

SUMMONING THE COURAGE AND HEART OF A LION
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One crucial challenge we face is to clarify who is correctly carrying on the heritage of Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism today, and what it means to do so. While the priests of Nichiren Shoshu disparage us, the ordinary practitioners of the SGI who are struggling day and night to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism, they claim ownership of the Daishonin's Buddhism by virtue of status, ritual and formality. If their view prevails, the spirit and energy behind the worldwide spread of the Daishonin's teachings will die out. This will amount to nothing other than losing the heart of this Buddhism.

Nichiren Daishonin's "Letter from Sado" makes many points that apply directly to us today. The Daishonin, who was enduring the persecution of being exiled to the harsh island of Sado, encourages his disciples not to lose faith in the face of any obstacles—that to face great hardships and dedicate their lives to the Lotus Sutra is the direct path to attaining Buddhahood and achieving kosen-rufu. The same is true today.

The spirit of this writing can guide us in our renewed efforts to educate people in the United States about the truth of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Of prime importance is courage—the courage to challenge this issue with perseverance and fresh determination. As the Daishonin says in "Letter From Sado": "Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove his real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with heretical priests tries to destroy true Buddhism and banish a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion will surely attain Buddhahood as Nichiren did" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 35). For nine years, we have been dealing with this issue, and we have made great progress in educating people precisely because we've been courageous.

But we cannot let up now. We must summon the courage and heart of a lion to stay focused on this issue, to maintain our resolve to educate others and ourselves.

The time has come for us to make another breakthrough with compassion, courage and confidence—"the heart of the lion" that the Daishonin is talking about. The recent secessions of temples from Nichiren Shoshu in Japan and the increasing desperation with which the temple is misrepresenting evidence in the midst of the Seattle Incident trial, point to a significant change in the times.

The Daishonin also emphasizes the importance of understanding the time: "Even a word or phrase of true Buddhism will lead one to the path of enlightenment, if it suits the times and the capacity of the people. Even though one may study a thousand sutras and ten thousand doctrines, he cannot attain Buddhahood, should those teachings not fit the times and the people's capacity" (Ibid.).

Some temple members are expressing doubts about what they see going on in the temple. At first, many of them were motivated to join the temple simply thinking they were pursuing the path of correct faith because priests were leading them. But they never imagined that their SGI friends would be excommunicated twice, that they would be asked to worship the high priest, that the Grand Main Temple would be destroyed and, most recently, that the high priest's doubt in the validity of the Dai-Gohonzon would be revealed. As a result, many temple members are having second thoughts and are more open to dialogue with us than they ever have been. The times have changed.

At the same time, SGI-USA has matured greatly over the last few years. We are not the

same organization they left.

The Daishonin is encouraging us to have a correct understanding of the people's hearts. SGI President Ikeda confirmed this recently saying we should proceed in a manner appropriate to America, in a way that Americans can feel comfortable with. America is different in many ways from Japan. We, the American members, must chart our own path toward accomplishing kosen-rufu in this country. Our members are eager to protect and propagate this Buddhism with new ideas and in new ways. They want to try things that have not been tried yet. We continue to strive to unite, listen to one another's ideas, wrack our brains and search our hearts for the best American strategy. And it has to be rooted firmly in mutual respect.

The Daishonin continues: "Neither non-Buddhists nor the enemies of Buddhism can destroy the Buddha's True Law, but the Buddha's disciples definitely can. As the sutra says, a parasite in the lion's bowels will devour the lion" (Ibid.). Our organization will unite and triumph when genuine warmth and kindness pervade it. In this sense, the "parasite in the lion's bowels" is any trace of coldness in our organization.

In one of Aesop's fables, the sun and wind have a competition to see who is stronger. They see a traveler wearing a coat, and both try to get him to take his coat off. The cold north wind blows trying to rip the coat off, but the traveler only pulls his coat tighter around himself.

The sun wins, by shining warmly on the traveler, making him relaxed and comfortable. He takes his coat off due to the warmth.

Several years ago, talking about soft power, SGI President Ikeda commented on this story: "The sun of friendship must first rise in the sky. As long as the cold north wind of criticism and reproach blows, people will never remove the cloak that shields their hearts; in fact, they will only clutch it closer to them."

The key to victory for SGI-USA — indeed, the entire human race — is, then, friendship. It is the warmth of the sun.

Our constant challenge as human beings is to be warm to one another — to be warm to our friends and families, and the temple members. This is my interpretation of what President Ikeda has recently described as "tenacious kindness."

The sun comes up every day, sharing its warmth with all. Our warmth and kindness, too, should be shared equally and liberally. But to share it, we cannot be passive. We need the courage to chant daimoku, speak and act for the sake of others, even if they do not at first appreciate our concern. This is what it means to have the "heart of a lion."

After all, the real purpose of the Buddha's advent lies in the Buddha's behavior as a human being. If our behavior toward others — including those under the influence of the temple — is warm, eventually they too will "remove their coats" and return to us. In the end, this sun-like warmth and friendship will ensure our victory in American kosen-rufu.