

## Study Material for May • June “Letter to Ko-ama Gozen”

*(The following passage is taken from the book Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, pp. 95–106, and can also be found in Goshō Zenshu, pp. 1324–25.)*

### Respecting As Buddhas Those Who Take Action for Kosen-rufu

**What is the conclusion of the Lotus Sutra? That a person who upholds the Mystic Law should be treasured wholeheartedly. The sutra says, “If you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha” (LS28, 324).**

IN the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” Nichiren Daishonin explains that this constitutes the “ultimate transmission” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 781). These words bring Shakyamuni’s preaching of the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra to a close. They represent the sutra’s final conclusion.

“Letter to Ko-ama Gozen”<sup>1</sup> was sent to the wife of Ko Nyudo<sup>2</sup> of Sado Island. The “Ko” in both names is probably from the name of the place where they lived. The couple became devotees of the Daishonin while he was in exile on Sado. They were childless, and it appears they were advanced in age.

In a letter dated two months prior, Nichiren Daishonin tells the couple: “Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, must be a compassionate father to both of you. I, Nichiren, must be your child” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 7, p. 87). And, “Because you have no sons, please consider coming here [to Minobu] to live with me in your old age” (MW-7, 88). This reveals how much the Daishonin thought of this couple who came to his aid when he was undergoing great persecution.

“When the Mongols come pouring into Japan,” he tells them, “please make your way here” (MW-7, 88). He is very specific. Treasuring people means taking tangible action on their behalf.

**I have received three hundred mon<sup>3</sup> of coins from the wife of Abutsu-bo.<sup>4</sup> Since both of you are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together.**

**I have also received the unlined summer robe you sent to me here in the recesses of this mountain in Hakiri Village, Kai Province, all the way from the province of Sado where you live. (MW-4, 139)**

THE year after the Daishonin went to live at Mount Minobu, Ko Nyudo came all the way from Sado to visit him, journeying hundreds of miles over both sea and rugged terrain. According to the modern calendar, he made this journey in July.

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The summer heat must have made the trip extremely arduous.

Ko Nyudo brought with him offerings of 300 *mon* of coins from Sennichi-ama, the wife of Abutsu-bo, and an unlined robe from Ko-ama.

Three hundred *mon* in the Daishonin's day would have equaled the price of a large sack of rice. Sennichi-ama must have scrimped and saved to make this offering. In Ko-ama's offering of an unlined robe, we can sense her spirit of consideration for the Daishonin. She was no doubt concerned for his comfort in the hot summer weather.

After staying for a time with the Daishonin, Ko Nyudo returned to Sado and was given this letter. Since it was entrusted to Ko Nyudo, it was addressed to Ko-ama. But the Daishonin indicates that because Sennichi-ama is "of the same mind," it is the same as if he had sent the letter to her. The Daishonin tells them that they should have someone read the letter aloud to the two of them. At the time, the majority of the population was illiterate.

He uses the expression *of the same mind*. We are friends and comrades practicing in the unity of "many in body, one in mind." The joy of one is the joy of all; the suffering of one is the suffering of all. And the glory of one is the glory of all.

When we base ourselves on this spirit of "one in mind," there is neither envy nor backbiting. Nor is there shirking of responsibility. Instead, we can manifest strong, broad-minded faith, and our lives will overflow with benefit.

Josei Toda said time and again, "Unity is the basis of the guidance of the Soka Gakkai."

**The Hosshi chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If there is someone who seeks the Buddha Way and during a certain kalpa presses palms together in my presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these praises of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable blessings" (LS 10, 164). This means that the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law surpasses that of serving in all sincerity as noble a Buddha as Shakyamuni with one's body, mouth and mind for an entire medium kalpa.<sup>5</sup> (MW-4, 139-40)**

HERE the Daishonin, basing what he says on the sutra, explains to these two couples, from the standpoint of Buddhism, how wondrous is their sincerity.

The votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day is Nichiren Daishonin. This passage is saying that the benefit of praising the Daishonin is even greater than that of praising Shakyamuni for an extremely long period. This is in fact the secret of the Lotus Sutra.

For whom was the Lotus Sutra expounded? In "Essence of the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin says, "The Latter Day is the focus of the Lotus Sutra, and Nichiren is the focus of the Latter Day" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 334). Fundamentally, the Lotus Sutra was expounded for the people of the Latter Day and explains Nichiren Daishonin's activities. The Lotus Sutra was expounded to predict the appearance of the original Buddha and the Gohonzon, and to prove their legitimacy.

The Lotus Sutra predicts that after the setting of the "moon" of the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra, the "sun" of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will rise in the

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Latter Day.

Doubtless such an idea had never occurred to these elderly couples on Sado Island. But they were fond of the Daishonin. They had been in close contact with him and had come to respect him from the depths of their lives. An unbreakable bond had formed between them, prompting them to make many trips to visit him at distant Mount Minobu.

Leaders of kosen-rufu, too, need to be liked by their fellow members. If a leader is hated by everyone, then his or her faith is meaningless.

Almost nowhere does Nichiren Daishonin indicate that he is the original Buddha. Had he come out and directly made such a claim, probably no one would have believed him. It might even have caused people to disbelieve and slander his teaching, and abandon their faith.

The Daishonin always spread the Mystic Law based on the sutra and through his own conduct. In this letter, for example, rather than adopting a prideful, self-aggrandizing attitude, he highly praises his followers. Then, out of the desire to further encourage them, he touches on the nobility of the Lotus Sutra's votary in the Latter Day.

This is the Daishonin's spirit. How the Daishonin must lament the arrogance of priests of later generations who order people to respect them! What indignation he must feel! How he must condemn them!

Moreover, such "befuddled priests" have even persecuted the SGI, whose members have made boundless offerings to the Gohonzon. This shows how completely their actions contradict the Daishonin's Buddhism.

This is truly a "befuddled age." Recent events increasingly bear out the reality of the Latter Day. In this letter, the Daishonin gives his assurance that the benefit for those who spread the Mystic Law in such a deluded age, who stand up for kosen-rufu at such a time, is immense and boundless.

**Although this may seem unbelievable, you should not doubt it, because such are the Buddha's golden words. (MW-4, 140)**

"THIS might be difficult to believe," he is saying, "but I am not speaking arbitrarily. It is clearly stated in the sutra. You should have the greatest confidence in this."

This is guidance that strikes a chord in the heart. The basis of guidance is to help the other person stabilize his or her mind and gain conviction and self-confidence.

**The Great Teacher Miao-lo further clarifies this passage from the sutra by saying, "If there is one who troubles [a preacher of the Dharma], then his head will be split into seven pieces; if there is one who makes offerings [to the preacher], his good fortune will surpass that of making offerings to a Buddha of the ten honorable titles."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law exceeds that of making offerings to a Buddha endowed with the ten honorable titles. On the other hand, one who persecutes a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the impure age will have his head broken into seven pieces. (MW-4, 140)**

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THESE famous lines are inscribed on either side of the Gohonzon. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi interpreted this passage as explaining the principles of benefit and loss. Benefit produces value in life, whereas loss produces antivalue.

Benefit and loss are not imparted by someone else. When we act in accord with the Law, value is produced. When we go against the Law, we receive retribution. To use a familiar example, if someone goes outside in the severe cold of winter without wearing warm clothes, he or she might experience the loss of becoming sick.

Buddhism deepens and expands our common sense regarding the affairs of daily life and the world. It reveals the Law of life that we need to follow in order to become happy.

In his treatise “The History and Belief of the Soka Gakkai” (1951), President Toda wrote:

Mr. Makiguchi, my mentor, would often say: “The Gohonzon has great power. This means that if you slander the Gohonzon, you will experience loss. If a father is not upstanding enough to scold his children, how can he help them to become happy? Pray to the Gohonzon sincerely. Can’t you hear the Gohonzon saying to you, ‘If you slander this Law, you will have your head broken into seven pieces’? This statement, which we can read on the Gohonzon, indicates the loss one will actually experience if one commits slander.” I think that Mr. Makiguchi was correct in this contention....

In the upper-left corner of the Gohonzon is an inscription that reads, “If there is one who makes offerings, his good fortune will surpass that of making offerings to a Buddha of ten honorable titles.” Doesn’t this signify the Gohonzon’s promise to us that we will receive benefit when we revere it? Benefit, or value, and loss, or antivalue, constitute the reality of our daily lives. Some Nichiren Shoshu priests had forgotten that the power of the Gohonzon can be revealed in one’s daily life—in both ways—until President Makiguchi discussed it. They were astonished at what he brought forth....

The head temple feared persecution if it supported Mr. Makiguchi’s contention that unless a country, family or individual follows the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, it will experience loss. It seemed that the head temple was frightened of the possible persecution it would face from the military if believers did not obediently enshrine the Shinto object of worship.<sup>7</sup>

We should faithfully follow not the authorities but Nichiren Daishonin. This was President Makiguchi’s great spirit.

### **Upholding the Mystic Law Brings Great Benefit**

PRESIDENT Makiguchi cried out: “What grieves me is not just the downfall of our religion but having to stand by and watch the whole nation destroyed before my

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eyes.... I fear the grief it would cause Nichiren Daishonin.”

Just as Mr. Makiguchi predicted, Japan was destroyed.

“His head will be split into seven pieces” indicates a state in which people lose the ability to distinguish between what is correct and what is mistaken, between what should and should not be done. It is a state where people become confused and can understand neither reason nor justice, gain nor loss.

This was the case in the Daishonin’s age. And it was the state of Japan in the time of President Makiguchi. We cannot fail to recognize that, lamentably, this is increasingly the condition of Japanese society today.

An age in which people’s values become distorted is a deluded age. In such a society, people encounter great persecution simply because they spread the Lotus Sutra, which teaches respect for human dignity. For precisely this reason, great benefit lies in store for those who endure this hardship and persist in spreading the Mystic Law.

The fact that the priesthood in President Makiguchi’s day had forgotten the doctrine of punishment and loss indicates that it had descended into abstract theory and formalism in which Buddhism has no relevance to people’s lives. The Soka Gakkai revived Buddhism as a teaching for daily life. Buddhism is not abstract—it is a teaching for triumphing over the realities of life.

Daily life is a collection of both good things (value) and bad things (antivalue). If the value or benefit in someone’s life outweighs the antivalue or loss, the person becomes happy. If the opposite is true, the person is unhappy.

Faith in the Mystic Law is the wellspring of value creation. It enables us to turn everything in our lives—both our joys and sufferings—into causes for accumulating the values of beauty, benefit and good in still greater measure. When we base ourselves on this kind of faith, everything that happens to us is a benefit.

“Thank you. Truly, thank you,” the Daishonin says. “I fully understand your spirit. The Buddha praises you.”

One can imagine these two elderly women of Sado closing their eyes and recalling the Daishonin and the sound of his voice as they listened to this letter being read.

What a caring world! What a world rich with human warmth!

This is the true world of Buddhism. And the SGI carries on this spirit. □

1. “Ko-ama Gozen Goshō” (*Goshō Zenshu*, pp. 1324–25), written in June 1275 when the Daishonin was 54. Editor’s note: The Goshō text here may differ in places from what appears in *The Major Writings* or other previously published translations. This is so that the wording of the English text will accord more smoothly with the modern Japanese translation of the original Japanese Goshō. (The author is using a modern Japanese rendering of the classical Japanese original as the basis of his lectures in this series.)

2. Nyudo: A lay priest, meaning one who is tonsured but continues to live as a layman.

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3. *Mon*: A monetary unit in ancient Japan. One thousandth of a *kan*, which consisted of a thousand coins strung together on a cord.
4. Wife of Abutsu-bo: Sennichi-ama. While Nichiren Daishonin was in exile on Sado, Sennichi-ama and her husband, Abutsu-bo, converted to his teaching. The couple frequently visited him in his forlorn hut at Tsukahara, bringing him food, stationery and other daily necessities. After the Daishonin was pardoned, Sennichi-ama maintained devout faith and sent her husband to visit him at Mount Minobu three times.
5. Medium kalpa: 15,998,000 years, according to the *Kusha Ron*.
6. This is a rephrasing of the "Hokke Mongu Ki" (Annotations on the Hokke Mongu [Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra]). The ten honorable titles are: 1) "Thus Come One" (from the world of truth); 2) "Worthy of Offerings"; 3) "Right and Universal Knowledge"; 4) "Perfect Clarity and Conduct"; 5) "Well Gone" (to the world of enlightenment); 6) "Understanding of the World"; 7) "Unexcelled Worthy"; 8) "Leader of People"; 9) "Teacher of Gods and Humans"; and 10) "Buddha, the World-Honored One" (an awakened one, endowed with perfect wisdom and virtue, who can win the respect of all people).
7. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Works of Toda Josei), vol. 3, pp. 102–03, 106. For complete English text, see *Seikyo Times*, June 1991, pp. 29–31).