

PUBLISHER'S COMMENTARY THE TIME IS RIGHT

On July 16, 1260, Nichiren Daishonin submitted his thesis of remonstrance, “Rissho Ankoku Ron” (“On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism”)—to the most powerful representative of Japan’s Kamakura government. It was a proposal about how to restore peace to a devastated country through the inner reformation of each person. In it, the Daishonin appeals to the ruler and, by extension, to all people of Japan to transcend their ignorance and selfishness: “If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, [2nd ed.], p. 38).

The Daishonin thus teaches us that caring for the peace and happiness of others is not separate from our personal concerns. In fact, caring for others is the way to cultivate inner peace. Seven hundred and thirty-nine years later, this message is still valid—and yet to be practiced widely.

When I recently visited Oklahoma, I attended a memorial service with local SGI-USA members to pray for victims of recent tornados as well as for the earliest restoration of the affected areas. I was painfully reminded of nature’s destructive power when I saw the vast stretches of waste and debris where people’s houses had once stood and communities had once thrived.

In the midst of this horrendous disaster, I was inspired by the efforts of members who organized relief efforts for the victims. I also heard that this tragedy served to strengthen the resolve of our members in the area to share the Daishonin’s Buddhism with friends and family. In the selfless dedication of the Oklahoma and Texas members, I saw the Daishonin’s spirit brought to life.

Through the actions of those members I was reminded of two key points that we all can keep in mind in our efforts to share the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The first is that none of us lives alone—without the help and goodwill of others. Those who think they live completely on their own—that they are independent entities—become trapped in their own selfish egos and, ultimately, become unhappy.

Those living with the awareness that they are connected with others in a fundamental way are happier because they are expanding the boundary of their consciousness, becoming freer and stronger. Such people can increase their happiness by sharing it with others. They transcend their own hardships by extending themselves to those in misery. In a sense, they develop a “larger self” that has the capacity to include and embrace others.

Buddhism ascribes this feeling of identity or connectedness to the principle of “dependent origination.” This means that nothing (and no one) in the universe exists on its own; everything arises through the influence of, or relationship with, something else. The feeling “I’m not alone” can be a source of compassion because we naturally care for others when we feel connected to them and regard them as important as ourselves. And when we understand our deep relationship to others, we feel a corresponding deep sense of appreciation.

Filled with this sense of community, we don’t have to pretend or force ourselves to pray for the welfare of others. It comes naturally. We want to pray for the happiness of people and share the Daishonin’s Buddhism with them because we know there is no fundamental

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separation between our lives and theirs, our happiness and theirs. In this sense, no one is more pathetic than a person who takes pleasure in others' suffering and feels jealous at others' joy. Such people are crippled by their own self-centeredness, utterly alienated from the world.

Once we awaken a natural desire for others' happiness, the next step is to find the courage to translate our altruistic desires into action. Without such courage, our sense of community remains idealized, and we eventually lose the will to go beyond ourselves.

I know through experience how difficult it sometimes is just to say to a friend: "Let's go to an SGI meeting together!" or "Let's chant daimoku!" Our fear of rejection or scorn at times keeps us from encouraging our friends to take faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. But we need courage to encourage, and acting in spite of our own fear is an expression of courage. Mark Twain once wrote, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear" (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*, ch. 12; 1894).

And SGI President Ikeda has said, "Without courage, we cannot be compassionate. Courage and compassion are inseparable, like the two sides of a coin. And faith is the wellspring from which courage springs" (March 27, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 9).

Whatever reaction we may receive, what is most important is that we tell our friends about the Daishonin's Buddhism, which can bring them true, lasting happiness. Such action is a gesture of our sincerest compassion and what fundamentally brings us closer to our friends, regardless of their response.

Of course, it is most important to understand and be respectful of the beliefs and circumstances of others. When our words to our friends about Buddhism arise from a genuine concern for their happiness, they will hear us on some level, even though they may not show it. Having the courage to speak about the beneficial power of the Daishonin's Buddhism is the ultimate expression of our compassion.

On a broader scale, I also feel that society too is in dire need of a sense of interrelatedness, one that brings people together over racial, political or religious lines. More people are feeling alienated and alone. I believe that a sense of alienation contributes in no small part to violent crimes, especially among youth.

At the same time, fewer people, it seems, are speaking out for the sake of others' happiness in the context of political, cultural or religious debate. American society needs a sense of community; people need to feel they are all connected. I am confident that the Daishonin's Buddhism can make valuable contributions in this area. The Daishonin's heartfelt response to the suffering populace of thirteenth century Japan was, "I cannot keep silent on this matter" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 5).

More and more people are looking to Buddhism for concrete solutions to their everyday problems as well as for their spiritual enrichment. In "The Selection of the Time," Nichiren Daishonin writes, "The Great Pure Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the heart and core of the Lotus Sutra. This is what should be propagated" (MW-3, 88).

I feel the time is right for us to share the Daishonin's Buddhism with friends, neighbors, family and acquaintances. We can start by awakening to our deep ties with others, and courageously expressing our heartfelt conviction.

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