

**July•August**  
**Study of Nichiren Daishonin's writings**  
**“Reply to Kyo’o”**

The following excerpt from The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin is material for the SGI-USA study meetings in July and August.

BELIEVE in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?

It is written that those who embrace the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra will be protected by Kishimojin and her ten daughters. They will enjoy the happiness of Aizen and the good fortune of Bishamon. Wherever your daughter may frolic or play, no harm will come to her; she will be free from fear like the lion king. Among Kishimojin's ten daughters, the protection of Kodainyo is the most profound. But your faith alone will determine all these things. A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then he will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff.

*(The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1. p. 119–120)*  
*(Gosho Zenshu, [The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, in Japanese], p. 1124)*

### Background

IN August 1273, Shijo Kingo sent a messenger to Nichiren Daishonin, who was in exile at Sado Island. He brought an offering of money and a report that Kingo's infant daughter Kyo'o had fallen seriously ill. “Reply to Kyo'o” was the Daishonin's response to Shijo Kingo and his wife Nichigennyō.

The couple had two daughters, Tsukimaro and Kyo'o. Nichigennyō gave birth to Tsukimaro in 1271, the turbulent year when the Daishonin was nearly executed and then exiled to Sado. It was around this time that the government began to pressure the Daishonin's followers in Kamakura, where Kingo and his wife lived.

Kyo'o was born the following year in 1272. Kingo was already 40 when the first daughter was born, so these children were especially dear to the couple. When young Kyo'o fell seriously ill, the atmosphere in Kamakura continued to be oppressive for the Daishonin's followers while he continued his exile at Sado.

“Reply to Kyo'o” is a relatively short letter, but significant because in it the Daishonin explains the importance of faith in the Gohonzon. Before his exile to Sado, the Daishonin encouraged his followers to discard their attachment to the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings of Shakyamuni and chant the title of the Lotus Sutra—Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—and take faith in his teachings. But the basics of faith and practice were not yet clearly defined and many of his followers continued to worship statues or images of Shakyamuni.

After the attempted execution at Tatsunokuchi, however, the Daishonin began to inscribe Gohonzon as the basis of faith and practice. Since the inscription of Gohonzon came later, letters in which he clearly defines it are rare. “Reply to Kyo'o” is one of these important writings in which he explains the importance of faith in the Gohonzon.

In this letter, the Daishonin declares that the Gohonzon is the embodiment of his enlightenment to the fundamental law of life. He states, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in

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sumi, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart... The soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (MW-1, 120). He explains that through their faith in the Gohonzon the couple will overcome any obstacle and be protected from any harm.

## Commentary

**Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?**

THE Daishonin clearly states his confidence in the power of the Gohonzon. Believing "with all your heart" can be interpreted from several perspectives. It means that we overcome any doubts in the Gohonzon especially when we experience hardships. Strong faith in the Gohonzon is to have strong faith in our innate Buddha nature. It is easy to believe in our potential when things are going smoothly. But when we face unexpected obstacles in health, relationships, finances and so on, we become unsure of our inner strength. This is precisely the moment when we must summon forth hope in our unlimited ability to surmount any obstacle. Limitless hope is what believing in the Gohonzon "with all your heart" means.

"With all your heart" also means to have courage in the face of obstacles, see them for what they are and challenge them. It does not mean that we depend on the Gohonzon as a shield to hide from our problems. The Gohonzon is not a deity or magical charm that solves problems for us; the Daishonin inscribed it for us to see what potential we possess within. He encourages us to be positive and self-reliant rather than dependent on the Gohonzon as an external object. This will bring forth life's fundamental strength to overcome all our problems, so the Daishonin says, "What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?"

He does not mean that people do not get sick when they practice Buddhism. Many people rely on God or the Buddha to prevent them from becoming ill or experiencing hardships, believing these to be the cause of unhappiness. The Daishonin explains that sickness or hardships are not the direct cause of people's unhappiness. Rather, their misery starts when they are defeated by them—when they lose hope and courage.

Buddhism does not guarantee us a life free of sickness or accidents. The Daishonin, however, promises us here that no sickness will be an obstacle to our happiness. "Sickness" in this passage may be interpreted not only as health problems, but also as life's hardships in general—problems of family, relationships, money, career and so on. Through our Buddhist practice, no hardship will hinder us from becoming happy and fulfilled. Instead, it will become a springboard for us to change our negative karma and elevate our life-condition.

**Wherever your daughter may frolic or play, no harm will come to her; she will be free from fear like the lion king.**

BUDDHISM explains that our lives and environment are essentially one and the same. So when we develop our Buddha nature within, the same life-affirming power will manifest in our environment. The positive forces in the environment that nurture and protect life are called Buddhist gods. The Daishonin goes on to say, "Wherever your daughter may frolic or play, no harm will come to her; she will be free from fear like the lion king." Likewise, those who embrace the Gohonzon can overcome fear or

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worry because if they develop confidence, they can overcome whatever problems they face in the course of their lives. When the Daishonin states “frolic or play” in this passage, he is indicating a state of freedom that defies any external restrictions.

When the Daishonin wrote “Reply to Kyo’o,” he was in exile on Sado. Besides all the restrictions and inconveniences of being an exile on a remote island, he was also lacking in basic necessities such as food and clothing. His circumstances were extremely dire. However, he did not allow his environment to become an obstacle to his spiritual freedom and happiness. He continued to write letters encouraging his disciples living far away while introducing his teaching to many native to the island. From Sado he says, “I, Nichiren, am the richest man in all of present-day Japan” (MW-2, 175).

The Daishonin teaches us that ultimately freedom must be established from within the life of each person regardless of social, political or environmental circumstances.

**But your faith alone will determine all these things. A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then he will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff.**

ALL the wonderful benefit from the Gohonzon—happiness, good fortune and freedom—depend upon nothing but our own courageous faith. No matter how great the power of the Gohonzon, if our faith and practice are weak and we act cowardly in the face of obstacles, the Gohonzon is no more than a piece of paper.

Our powers of faith and practice to the Gohonzon will determine the extent to which we can draw the powers of the Buddha and the Law from within. “The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith.” □

(Background and commentary by SGI-USA Study Department)

### From SGI President Ikeda’s speeches

WE all face various problems and obstacles. But Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Kyo’o Gozen’s misfortunes will change into fortune. Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (MW-1, 120)

The first thing is to pray. From the moment we begin to pray, things start moving. The darker the night, the closer the dawn. From the moment we chant daimoku with a deep and powerful resolve, the sun begins to rise in our heart.

Hope—prayer is the sun of hope. To chant daimoku each time we face a problem, overcoming it and elevating our life-condition as a result—this is the path of “changing earthly desires into enlightenment” taught in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Suffering and undergoing hardships for the sake of friends and for the sake of spreading the Law is a manifestation of the great sense of responsibility of a genuine leader and the behavior of a bodhisattva. There is no suffering or hardship that a Bodhisattva of the Earth cannot surmount. So no matter what happens, I would like you to steadily advance, one step at a time, always chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with a vibrant voice (July 5, 1996, *World Tribune*).

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TRUE and lasting happiness only and always comes from our own efforts, our own wisdom, our own good fortune. This is a fundamental truth. Faith is the key to strengthening our efforts, wisdom and good fortune; SGI activities are the key to strengthening ourselves....

The Daishonin indicates that wherever those who uphold the Mystic Law frolic or play, no harm will come to them; they will be free from fear, like the lion king. Each of us will be able to savor such a state of life of perfect freedom throughout eternity. That is why we practice faith (March 29, 1996, *World Tribune*).

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THE Devil of the Sixth Heaven is the manifestation of the fundamental darkness inherent in human life. The Daishonin teaches that only with "the sword of faith" can we cut through this fundamental darkness. We must boldly draw this sword as the Daishonin taught: "A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith" (MW-1, 120).

Courage is what counts. The spirit of faith is to fear nothing. The majesty and power of the Buddhist gods will increase for a person of abundant courage (Dec. 9, 1991, *World Tribune*).

## Glossary

**Mandala:** (Skt.) An object of worship on which Buddhas and bodhisattvas are depicted or on which the mystic doctrine is expressed. Mandala originally meant a round or square altar on which Buddhas are placed. It is translated in China by terms meaning "perfectly endowed" or "cluster of blessings." In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, mandala indicates the Gohonzon because it embodies all the practices and resulting virtues of all the Buddhas in the universe.

**The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra:** The title of the Lotus Sutra or the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

**Kishimojin (Skt. Hariti) and her ten demon daughters:** A female demon. She had 500 (some sources say ,1000 or 10,000) children, including the ten daughters who appeared in the Dharani (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. According to the Kishimo Sutra (Sutra of Kishimojin) and the Binaya Zoji (Monastic Rules with Respect to Various Matters), she killed the babies of other people to feed her children, and the terrified and grieving populace begged Shakyamuni for help. The Buddha then hid Kishimojin's youngest son, Binkara. She sought him throughout the world for seven days, but to no avail. In despair she finally asked the Buddha where he was. Shakyamuni rebuked her for her evil conduct and made her vow never to kill another child. Then he returned her son to her. According to the Nankai Kiki Naiho Den, Kishimojin was revered in India as a goddess who could bestow the blessings of children and easy delivery. Kishimojin worship was later introduced to Japan. In the Dharani (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, she and her ten daughters pledge before the Buddha to safeguard the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. The

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Daishonin talks about the protection from Kishimojin and her ten demon daughters in "Reply to Kyo'o," partly because they were well known as guardian deities of children and childbirth.

**Aizen:** (Skt. Ragaraja) A Buddhist deity who is said to purify people's earthly desires and free them from illusions and the suffering accruing from earthly desires. In the esoteric teaching his true identity is regarded as Dainichi (Skt. Mahavairochana) Buddha or Kongosatta (Vajrasattva). Aizen is pictured on the Diamond World mandala and is depicted as being red in color with three eyes, six arms and a furious expression. In his hand he has a bow and arrows. His name is inscribed in Siddham, a medieval Sanskrit orthography, on the left-hand side of the Gohonzon as one faces it, signifying the principle that earthly desires lead to enlightenment. In "Reply to Kyo'o," the Daishonin uses Aizen to indicate a state of happiness through the fulfillment of all desires.

**Bishamon:** (Skt. Vaishravana) One of the Four Heavenly Kings, who lives halfway down the northern side of Mount Sumeru and protects the north, accompanied by the two classes of demons called yaksha and rakshasa. Bishamon is a transliteration of the Sanskrit Vaishravana. This name is also translated as Tamon (Listening to Many Teachings). This god is said to always protect the place where the Buddha preaches and listen to the Buddha's teachings. In the Dharani (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he pledges to protect the votaries of the sutra. In Japan, he is regarded as one of the seven beneficent deities. In "Reply to Kyo'o," the Daishonin uses Bishamon to represent workings to bestow good fortune to those who practice the Mystic Law.

**Kodainyo:** One of Kishimojin's ten demon daughters, who is considered as being a good demon from the beginning. In the Dharani (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, she is named as she represents her sisters when they are entrusted with the protection of the votaries of the sutra. □

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