

The Final Message of the Lotus Sutra

What is the final message of the Lotus Sutra? President Ikeda explains in the conclusion of his Sept. 22 speech that it's this: 'We should treasure those striving earnestly for kosen-rufu in accord with the Daishonin's teachings and show them the same respect we would a Buddha.'

Part 2 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 26th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Sept. 22. (Part 1 appeared in the Oct. 16 issue.)

A Microcosm All Its Own

Nichiren Daishonin declares with unswerving confidence, "There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161). I want you to feel this with the deepest certainty in your lives.

In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin says: "[With regard to the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo,] our head is *myo*, our neck is *ho*, our chest is *ren*, our belly is *ge*, and our legs are *kyo*. Our five-foot body is the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 716).

Buddhism teaches that our body itself is a manifestation of the Mystic Law and a microcosm all its own. According to the Daishonin, our eyes correspond to the sun and the moon, and the hair on our heads, the stars. (If someone asks you what urine corresponds to, just tell them it's hot springs...and if they want to know what excrement is, just tell them it's lava!)

Seriously, however, *myo* represents the world of Buddhahood, and *ho* represents the nine worlds. Life and the universe together, as a whole, make up *myoho*, the Mystic Law.

No Buddhism Without Action

The passage I just cited from the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" states that *kyo* of Myoho-renge-kyo corresponds to our legs. What this means is action. Without action, there can be no Buddhism.

Your gathering here for this meeting is action. Your teaching others about Buddhism is action, too.

The words of individuals who do not take action themselves, no matter how fine-sounding they may be, are not worth listening to. Their words are abstract and empty, having no foundation in actual experience.

In the worst sense, such people can be called robbers of the Law. The most respectable people are those exerting themselves in the real world.

The Only Solution

Japan suffered defeat in the last world war. Many people are now describing the deplorable state of affairs in Japan as a second defeat. The economy is in recession, and there has been a serious downturn in consumer spending and business activity. The country is also deadlocked on many other fronts. Someone observed that the only group flourishing and doing well is the Soka Gakkai.

Myo of Myoho-renge-kyo has the meanings to open, to be endowed and perfect, and to

revive. The Mystic Law enables us to tap life's supreme power.

In Japan's harsh environment, which resembles the postwar period in which President Toda conducted activities, let us be determined to impart confidence, courage and hope to all around us.

The Mystic Law is the only solution. The Soka Gakkai, the only hope.

All These Honors

The honorary doctorates and professorships that I have received from academic institutions around the world now total 55. I have been advised of the bestowal of several more such honors in the near future, which will bring the number to well over 60.

All these honors are received on your behalf; I always accept them as your representative. When I receive these awards, the world is actually paying tribute to your efforts. I hope you will be proud of this. I have absolutely no doubt that this good fortune and benefit flows directly to you and your descendants.

The Mountain in the River

I want to introduce some more ancient words of wisdom for your spiritual development and growth.

The Chinese Southern Song– Dynasty philosopher Zhu Xi said, “Be fearless whatever happens, like the mountain stands firm in the river's flow.”

Some people might have a hard time fathoming the sayings of the ancients, but as leaders, it's important that we study widely. Leaders of ages past memorized such maxims.

These words of Zhu Xi refer to the courageous spirit of a person who stands alone. He calls on us to stand resolute like the mountain that once stood indomitably in the middle of China's Yellow River. The underlying meaning is that, even if you are given a big responsibility, you must challenge it with conviction and never be afraid of encountering difficulties.

The *Analects* of Confucius contain the words “The wise are without perplexity; the good are without sorrow; the brave are without fear.” Our human revolution enables us to develop such indomitable selves.

See Through Evil

Another Chinese saying goes “Being with the good is like entering a room fragrant with irises and orchids.” The Daishonin, too, refers to “a friend in the orchid room” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 36). The implication of both expressions is that, just as one is gradually penetrated by the fragrance of flowers — without even noticing it — when we associate with people of excellent character and integrity, their beautiful virtue penetrates our lives. We are positively influenced and improved by our association with them.

That's why it is so important to associate with good people. We mustn't associate with evil, corrupt individuals. We have to discern evil and wrongdoing, and that includes seeing through individuals out to take advantage of the members' faith for personal profit. A Lotus Sutra passage cited in the Daishonin's writings says, “Part with bad friends and seek out good ones” (MW-1, 213).

Straying From Humanity

Meng Jiao, a Chinese poet in the Tang dynasty, left the following words about remaining true to one's good friends: “How should one repay a good friend? With undying constancy and loyalty.” Those who betray their friends and forget their debts of gratitude have strayed

from the path of Humanity and tumbled into Animality.

The Daishonin writes: “Buddhism teaches that encountering hardships in life is a common, normal occurrence. Persecutions become the flowers of prosperity of saints and sages” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1020). The just invariably encounter persecution and attack — and this is proof of their correctness.

By contrast, there are people only concerned with appearances who try to maneuver their way through life so that they always come out looking good. These people are dishonest and corrupt.

Let’s always advance with the spirit that obstacles and hardships are our greatest pride, our most magnificent flowers of glory.

Summation of the Lotus Sutra

In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the Daishonin says, “Shakyamuni condensed the essence of the Lotus Sutra, which he taught for eight years, into eight Chinese characters and bestowed them upon the people of the Latter Day of the Law” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 781). What are these eight characters, which constitute the quintessential message of the Lotus Sutra? They comprise the instruction in the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “[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” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324).

Stressing that this is the summation of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin calls this passage “the ultimate transmission” of Shakyamuni Buddha. I have spoken about this before a number of times.

What this means is that we should treasure those striving earnestly for kosen-rufu in accord with the Daishonin’s teachings and show them the same respect we would a Buddha.

There are, however, members who gain power and position in society and then let it go to their heads. Later, they treat their fellow members working hard for kosen-rufu with contempt. There are also members who let hunger for money destroy their faith and then betray the organization. Such individuals betray the Daishonin. Their actions are unforgivable.

President Toda cherished the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, warmly embracing each member. He once said, “At Gakkai meetings, even if there are only one or two participants, it’s important that we treasure those people, teach them about Buddhism and seriously engage them in dialogue with a sense of delight and appreciation.”

President Makiguchi was of the same mind.

Those who look down on small discussion meetings and gatherings are arrogant.

In the Midst of Diversity

Mr. Toda placed great emphasis on discussion meetings and would always thoroughly prepare for them with the other central figures. “Who will be the master of ceremonies?” “What shall we put on our program?” “I’m going to talk about this, so you talk about that” — he went over every detail.

It’s important that those involved in organizing a meeting rack their brains and make careful preparations to ensure that it will be satisfying for all who attend. Such groundwork lays the path to victory.

No matter how times change, we mustn’t neglect the basics. Mr. Toda was generally broad-minded and easygoing, but he always made sure to plan thoroughly for even the smallest meeting.

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When a meeting was under way, he would pay close attention to the audience, watching the people's reactions and trying to discern whether they were happy with the meeting and were enjoying it. "There is no need to be overly concerned with the format," he said. "I feel we have to create an environment at our meetings that will leave even first-time participants saying that they enjoyed the meeting and learned something valuable about Buddhism. I feel sorry for the participants if we offer them anything less."

Small meetings with only a few participants are the greatest challenge. And they are of vital importance.

Currently, high-spirited general meetings at the chapter or district level are being held around Japan. Some people may go to these events reluctantly. Those who have been instrumental in getting them to attend also deserve high praise!

Buddhism expounds the doctrine of the mutual possession of the ten worlds, so there are people with all sorts of life-conditions. Trained and forged in the midst of such diversity, we become great leaders. For a sumo wrestler to win the title of grand champion, he has to compete against many different kinds of opponents. The principle is the same.

What's important is to decide that the most mundane efforts are your most crucial struggle, and then exert yourself in your activities with all your might. That is the key to true victory. The areas that are strong are those where the leaders do painstaking groundwork and keep making consistent, tenacious efforts.

I hope that you will always remember this basic formula for victory.

The Fickle Heart

I want to quote some further passages from the Daishonin's writings:

"There are also those who appeared to believe in Nichiren but began doubting when they saw him persecuted. They have not only forsaken the Lotus Sutra but actually think themselves wise enough to instruct Nichiren. The pitiful thing is that these perverse people must suffer in the depths of hell even longer than the Nembutsu believers" (MW-1, 42).

"Persons who have been helped by me, not only in religious matters but in secular affairs as well, fearful of the eyes of others and hoping thereby to put an end to talk, make a show of condemning me, though I do not think they do so in their hearts" (MW-7, 115).

"When I incurred the displeasure of the government, even in Kamakura 999 out of 1,000 discarded their faith" (MW-3, 69).

The Daishonin clearly perceives the workings of people's hearts.

None of you, however, have forsaken faith, irrespective of the obstacles you have encountered. You have won! The Soka Gakkai has won! The Daishonin would surely praise you.

The Daishonin knew how fickle the human heart can be. He was well aware of this human weakness, this frightening aspect of the human heart.

He strongly encouraged his followers, telling them: "Never let life's hardships disturb you. After all, no one can avoid problems, not even saints or sages" (MW-1, 161).

I believe that he's saying: "One is not necessarily the target of slander and criticism because one has done something wrong. On the contrary, even saints and sages are maligned and abused. Sometimes, people's greatness is the very thing that makes them the target of persecution. We shouldn't let it worry or perturb us."

This Jealousy-Ridden Society

In "Letter from Sado," the Daishonin declares that the most incorrigible slanderers of Buddhism proliferated until they became the people of today's Japan (MW-1, 38). Someone remarked that this explains the malicious jealousy that seems to be evident

everywhere in Japan. The Daishonin stood up alone to try to transform this benighted country for the better.

It is crucial that all genuine disciples, all youth division members, join in this struggle. Victory is the hallmark of youth. It is your mission to rectify the perversions created by this jealousy-ridden society. I believe that you, the youth, will succeed in this.

In closing, allow me to thank everyone again for making the long trip to be with us today. My deep appreciation especially to the visiting SGI members from overseas.

Thank you very much.

This is the final installment of this speech