

**WHAT A CONCEPT: ‘Shakubuku’
Breaking and Subduing...What?
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Shakubuku literally means to break and subdue — which doesn’t sound very...uh...friendly. In general SGI parlance, though, *shakubuku* means to introduce others to the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, to encourage people to overcome their difficulties and pursue their dreams — which is a friendly thing to do.

So it’s important to recognize that when we do *shakubuku*, we’re not breaking and subduing other people. By introducing others to the practice of Buddhism, our aim is to break and subdue the egotism or shallowness in ourselves and others.

Shakyamuni Buddha sought to break the illusory attachments that people had, such as cravings for material comfort or attachments to ascetic practices of self-denial. Nichiren Daishonin similarly sought to break people’s attachments to false teachings. In the Daishonin’s day, many people believed that their happiness existed only in an afterlife or distant “pure land.” Therefore, they needed simply to obey priests and government authorities throughout their lives to be reborn in paradise, they thought.

To believe these things, the Daishonin taught, was to slander the Lotus Sutra. The sutra teaches, as did the Daishonin, that people can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime through their own faith. But many of the Daishonin’s contemporaries found this view offensive and preposterous, which necessitated the Daishonin’s hard words, inexhaustible religious debates and unrelenting criticism of his detractors.

In the “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” the Daishonin draws a clear connection between belief in erroneous teachings and misfortune. He writes: “When we examine this wide variety of sutras, we find that they all stress how grave a matter it is to slander the Law.... How could we not grieve? How could we not suffer? Therefore you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 40). The Daishonin emphasizes that the goal of *shakubuku* — to reform the tenets in our hearts — is to allow people to live in safety and enjoy good fortune.

Today, though, many people express beliefs that are in tune with the Lotus Sutra. Positive thinking, believing in oneself, caring for others and creating peace are mainstream ideas. And it seems that today’s problems are so complex and global that to urge people to “just chant and be happy” sounds, to some people, fatuous and superficial. In this atmosphere, it could be said that the *shakubuku* movement of the SGI is an education movement. Its emphasis is on helping SGI members and all people reflect on themselves and develop a clearer understanding of the nature of their lives. In a world in which, despite much positive thinking, cowardice, fear, indifference, indulgence and attachment still hold sway, *shakubuku* means to awaken people to a sublime sense of purpose or mission and to revitalize one another, breaking the shackles of inertia and frustration, so we can each live fully.

A much-quoted passage from SGI President Ikeda elaborates on this idea: “First you must break the hard shell of the lesser self. / This you must absolutely do. / Then direct your lucid gaze toward your friends, fellow members. / People can only live fully by helping others to live.”

Shakubuku begins with each of us having a willingness to change our lives and the lives of others for the better. By breaking and subduing our own darkness and negativity, we begin the revitalization of our lives, communities, country and world.

Twenty in a series

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