Special Lecture
Commemorating November 18, Soka Gakkai Foundation Day

“The OPENING of the EYES”

Usher in a Triumphant Revival of Humanity

THE PASSAGES FOR STUDY

This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law. . . .

Here I will make a great vow. Though I might be offered the rulership of Japan if I would only abandon the Lotus Sutra, accept the teachings of the Meditation Sutra,¹ and look forward to rebirth in the Pure Land, though I might be told that my father and mother will have their heads cut off if I do not recite the Nembutsu²—whatever obstacles I might encounter, so long as persons of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, I will never yield! All other troubles are no more to me than dust before the wind.

I will be the pillar of Japan. I will be the eyes of Japan. I will be the great ship of Japan. This is my vow, and I will never forsake it! (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, pp. 280–81)

Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood. Do not have doubts simply because heaven does not lend you protection. Do not be discouraged because you do not enjoy an easy and secure existence in this life. This is what I have taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they begin to harbor doubts and abandon their faith.

Foolish men are likely to forget the promises they have made when the crucial moment comes. (WND-1, 283)
"I Will Stand Up Alone, Here and Now!"

In one of his articles on “The Opening of the Eyes,” second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda spoke of his powerful emotional reaction when reading this and other writings, and coming into contact with Nichiren Daishonin’s unflinching and impasioned spirit for kosen-rufu: “His blazing spirit strikes my heart with the intensity of the noonday summer sun. My chest feels as if it is filled with a giant ball of molten iron. Sometimes I feel like a scalding spring is gushing forth inside me or as if a great, earthshaking waterfall is crashing over me.”

I have also dedicated myself to the great struggle for kosen-rufu with the determination to internalize and put into action the Daishonin’s spirit with my entire being, just as my mentor taught.

Whenever I read this passage from the Daishonin, I sense his towering life state—his spirit soaring to a lofty height and gazing down calmly on the world racked with strife and petty jealousies.

Nichiren is saying he doesn’t care if the gods have abandoned him; he is ready to face any persecution. He is prepared to give his life, without fear, without doubt, in order to propagate the Lotus Sutra. With the words “Still I will give my life,” he serenely affirms that he is prepared to uphold the correct teaching as long as he lives.

“I will stand up alone, here and now!” I can hear this lionhearted cry of the Daishonin standing invincible and unassailable as a massive rock amid a storm of persecution.

In “The Opening of the Eyes,” Nichiren is urging people to open their eyes to the truth that the votary of the Lotus Sutra who is propagating the correct teaching of Buddhism in the defiled age of the Latter Day of the Law, never hesitating in the face of persecution by the three powerful enemies is the “lord of teachings” seeking to guide all living beings to enlightenment, and that person is none other than he himself.

“The Opening of the Eyes” is one of Nichiren’s major writings, in which he reveals the “object of devotion in terms of the Person.”

As I consider its profound significance, I am again struck with awe at the tremendous power, wisdom and potential that reside in a single individual, and filled with a deep appreciation of the dignity and nobility of the human being.

The Noble Call for a Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple

Sternly yet warmly, Nichiren Daishonin also called on his disciples to demonstrate the same unwavering commitment that he had.

In the second passage that we are studying, we can detect both his deep trust and strict compassion toward his disciples. His words resonate with the message that he had risked his life and overcome great persecutions in his effort to propagate the Law, and that if his disciples continued to strive alongside him in his struggle, they could do likewise.

Mentor and disciple are one, not separate.

When we look at the Daishonin’s writings, we see that he referred to his disciples who persevered in their Buddhist practice with unwavering faith—both men and women, young and old—as votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

For instance, praising Oto Gozen’s mother, Sage Nichimyo, Nichiren writes, “You are the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan” (“Letter to the Sage Nichimyo,” WND-1, 325).

Writing to the lay nun Toki, the wife of Toki Jonin, the Daishonin describes Shijo Kingo as “not only an excellent physician but a votary of the Lotus Sutra” (“On Prolonging One’s Life Span,” WND-1, 955).

Commending the staunch faith of Ikegami Munenaka in the face of being disinherited by his father, and urging Munenaka’s younger brother, Munenaga, not to abandon his faith, the Daishonin writes, “[Munenaka] will now become one of [the Lotus Sutra’s] votaries” (see “The Three Obstacles and Four Devils,” WND-1, 637).

Praising the lay nun Konichi, who lost her beloved son but remained steadfast in her Buddhist practice, Nichiren says, “How much more will [Buddhahood be assured for] the present-day Honorable Konichi, who out of her great affection for her son became a practitioner [or votary] of the Lotus Sutra?” (“Reply to the Honorable Konichi,” WND-2, 964).

The situation of each of these people was different, as was the length of their practice and the reasons they took faith in the Daishonin’s teaching. But to Nichiren, they were all disciples who shared profound karmic ties with him, votaries of the Lotus Sutra, each propagating the Mystic Law to the best of their abilities.

Returning to the passage in “The Opening of the Eyes,” which contains the phrase “I and my disciples,” the Daishonin here infers that both he and his disciples who share his struggle are equally votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

By the same principle, I am absolutely certain that Nichiren would highly praise as votaries of the Lotus Sutra all who dedicate themselves to the great vow of propagating the Mystic Law, whoever they may be and in whatever age they may live.

—From the February 2015 Living Buddhism, pp. 26–27 and pp. 31–32.

1. Meditation Sutra: The abbreviated name for the Meditation on the Buddha Infinite Life Sutra. The Buddha Infinite Life is also known as the Buddha Amida. This sutra is one of the three basic scriptures of the Pure Land (Nembutsu) school of Buddhism, which reveres Amida Buddha and aspires for rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land of Perfect Bliss.

2. To recite the Nembutsu means to recite the name of Amida Buddha, the practice of the Pure Land school.


4. Three powerful enemies: Three types of arrogant people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death, described in the concluding verse section of “Encouraging Devotion,” the 13th chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China summarizes them as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests and arrogant false sages.

5. The object of devotion in terms of the Person is revealed in “The Opening of the Eyes,” composed by the Daishonin on Sado in February 1272. He clarifies that he is the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law who possesses the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent, and who will lead the people of the Latter Day to enlightenment. The object of devotion in terms of the Law, meanwhile, is revealed in “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” composed on Sado in April 1273. The Daishonin clarifies that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood that all people of the Latter Day should revere.

6. This statement implies that, because the elder brother, Munenaka, will accept disinheritance and the accompanying social sanctions rather than renounce his faith, he is in effect giving his life for the Lotus Sutra.