

From One's Mouth
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Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins him, but fortune comes from one's mind and makes him worthy of respect. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 272)

Ever had a statement leap out of your mouth like a little frog? You know what I'm talking about: those nightmarish moments of hearing yourself say something and, once those words are out in the light of day, cringing and shrinking.

I have had that experience in several different ways. Sometimes my choice of words is offensive, no matter how "right" I may be. Other times the experience has been even more self-revelatory: More dialogue leads to an understanding of how my statements have been perceived aside from my intended meaning.

This Goshō passage reminds me that developing my heart is an important basis for my speech and action. This passage shouldn't be mistaken as Nichiren Daishonin's message to not say anything, but one of my first reactions to this quote was: "I need to just shut up. If I keep my mouth shut, I can't help but come out ahead." Not true. The more I considered this passage, the more I realized that in many cases silence is duplicitous with evil. A bad situation can be made much worse by the silence of those involved.

The fortune that "comes from one's mind," after all, is the wisdom to effect positive change. That means thinking seriously about what I say before I say it — how can my words lead to something positive? That means speaking the truth without discouraging or blaming the hearer. Dialogue and active listening produce a synergy that can only add up to the common good.

This Goshō was written at a time in human history when freedom of speech was not considered a right. Even a whispered comment could get you in a lot of trouble — it could even lead to instant death. But now we live in a world where freedom of speech is expected and fought for. That's why, more so than ever before, our thoughts, statements and actions build the lives we lead.

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