

Good Times, Bad Times
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Do not expect good times, but take the bad times for granted. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 242)

On the surface, this Goshu quote seems pessimistic, as if the Daishonin were saying: “Hey, life’s rough. Just get used to it.” I was wondering who would want to practice our religion if the first thing we said was “Don’t expect good times here.”

But what Nichiren Daishonin is pointing to is true happiness, which is something much more than experiencing good times or not experiencing bad times. The Atsuhara Persecution, which shook his followers, had just occurred when he wrote this letter. Nichiren Daishonin, using the example of his own 27 years of persecution, tries to wake up the believers to a larger view of happiness, encouraging them in this Goshu to become “roaring lions,” to discover such a happiness that they’re unafraid of anything.

It seems to me that often it’s our shallow view of happiness that makes us unhappy. Sometimes, for example, I wonder why my life isn’t more like the American Dream. (I’m not actually sure what the American Dream is, but I have a vague notion that I should be living in a house, have a lot of cars and kids and stuff.)

Then I wonder why I’m being stupid. Of course, the American Dream, whatever it is, can’t guarantee my happiness.

And why did I start practicing anyhow? To live the American Dream? No. I started because I was miserable — I just wanted to become happy, even a little bit happy. And it worked: I have to admit that I’m happy now.

What the Daishonin means by “Do not expect good times, but take the bad times for granted” is that in practicing Buddhism we should seek the deepest, truest, most absolute happiness. I think this should be the new American Dream — not shallow happiness but the real thing.

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