

## 'GIFT OF AN UNLINED ROBE' (1)

The following excerpts from Nichiren Daishonin's "Gift of an Unlined Robe" and accompanying commentary are from SGI President Ikeda's book, *Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 7.

### Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the letter "Gift of an Unlined Robe" in August 1275 at Mount Minobu when he was 53. The letter's title was probably added later because the Daishonin explains the blessings one receives from making offerings to a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

Little is known about the recipient's identity. Since the Daishonin writes: "even though we have not yet met" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p.1515), the recipient had never personally encountered the Daishonin when he penned this letter. Also in the postscript of the letter, the Daishonin writes: "You should always meet with the wife of Toshiro and read this letter together" (GZ, p. 1515). The Daishonin writes similarly to Nichigen-nyo, the wife of Shijo Kingo, "I hope you will read this letter over and over again together with Toshiro's wife" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 194). Judging from those passages, "Gift of an Unlined Robe" was most likely addressed to a woman and her husband who were on friendly terms with Shijo Kingo's family in Kamakura, the seat of the shogunate government.

At the beginning of the letter, the Daishonin acknowledges his receipt of an unlined robe from the couple. He then explains that because he is devoted to spreading the Lotus Sutra and thereby actualizing the Buddha's words, he has been hated and abused by those ignorant of Buddhism and has undergone government persecution as foretold by the sutra. "If Nichiren had not appeared in the country of Japan, these golden words of the Buddha would have been in vain," the Daishonin declares (GZ, p. 1514). The Daishonin spread the Lotus Sutra just as it urges future practitioners to do, and, as a result, he experienced the hardships also predicted in the sutra, thus proving its validity.

Viewed from this perspective, the gift of an unlined robe for the Daishonin is an offering made to a votary of the Lotus Sutra and thus to the sutra itself and all Buddhas awakened to its truth. The Daishonin, therefore, praises the couple's sincerity and reassures them of their enlightenment. He concludes his letter by saying: "In this life, your sincere offering becomes a prayer for the fulfillment of your every desire and a treasure. At the time of your deaths it...will usher you into the pure land of Eagle Peak" (GZ, p. 1515).

Title: Gift Of An Unlined Robe (1)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.6 LB9909p06

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Buddhahood Daisaku Daishonin Gift Gosho Ikeda Nichiren People Robe Study Unlined Writings

I have received the unlined robe that you graciously sent. In the past, in a country called Kirokoku, old people were abandoned. In Japan, today, the Lotus Sutra's votary is cast away.

Since the country's appearance, there have been seven reigns of heavenly gods and five generations of earthly gods. It was then that the 100 reigns of human sovereign began. There have been ninety reigns since Emperor Jimmu. And already sixty reigns have passed since Buddhism was introduced to the country during the reign of Emperor Kimmei [the twenty-ninth] more than 700 years ago.

During this time, there have been countless parent-murderers, enemies of the emperor, mountain bandits and pirates. But I have never heard of someone who was hated as much as I, Nichiren, on account of the Lotus Sutra. Some have been hated by the ruler but not by the people, or have been hated by priests but not by lay people, or have been hated by men but not by women, or have been hated by the ignorant but not by the wise.

But I am hated by the people even more than by the ruler, by laymen and laywomen even more than by monks and nuns, by the wise even more than by the ignorant, and by the good even more than by the wicked. My case is thus entirely without precedent. Nor is it likely that anyone in later ages will receive such treatment. As a result, during the more than twenty years from when I was 32 [when he established his teaching] until now, at 54, I have been driven out of temples, I have been expelled from my place of residence, my parents and relatives have been harassed, I have been attacked at night, I have encountered battles, I have been vilified countless times, I have been struck and injured, my disciples have been killed, I have nearly been beheaded, and twice been sent into exile. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1514)

The Gosho,<sup>1</sup> the collected writings of Nichiren Daishonin, elucidates the means for all people to attain enlightenment. It is the eternal teaching. The Gosho is a scripture of boundless hope. As long as we continue to study the Gosho and put its teachings into practice, we definitely will never become deadlocked.

Some Gosho, of course, are very doctrinal and complex. But we do not necessarily have to understand all of the Daishonin's writings. The important thing is to have a keen desire to read the Gosho and to expose our lives, even for just a short time each day, to Nichiren Daishonin's spirit.

Having such a seeking mind enables us to securely anchor our lives to the orbit of true happiness, to the path of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. And it becomes the engine for advancing kosen-rufu.

### **I have received the unlined robe that you graciously sent.**

This letter is dated a little more than a year after the Daishonin retired to Mount Minobu. He had received a gift of a robe from a couple, followers of his whom he had not yet met. An unlined robe is a light garment suitable for use in hot weather.

The couple must have been concerned about the difficulty of the Daishonin's life in the mountains. In their gift, we can sense a real human tenderness. Theirs was an offering made with sincerity.

Title: Gift Of An Unlined Robe (1)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.6 LB9909p06

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Buddhahood Daisaku Daishonin Gift Gosho Ikeda Nichiren People Robe Study Unlined Writings

The Daishonin may have used the brief interval before the couple's messenger set out on his return journey to take up his brush and compose a letter of thanks. This is the letter.

While the names of the husband and wife who received this letter are not known, it is surmised that they may have been relations of the Nanjo family, or followers living in Kamakura. Since they had not yet met the Daishonin directly, they probably were not central figures among his followers. From the contents of the letter, however, it is apparent that they were carrying through with steadfast faith.

The nameless people count most. The essence of Buddhism shines in their down-to-earth efforts to make faith manifest in daily life.

The Daishonin replied to the sincerity of this couple with his own sincerity. This letter abundantly conveys his spirit in this regard. Let us always bear this spirit in mind.

The letter is pervaded with the compassion of the Daishonin, who assures them that their sincerity is definitely known to all Buddhas, and that they are certain to attain Buddhahood. Their offering was a robe and yet more than just a robe; in the gift, the Daishonin perceived the heart and very life of his followers.

I know of no other religious figure who wrote such considerate letters of appreciation in response to each offering received. Nearly all of the Daishonin's personal letters to his followers were written in thanks for offerings.

The Daishonin replied from his heart to others' hearts. He replied to sincerity with great sincerity — and with lightning speed. This was also the spirit of Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president. The Soka Gakkai has developed to such an extent because we have maintained this spirit to this day.

Followers reading the Daishonin's letters must have been deeply moved by his warmth. More than a few continued to advance with the Daishonin despite great persecution. That was because of the heart-to-heart bonds that existed between him and each of his followers.

It is the same in the SGI. The SGI is strong not because of its organization but because we are creating invisible bonds of the heart.

## **A Great Spiritual Revolution**

**In the past, in a country called Kirokoku, old people were abandoned. In Japan, today, the Lotus Sutra's votary is cast away.**

**Since the country's appearance, there have been seven reigns of heavenly gods and five generations of earthly gods. It was then that the 100 reigns of human sovereign began. There have been ninety reigns since Emperor Jimmu. And already sixty reigns have passed since Buddhism was introduced to the country during the reign of Emperor Kimmei [the twenty-ninth] more than 700 years ago.**

**During this time, there have been countless parent-murderers, enemies of the emperor, mountain bandits and pirates. But I have never heard of someone who was hated as much as I, Nichiren, on account of the Lotus Sutra. Some have been hated by the ruler but not by the people, or have been hated by priests but not by lay people, or have been hated by men but not by women, or have been hated by the ignorant but not by the wise.**

Title: Gift Of An Unlined Robe (1)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.6 LB9909p06

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Buddhahood Daisaku Daishonin Gift Goshō Ikeda Nichiren People Robe Study Unlined Writings

**But I am hated by the people even more than by the ruler, by laymen and laywomen even more than by monks and nuns, by the wise even more than by the ignorant, and by the good even more than by the wicked. My case is thus entirely without precedent. Nor is it likely that anyone in later ages will receive such treatment.**

In Kirokoku the elderly were discarded to reduce the number of mouths to feed. Buddhist scriptures speak of lands in which it was customary for the elderly to be treated poorly. One sutra relates an episode where a kingdom puts an end to this cruel custom. A minister, in violation of the law of the land, does not turn out his aged father but secretly maintains him. Later, the kingdom is visited by a crisis and no one knows what to do. The land is saved from calamity by the wisdom of the aged father who had been in hiding. Thereupon the ruler changes the laws and makes it so that the elderly are respected.

Nichiren Daishonin says that just as this ancient country had discarded its wise people, Japan has thrown away the votary of the Lotus Sutra. No country is more foolish than one that discards its people of wisdom, who can save it from disaster.

The death in prison of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the Soka Gakkai's founding president, amounted to wartime Japan's having "thrown away the Lotus Sutra's votary." Japan, therefore, was headed for ruin.

As the Daishonin says in this writing, no one has been as hated as he on account of the Lotus Sutra. Although he was fighting for the people's happiness, he was hated even by the people. This might seem unreasonable, but such is the lot of all those who seek to open a new path forward.

"If the Mystic Law is correct," President Toda was once asked, "then why is it so difficult to spread?" He explained:

Precisely because it is correct, people have a hard time accepting it. For example, it's correct for children to be dutiful toward their parents. But are you truly so considerate of your parents? It's something in which people rarely succeed. We may not necessarily study hard even though we know that it's important. And people who are broke may go out and squander their paychecks on alcohol even though they know it's the wrong thing to do. Similarly, Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the more correct a teaching, the more enemies it will have.

Not only do people fail to do what is correct, they tend to react emotionally and negatively toward a person of justice. This is human nature.

In particular, arrogant authorities cannot bear to have anyone stand up to them and speak out for justice. That's because they regard themselves as superior to everyone. This is an unchanging principle.

**As a result, during the more than twenty years from when I was 32 [when he established his teaching] until now, at 54, I have been driven out of temples, I have been expelled from my place of residence, my parents and relatives have been harassed, I have been attacked at night, I have encountered battles, I have been vilified countless times, I have been struck and injured, my disciples have been killed, I have nearly been beheaded, and twice been sent into exile.**

“During these more than twenty years, I have never known even an hour or a moment of peace,” the Daishonin says. He lived this way for us. How merciful! His was a great struggle for spiritual revolution more intense than any battle.

From the time the Daishonin established his teaching at 32, great persecutions rained down upon him. Still, he never retreated a single step.

To elaborate on the persecutions that the Daishonin touches on in this writing, which represent only a portion of the difficulties he underwent: He was driven away from Seicho-ji [the temple where he had received his initial training as a priest, and where he proclaimed the establishment of his teaching]; he was chased away from his birthplace of Awa; his parents and relatives were made to suffer greatly; he was attacked at night while dwelling in a hermitage; he was attacked at Komatsubara; groundless rumors about him were spread; and he was the target of countless insults.

In the Komatsubara Persecution, the Daishonin’s left arm was broken and he received a sword wound to his forehead. Also, his disciples were killed. When Hei no Saemon came to arrest him, the Daishonin was struck by Sho-bo (also called Shofu-bo) with a sutra scroll, and in the Tatsunokuchi Persecution he was nearly beheaded. In addition, he was twice exiled, to Izu and to Sado Island.

Yet the Daishonin continued to stand up bravely. “Still I am not discouraged” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 166), he says. “I rejoiced, [having] long expected it to come to this” (MW-1, 175). “It is all just as I expected” (MW-1, 36).

This was all for the people—he underwent everything on our behalf. He sought nothing for himself. Had he desired to lead a peaceful and tranquil life, he could certainly have done so. And he plainly understood that once he stood up he would encounter great persecution. Nevertheless, the Daishonin dared to stand up.

In this letter, where he lists persecutions he had undergone, there is not the least note of bitterness or complaint. Rather, the Daishonin took tremendous pride in having undergone great persecution. In this, we can sense the heartbeat of the indomitable lion king.

We are the Daishonin’s disciples. We carry on his great struggle. This is the greatest possible honor. Compared with the great persecutions the Daishonin underwent, to be called a few names hardly amounts to anything.

President Toda wrote of the period during World War II when the militarists were bent on ruthlessly suppressing all dissenting voices:

The surprise and confusion of believers and the perplexity of those affiliated with the head temple were such that it was comical to hear and embarrassing to imagine. President Makiguchi, myself and all the members with us were prohibited from making pilgrimages to the head temple, and far and wide we were vilified as enemies of the nation. Such absurdity, while a reflection of the conditions of the times, was even laughable.

And those put in prison were also pathetic. Some saw their businesses collapse. And their families were hounded by debt collectors or simply unable to provide for themselves for want of a livelihood. The families they left behind were, just as much as the prisoners, at a loss for what to do.

Consequently, the families abandoned faith or began to doubt. This was because they lacked confidence and had only a dim grasp of the Daishonin’s teachings. And one by one, those who were imprisoned abandoned their faith,

too. They were spineless people. They lacked courage and had weak faith. This was the pitiful plight of those who failed to recognize the Daishonin as the original Buddha.

Even amid such circumstances, Mr. Toda felt deep appreciation toward his mentor, President Makiguchi, to whom in a memorial he would later say, “In your vast and boundless compassion, you allowed me to come with you even to prison.” This eloquently sums up their solemn, magnificent relationship as mentor and disciple.

As expressed in even this short Goshō, the Daishonin was at once dauntlessly strong toward arrogant authorities and infinitely kind toward people of sincerity. These are both manifestations of his compassion. This sums up Nichiren Daishonin’s sublime humanism.

1. Goshō: The term Goshō can be used in either the singular or the plural.

Title: Gift Of An Unlined Robe (1)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.6 LB9909p06

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Buddhahood Daisaku Daishonin Gift Goshō Ikeda Nichiren People Robe Study Unlined Writings