

THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN: ILLUMINATING THE WORLD

[6] “On Persecutions Befalling the Sage”—Part 1 [of 2]

“The Buddhism of the People—Opening an Age of Humanistic Religion”

—General References—

go to www.nichirenlibrary.org to access the most up-to-date information:

- *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vols. 1 & 2
- *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*
- *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*
- *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR THIS LECTURE

1. Background of “On Persecutions Befalling the Sage” (www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-1/Content/138)
2. *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 2nd edition, pp. 61–63 (“The Atsuhara Persecution and the Purpose of the Daishonin’s Appearance in This World”)

TERMS:

- Purpose of one’s advent (see *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*; www.nichirenlibrary.org)
- Atsuhara Persecution (see *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*; www.nichirenlibrary.org)

BACKGROUND HIGHLIGHTS

- “On Persecutions Befalling the Sage” was written on October 1, 1279, amid the turmoil of the Atsuhara Persecution.
- Events leading up to the Atsuhara Persecution:
 - Around 1275, four years before this letter was written, propagation efforts led by Nikko Shonin in the Fuji area of Suruga Province began to produce significant results.
 - As new believers, both priest and lay persons, increased, so too did threats and harassment toward them.
 - The greatest persecution took place on September 21, 1279, when 20 of the Daishonin’s disciples were arrested on false charges, and three were later beheaded. However, not one of the 20 farmers abandoned their faith.
- This letter was written before the three martyrs of Atsuhara laid down their lives.
- Upon seeing that these ordinary people would give their lives to protect the Law, the Daishonin was able to affirm that he had actualized the “purpose of his appearance in this world”—revealing the Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

OPENING POINTS

See July 2016 *Living Buddhism*, p. 42

- A new era of worldwide kosen-rufu has arrived with a steady stream of capable people awakened to their mission of spreading the Mystic Law emerging throughout the world, giving expression to the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.
- **SGI President Ikeda on this writing:** It triumphantly proclaims the establishment of a Buddhist teaching for all people through the struggle of disciples who were ready to risk their lives to protect their beliefs. (LB, p. 42)

BASIC POINTERS FOR PREPARING A LECTURE ON THE WRITINGS

- Read the writing several times through.
- Read the lecture on the writing several times through.
- Create a concise explanation of the background:
 - when the letter was written, conditions of society and Nichiren’s life at the time, the intent in composing the writing, etc.
- Make note of the title of the lecture—often the key message is conveyed in the title.
- Make note of the opening section(s) of the lecture—the key points are often included in the opening.
- Are there terms or concepts that need explanation?
- What are some key portions of the Gosho passage to emphasize?
- How do these key portions and correlating points connect to our lives today?
- What are some possible questions that might come up?
- What points do you want members to go home with?

KEY PASSAGE #1:

The Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai took about thirty years, and the Great Teacher Dengyo, some twenty years. I have spoken repeatedly of the indescribable persecutions they suffered during those years. For me it took twenty-seven years, and the great persecutions I faced during this period are well known to you all. (WND-1, 996)

See LB, pp. 43–45

- Since Nichiren first proclaimed his teaching on April 28, 1253, he met numerous persecutions that clarified who his genuine disciples were. The true strength of one's faith is revealed at a crucial moment.
- The disciples in Atsuhara were recent converts to Nichiren Buddhism. They had not met Nichiren, but learned his spirit through Nikko Shonin's behavior. Faith is not determined by length of practice or whether one has met the mentor.
- **President Ikeda:** Courageous faith is demonstrated by disciples who strive with the same spirit as their mentor. (LB, p. 44)

KEY CONCEPT #1: The purpose of one's advent

See LB, pp. 45–47

- "The purpose of one's advent" is the true and ultimate purpose for which one has appeared in this world.
- **President Ikeda:** For all Buddhas, the purpose of their advent is to achieve the great objective of leading everyone without exception to enlightenment . . . Those who teach and spread the correct teaching without begrudging their lives, who never flinch in the face of persecution, who make the wish of the Buddhas their own, are true votaries, or genuine practitioners, of the Lotus Sutra. (LB, p. 47)
- Key Passage #1 describes how Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo taught the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood in a way appropriate to their time. Each fulfilled the purpose of their appearance in the world. Nichiren carried on the direct lineage of these three teachers in three countries who propagated the Lotus Sutra, identifying himself as the fourth among what he termed "the four teachers of the three countries" (see "four teachers of the three countries" in *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*; www.nichirenlibrary.org).
- Nichiren appeared in the Latter Day to reveal the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, to lead all people to enlightenment.
- What does this mean for us as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism? What is the purpose of our advent?

KEY CONCEPT #2: The Buddhism of the People

See LB, pp. 47–48

- Why is it necessary to define the significance of "the Buddhism of the people"? Because, rather than serve the people, Buddhism for a long time served elite clergy and political authorities. The Atsuhara Persecution was a result of ordinary people daring to stand up against authorities for their beliefs. The authorities in response persecuted these believers.
- **President Ikeda:** The Buddhism of the people is a philosophy based on the teaching of universal enlightenment set forth in the Lotus Sutra, fully propounding the unsurpassed worth, dignity and equality of all people. The protagonists of this philosophy have no special abilities or attributes beyond those of ordinary human beings. They are the mentor and disciple practicing and spreading the essence of Lotus Sutra in the real world, in society and in their communities. The disciples engage in the same practice as the mentor, striving to awaken as many individuals as possible. The Buddhism of the people is a humanistic religion, in which people awakened to their mission play the leading role and open the way to victory for all people. (LB, p. 48)
- **President Ikeda:** Arrogant authorities who seek to subjugate the people fear above all an awakened populace that demands truth and justice. (LB, p. 43)
- **President Ikeda:** This persecution involved people awakened to a noble mission waging a great struggle against the devilish nature of authority. (LB, p. 44)
- The farmers of Atsuhara represented the emergence of ordinary people who believe in and practice Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. They proved that the power of Buddhism lay with the people who practice it in the midst of

NOTE: This is not intended as a prepared lecture. This only serves as a supporting reference for lecturers.

daily life, rather than with an elite clergy or political authority. This marked the fulfillment of the purpose of Nichiren's advent.

KEY PASSAGE #2

Countless numbers of disciples have been murdered or wounded, banished or heavily fined . . . Had it not been for the advent of Nichiren in the Latter Day of the Law, the Buddha would have been a teller of great lies, and the testimony given by Many Treasures and by the Buddhas of the ten directions would have been false. In the 2,230 and more years since the Buddha's passing, Nichiren is the only person in the entire land of Jambudvīpa who has fulfilled the Buddha's words. (WND-1, 997)

See LB, pp. 48–49

- "Nichiren is the only person" in the world who proved the truth of Shakyamuni's words. He underwent life-threatening persecutions to propagate the Law and provide all people with a means to attain enlightenment.
- The persecutions, he says, have also been extended to his followers, proving the validity of the Buddha's words.
- **President Ikeda:** Those who propagate the correct teaching and fight against persecution are truly worthy of respect. For those who dedicate their lives to truth and justice, persecution is a badge of honor and proof that the teaching they uphold is correct. (LB, p. 49)
- **President Ikeda:** Through the shared struggle of mentor and disciple, the Buddhism of the people was transmitted to future generations, leading eventually to the emergence of the Soka Gakkai in our time. In that sense, the mission and role of the people's organization of the SGI, which has inherited the Nichiren's fundamental purpose and spread it throughout the world, take on even greater importance. (LB, p. 49)