



From SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

Learning From The Writings: The Teachings For Victory

[1]

“Letter From Sado,” Part 1
My Disciples Win With The
Heart of a Lion King!

*Dedicate This Supreme Life
to Buddhism*

The way of the world dictates that one should repay a great obligation to another, even at the cost of one's life. Many warriors die for their lords, perhaps many more than one would imagine. A man will die to defend his honor; a woman will die for a man. Fish want to survive; they deplore their pond's shallowness and dig holes in the bottom to hide in, yet tricked by bait, they take the hook. Birds in a tree fear that they are too low and perch in the top branches, yet bewitched by bait, they too are caught in snares. Human beings are equally vulnerable. They give their lives for shallow, worldly matters but rarely for the Buddha's precious teachings. Small wonder they do not attain Buddhahood.

(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 301)

Earlier, by noting that people often lose their lives in accidents or in armed conflicts—which he expresses as “the pain of fire” and “the flashing of swords” (WND-1, 301)—Nichiren Daishonin reminds us that all people treasure their own lives.

In this next section, he also points out that there are many examples of people laying down their lives in accord with their society's moral conventions and values.

There are also many cases of people foolishly duped into sacrificing their lives, try as they might to protect themselves from harm. The behavior of the fish and birds described in this section are based on the insights of ancient thinkers documented in such works as *Zhenguan zhengyao* (The Essentials of Government in the Chen-kuan Era),¹ a Chinese classic on the art of leadership. “Tricked by bait” is a metaphor for how human beings—even though taking various measures and precautions to stay safe—may be swept away by immediate desires or have a lapse of judgment due to narrow thinking, leading ultimately to their self-destruction. Sadly, such human folly remains very much in evidence today.

Nichiren, therefore, counsels that rather than giving our lives—the most valuable possession of all—for “shallow, worldly matters,” we should dedicate them to “the Buddha's precious teachings.”

We speak of “not begrudging one's life,” but Nichiren Buddhism is definitely not a teaching of reckless self-sacrifice or martyrdom. Mr. Makiguchi, Mr. Toda and I—the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai—have taken action with the resolve to advance kosen-rufu in such a way that not one member is sacrificed, and we have willingly given our all toward that end. In the future as well, this must remain the spirit of successive Soka Gakkai presidents.



You absolutely must not throw away your precious lives. To our young men and women, I say: No matter what painful or difficult challenges you may be facing, you must never disrespect or harm your own lives or the lives of others. Each of you is endowed with the wondrous and supremely noble Buddha nature.

In specific terms, how should we practice in order to dedicate this invaluable lifetime to “the Buddha’s precious teachings”? In another writing, Nichiren says with regard to ordinary people attaining Buddhahood in the Latter Day of the Law: “As for the matter of becoming a Buddha, ordinary people keep in mind the words ‘earnest resolve’ and thereby become Buddhas” (“The Gift of Rice,” WND-1, 1125). These words express the spirit of “not begrudging one’s life” in its supreme and highest form. It is the Daishonin’s emphatic declaration that ordinary people of this age can, without having to sacrifice their lives in the manner of the boy Snow Mountains, attain the same benefit that accrues to such selfless dedication through their “earnest resolve.”

As Nichiren writes, “It is the heart that is important” (“The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 1000). It’s a matter of exerting millions of *kalpas* of effort in a single moment of life for the sake of Buddhism, for the noble cause of kosen-rufu. For us, not begrudging our lives ultimately means steadfastly chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo without any fear, and wholeheartedly dedicating ourselves to showing actual proof of faith—for the sake of the world, for the sake of the future and for the sake of others.

President Makiguchi described this as “a selfless way of life of great good.” Overcoming both selfishness and fear, and striving for the happiness of both oneself and others characterize such a way of life. He explained, “It is an ordinary way of life, a way of plain humanity—such that anyone who consciously experiences it and comes to realize that

it is universally accessible will feel an overwhelming desire to embrace it, and, indeed, will feel compelled to do so.”²

Therefore, he asserted that the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-creating Education Society; forerunner of the Soka Gakkai) “was itself living proof of a life of great good.”³

In other words, selfless dedication is found in a seemingly ordinary way of life open to anyone. A true example of such dedication can be seen in our daily efforts for kosen-rufu, exerting ourselves body and soul to encourage others and sincerely sharing the greatness of Buddhism with those around us.

(November–December 2009 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 54–55)



Shayna Peveler



[2]

“Letter from Sado,” Part 2 The Direct Path To Attaining Buddhahood: Overcoming Great Obstacles Is the Key To Transforming Our Karma

As practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, when we have problems, worries, or sufferings, we see them as an opportunities to challenge karma arising from the four universal sufferings—birth, aging, sickness and death. If we merely let ourselves be overwhelmed or just weep and lament over our situation, we cannot break through our karma, which exists precisely so that we can overcome it. From the standpoint of Buddhism, karma is an expedient means for us to prove the greatness of the Mystic Law.

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Cultivating One’s Life Is the Supreme Benefit

Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword. Worthies and sages are tested by abuse. My present exile is not because of any secular crime. It is solely so that I may expiate in this lifetime my past grave offenses and be freed in the next from the three evil paths.

(WND-1, 303)

Nichiren Daishonin underscores the importance of practicing Buddhism to transform our karma. Developing inner strength and fortitude is the supreme benefit of practicing Nichiren Buddhism. A thoroughly forged life ensures our eternal happiness. The Daishonin

says that his present ordeal “is not because of any secular crime” (WND-1, 303), even going so far as to assert that he was exiled solely so that he could change his karma in this lifetime.

We practice Buddhism to forge and transform our lives. Indeed, as the Russian author Mikhail Sholokhov states, each of us is “the blacksmith of our own happiness.”⁴ My disciples, become as strong as steel, as strong as finely tempered swords! Stand up as true worthies and sages!

Nichiren vigorously encourages his embattled followers as if shaking them by the shoulders: “You have to change your karma! The power to do so exists within you! Don’t run away from hardships! True victory means winning over your own weaknesses! Great suffering produces great character! Become an enduring victor!”

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Shayna Peveler



[6]
“Letter to the Brothers,”
Part 3
The Disciple’s Victory
Is the Mentor’s Greatest
Wish and Joy

*A Victorious Life Guided by the
Principle of the Heart Being
Most Important*

A passage in the Six Paramitas Sutra says to become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you.

Whatever trouble occurs, regard it as no more than a dream, and think only of the Lotus Sutra.

(WND-1, 502)

As Nichiren Daishonin declares, “It is the heart that is important” (“The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 1000). The human heart or mind can give supreme dignity and nobility to life. At the same time, it can fall into the depths of depravity if it succumbs to the impulses of fundamental darkness or ignorance. Transforming the human heart is the foundation for all lasting change.

If we base ourselves on our own fickle, ever-changing hearts, we cannot make our way up steep ridges buffeted by the fierce winds of devilish functions. We must set our sights on the solid and unshakable summit of attaining Buddhahood and continually seek to master our minds. This is the meaning of the passage “Become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you” (WND-1, 502).

Becoming the master of one’s mind

ultimately means basing oneself on the unwavering foundation of the Law. Herein lies the importance of sutras or writings containing the teachings of the Buddha who has awakened to and spreads the Law. For us, as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, mastering our minds means basing ourselves on the Gohonzon and Nichiren’s writings. And in Buddhism, it is the teacher or mentor who puts the teachings into practice that helps us connect to the Law. Mastering our minds means having a sincere seeking spirit in faith based on the shared commitment of mentor and disciple, and not being ruled by arrogant egoism or self-centeredness.

Nichiren highlights the importance of living with inner mastery—mastery based on the Law—in the following passage: “Whatever trouble occurs, regard it as no more than a dream, and think only of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 502). When viewed in terms of the infinite scale of eternity, any event or phenomenon is as fleeting as a passing dream. The Law, in contrast, is eternal. Allowing oneself to be defeated by devilish functions and straying from the Law will be a cause for everlasting regret. In this passage, Nichiren urges his followers to “think only of the Lotus Sutra,” to focus only on kosen-rufu and to remain steadfast in their faith for the sake of eternal victory.

In the present age, we of the Soka Gakkai have been dedicating ourselves to mastering our minds through single-minded commitment to the Lotus Sutra (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo). As a result, we are showing magnificent actual proof of victory. There are now countless heroic members—ordinary people exerting themselves valiantly in their Buddhist practice—in Japan and around the world. They are truly treasures of kosen-rufu and treasures of humanity. Basing themselves on the Law and embodying the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple, they have

