhism acknowledges no external power that could reward or punish us. Rather, it concerns itself with victory or defeat, that is, with fundamental happiness or unhappiness in each individual’s life. Its authority rests nowhere outside us but with the ultimate truth or Mystic Law inherent in life itself. If one believes in and seeks to realize this truth, he will win; if he remains ignorant of or goes against it, he will lose. This is due to the workings of karmic causality, which are perfectly impartial.

The Buddha is called “the hero of the world,” not because he bends others to his will, as a king or government does, but because he reveals the Law that is eternal and thus leads all people to enlightenment.

In this, we can also see a fundamental distinction between religions based on rules and those based on virtues. Rule-based religions create behavioral restrictions. Those who violate these restrictions will be punished; those who abide by them will be rewarded. The practitioners of these faiths, which are typically based on an external deity, often believe this reward or punishment will manifest after death. Without the threat of punishment being meted out in the present, the incentive to restrict unethical behavior may prove inadequate. The increasing violence of our society is just one example of the loosening of these strictures of faith.

In a virtue-based ethic, like that of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, ethical behavior based on the fundamental law of cause and effect leads to a lasting happiness and victory instead of defeat. It is its own reward, hard-wired, as it were, into each person’s being. In these terms, we can see why the Buddha is the hero of this world. For a Buddha opens our eyes to the internal, eternal and objective law of causality that transcends the limitations of secular or religious authority that dispenses reward and punishment.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, we are able to see for ourselves the workings of this Law in ourselves and our environments. Imbued with this wisdom we can live victoriously and happily.

This letter was written to Shijo Kingo, one of the Daishonin’s strongest supporters and a retainer of the Ema family. At the time, Lord Ema was threatening to expel him from the

clan. This would mean losing his estate and becoming essentially a homeless samurai, a life-threatening situation.

All of this persecution was the result of his Buddhist practice and staunch support of the Daishonin. If Kingo were to capitulate and give up his faith, he likely would have pleased Lord Ema and been allowed to remain in his position on his estate. However, by giving up faith, he would fail to achieve lasting happiness. By remaining firm in his faith, he was in danger of being punished, but guaranteed eternal victory in life. Through perseverance, he also won his lord's favor in the end. The Daishonin urges him to think about ultimate victory or defeat, rather than temporary reward or punishment.