LEARNING FROM THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN: THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

“The Bow and Arrow” [51]

Encouraging the Person Right in Front of Us

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This lecture guide should serve as a resource for those preparing presentations on SGI President Ikeda’s lecture series published in Living Buddhism. This does not cover all the points. Many points may be elaborated upon. This SHOULD NOT be distributed at study meetings.

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in March 1276 to lay nun Toki of Shimosa Province (part of present-day Chiba Prefecture) and entrusted its delivery to her husband, Toki Jonin, who was visiting Mount Minobu at the time. Toki had brought with him the ashes of his mother who had died the month before. From a previous correspondence, it is known that Toki’s mother was more than 90 years old when she died. In this letter, Nichiren praises the lay nun for supporting her husband and for giving attentive care to her mother-in-law. And he encourages her to now focus on recovering from her own illness.

On this lecture’s title “Encouraging the Person Right in Front of Us”:

SGI President Ikeda: The only way to truly transform society, to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land, is for each person to work through the process of confronting their actual problems in life and to transform their life condition.

Individual encouragement is the great path that opens the way to human revolution, which is the starting point toward that goal. (p. 24, right column, 3rd paragraph from bottom of page)

President Ikeda: Advancing kosen-rufu in an age when human ties are growing increasingly tenuous means employing the “art of encouragement” and creating a truly humanistic and harmonious society where each person is valued and their dignity respected. This is my unwavering conviction. (p. 26, right column, last paragraph under heading)

President Ikeda: Encouragement in Buddhism is not just a matter of offering words of sympathy or comfort. It is the earnest effort to awaken a person’s inner Buddha nature. (p. 31, left column, 1st paragraph)

Passage of focus for January (see pp. 26–27)

My greatest concern now is your illness. Fully convinced that you will recover your health, you should continue moxibustion treatment for three years, as regularly as if you had just begun. Even those who are free from illness cannot escape the transience of life, but you are not yet old, and because you are a votary of the Lotus Sutra, you will not meet an untimely death. Your illness is surely not due to karma, but even if it were, you could rely on the power of the Lotus Sutra to cure it.

King Ajātashatru extended his life by forty years by embracing the Lotus Sutra. Ch’en Chen added fifteen years to his life. You also are a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, and your faith is like the waxing moon or the rising tide. Be deeply convinced, then, that your illness cannot possibly persist, and that your life cannot fail to be extended! Take care of yourself, and do not burden your mind with grief. (WND-1, 656)

Confidence and Determination (pp. 26–27)

President Ikeda: Though her illness must have left her exhausted and mentally fatigued, the lay nun Toki had continued to support her husband and nurse her mother-in-law. No doubt in her preoccupation with these tasks, she may have neglected to pay attention to getting well. She may
even have begun to feel that she might not recover at all. Addressing this anxiety, Nichiren encouraged her by stressing the absolute power of the Mystic Law. He sought to rouse in her the confidence that she would get better and also the determination to do so without fail. (p. 27, left column, 3rd paragraph)

- With stern compassion, Nichiren urges the lay nun to concentrate on her own health and recovery.

**Living Wisely and Enjoying a Long, Healthy and Fulfilling Life (p. 27)**

**President Ikeda:** In this letter, Nichiren reminds the lay nun Toki twice that she is a votary, or a practitioner, of the Lotus Sutra. Citing the examples of King Ajatashatru and the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s older brother Ch’en Chen, he assures her that a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra will never be vanquished by the devil of illness. Those who have dedicated themselves to the great mission of propagating the Lotus Sutra will never be defeated in life, he tells her. (p. 27, left column, last paragraph)

- “Be deeply convinced”: Have unshakeable conviction that we can overcome our problems and will be protected.
- “Take care of yourself”: Lead a well-balanced and disciplined life so we can take on any problems.
- “Do not burden your mind with grief”: Live wisely with a strong, positive attitude and refrain from negativity and needless fretting and complaining.

- At the end of this letter, Nichiren again stresses this point, writing, “There is nothing to lament when we consider that we will surely become Buddhas” (WND-1, 657). (See “Lives of Triumph That Rise Above All Suffering,” p. 30)
- Those who remain steadfast in their practice never need to sink into the mire of suffering. Instead of being depressed, they are buoyant and their hearts light as they look to the future. The key is to chant resonantly with joy and with the determination that they have already won (see p. 30, bottom right column).

**President Ikeda:** Naturally, in the case of illness, seeking the best medical treatment should always go hand in hand with a strong practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It is my dearest wish and prayer that all of our members will live wisely and make health their top priority. (p. 27, right column, last paragraph)

**Empathy and Concern for Others (pp. 28−29)**

**President Ikeda:** It’s important to note that the Daishonin’s message isn’t simply: “There are others worse off than you” or “You have it easy.” What he is saying to the lay nun Toki, who may have been feeling rather disconsolate and alone, is, “You are not the only one who is suffering.” By drawing her attention to the plight of others, he seeks to alleviate her pain and turn her gaze outward. He is trying to teach her the spirit of empathy—that is, recognizing and sharing the sufferings of others. (p. 29, left column, 2nd paragraph)

- By offering examples of others’ suffering, Nichiren teaches her that sorrow is common to all people.
- As an additional example, President Ikeda conveys the story of Shakyamuni and Kisa Gotami.

**Opening Life’s Infinite Potential (p. 29)**

**President Ikeda:** The point is that none of us is free of the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death. At the same time, each of us possesses the Buddha nature—the infinite potential within life that enables us to fundamentally overcome that suffering. Opening our eyes to this universal truth is the first step to liberation from suffering. (p. 29, right column, 1st paragraph)