

LEARNING FROM SHIJO KINGO — 1
Challenging Ourselves at Work
and in Our Communities

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Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people (“The Three Kinds of Treasure,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 238).

Shijo Kingo received this letter from Nichiren Daishonin in March 1277. At that time, Kingo, a samurai vassal, was told by his lord to give up his faith in the Lotus Sutra. Otherwise, he would have his land confiscated.

Eventually, though, his lord fell seriously ill and Kingo, being knowledgeable in medicine, was asked to care for him. The Daishonin tells Kingo to challenge his circumstances without complaining. Then he urges Kingo to show proof of his Buddhist practice not only in the realm of Buddhism, but also at his work and in his community.

What the Daishonin encourages Kingo to strive for here is something that applies to all of us. No doubt the Daishonin would expect the same from us as practitioners of his Buddhism: to make effort upon effort to excel at work while extending warm care and concern to those around us — whether they are Buddhists or not. (Note that Kingo’s “boss” not only misunderstood his practice, but was also opposed to it.)

It may be easy to act as an exemplary Buddhist when surrounded by other Buddhists, but the real test lies in how we behave at work and in our community. People with whom we interact at work or in our community see us in terms of how we act as humans, not as Buddhist leaders.

First Soka Gakkai President Makiguchi often said: “There are three kinds of people: those indispensable, those whose presence makes no difference, and those who cause trouble for others. Whether we are at work or home, we all must strive to become the first type — people who are needed.” How then can we become those whose presence is appreciated at work and in our communities? Second President Toda once encouraged a youth who could not get the job he wanted, saying:

The real world, unfortunately, is not as easy as you would hope. There may be only a few people who get their ideal jobs. In most cases, people have to take up a job that they least expected. The question is what to do then. In my opinion, youth at such times should never be defeated. Youth should strive to complete the task before them while studying and making further efforts.... Viewed in light of the principle that faith equals daily life, whether youth will succeed or not in the future depends upon whether they tackle their present work earnestly.

President Toda also encouraged members, saying:

I often see some members assume an easygoing attitude, believing that they can receive benefit without racking their brains about their businesses or without making earnest efforts just because they have the Gohonzon. This is a serious mistake....

The Daishonin states that those who embrace the Gohonzon should come to understand how they can improve their lives and develop their businesses.... For this reason, we must continuously study and make efforts to improve our businesses.

In other words, the principle that faith equals daily life means that we should first pray

earnestly to the Gohonzon to bring forth a strong life-force and abundant wisdom to make the utmost efforts. While tapping our ingenuity, we can prove the Daishonin's Buddhism at work and in our communities. Regarding the importance of ingenuity, President Toda also mentioned:

Earnestness is a fundamental virtue. But, without ingenuity, earnestness alone does not enable us to lead outstanding lives. Some people may be earnest, but, lacking in ingenuity, live only mediocre existences.... When we excel in a particular field of endeavor, then we can live a meaningful existence. If you are in business and want to sell something, you must understand the formula that earnest efforts plus ingenuity equals success.

Through this Gosho to Shijo Kingo, the Daishonin teaches us the importance of challenging ourselves at work and in our communities. The people with whom we deal in these places are, in a sense, the strictest judges of our Buddhist practice. They see only the result of our practice — our behavior.

The Daishonin tells us here that our organization is not the only place where we practice Buddhism. Our workplaces and communities are equally important arenas of Buddhist practice, if not more so.

This new series on the Gosho written to Shijo Kingo will show how Shijo Kingo set an example for us as YMD members. He supported Nichiren Daishonin in his darkest hour of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and showed great proof of his faith in daily life. His life is a model of what a disciple's life should be like, and the Gosho written to him are at the same time a guide for us. SGI President Ikeda has said: "All the wisdom you need is contained in Nichiren Daishonin's writings. In these writings you will find the unlimited wisdom with which to fully live out your lives. Your efforts to read and practice even a single phrase or sentence of the Daishonin's writings amount to understanding the entirety of the teachings." With that spirit, I hope everyone will enjoy this series this year.

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