

ENCOUNTERING OBSTACLES AND PERSECUTION

WHEN Nichiren Daishonin established his Buddhism on April 28, 1253, he knew full well that he would face unprecedented persecution. But he did so without retreating an inch for the sake of all people's happiness. He took great pride in doing so.

It is precisely because the Mystic Law is correct that people have difficulty in accepting it. Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the more correct a teaching is, the more opposition it will encounter. In "Gift of an Unlined Robe," he writes:

I have never heard of someone who was hated as much as I, Nichiren, on account of the Lotus Sutra....The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "Hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One [Buddha] is in the world. How much more will this be so after his passing?" (LS10, 164) If Nichiren had not appeared in the country of Japan, these golden words of the Buddha would have been in vain. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1514)

SGI President Ikeda explains this passage:

"Buddhism exists because I exist" —this is the Daishonin's immense conviction. The Buddha's word, in a sense, became true precisely because the Daishonin singlehandedly underwent great persecution. (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 18)

When someone stands out from the crowd, people tend to want to bring them down. In school, the straight-A student is often outcast and criticized by other students. On the job, the gung-ho worker is the target of others' disdain. History is full of examples where those who stood up for justice were persecuted—Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr.

"Not only do people fail to do what is correct," President Ikeda continues, "they tend to react emotionally and negatively toward a person of justice. This is human nature.

"In particular, arrogant authorities cannot bear to have anyone stand up to them and speak out for justice. That's because they regard themselves as superior to everyone. This is an unchanging principle" (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 12).

The great mathematician and honorary rector of Fudan University in China, Su Buqing, was persecuted during the great upheaval in China known as the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). He survived the ordeal and eventually returned to teaching at the university. One of his sons Su Dechang, himself a university professor, said of his father:

I think my father can best be described as a person of integrity and moral courage. He will not compromise his beliefs. It was precisely his unwillingness to compromise that led to his extremely harsh treatment during the Cultural Revolution. But it was that same unwillingness to compromise that made it possible for him to recover afterward. He does not bend. He has firm beliefs, which creates enemies for him.

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Subject: Living Buddhism 06/97 v.1 n.6 p.20 LB9706p20

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Keywords: Discussion Encountering Obstacles Persecution Practice Topics

Yet, it is because we have opponents that we can advance. Without opponents, we do not move forward. I think that the SGI and President Ikeda face obstacles for the same reason. My father was very aware of this nature of things. (July 1996 *Seikyo Times*, p. 17)

We will never experience the kind of persecution the Daishonin did, but when we first began our practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, some of us were tormented by friends and family or teased by co-workers and neighbors. This kind of opposition is explained by the Buddhist principle of the three obstacles and four devils—forces that try to prevent us from “rising above the crowd” to become truly happy.

Three Obstacles and Four Devils

Various obstacles and difficulties occur in the course of Buddhist practice. These may arise from earthly desires originating from greed, anger or ignorance, or take the form of opposition from one’s spouse, children or parents; or present themselves as troubles of body and mind or death. They are not obstacles and devils in and of themselves. They become obstacles and devils when we allow our faith to be swayed by them.

The following is a brief explanation of the three obstacles and four devils:

Three Obstacles

- 1) The obstacles of earthly desires, or those arising from the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance.
- 2) The obstacle of karma or the result of negative causes made in the past. This includes opposition from one’s spouse or children.
- 3) The obstacle of retribution or obstacles from slandering the Law in the past. This includes opposition from one’s parents or government authority.

Four Devils

- 1) Obstructions caused by one’s physical and mental functions (the five components).
- 2) Troubles originating from earthly desires.
- 3) Doubts caused by the death of a fellow member.
- 4) Persecution by the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. This devil is the king of devils and causes one to use the efforts of others for his or her own pleasure. Nichiren Daishonin explains that it originates in the fundamental darkness of life. It possesses the bodies and minds of those in power and causes them to persecute practitioners. □

From *The Major Writings* of *Nichiren Daishonin*

“Letter to the Brothers”

THE doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* (a single life-moment possesses three thousand realms) revealed in the “Maka Shikan” (Great Concentration and Insight) is especially profound. If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. Were it not for these, there would be no way of knowing that this is the true teaching. One passage from the same

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volume reads: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If you fall under their influence, you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism." This quotation not only applies to Nichiren but also is the guide for his disciples. Reverently make this teaching your own and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations (MW-1, 145).

"On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings"

THEREFORE, from the very day you take faith in this teaching, you should be fully prepared to face the three kinds of persecutions which are certain to be more terrible now after the Buddha's passing (MW-1, 99).

SUPPOSE someone, no matter who, should loudly proclaim that the Lotus Sutra alone can lead people to Buddhahood and that all other sutras, far from enabling them to attain enlightenment, only drive them into hell. Observe what happens should he thus try to refute the teachings and doctrines of all the other sects. The three powerful enemies will arise without fail (MW-1, 105). □