

**STUDY MATERIAL FOR DECEMBER
NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS
"THE FOURTEEN SLANDERS"
(THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN, PP. 755-56;
GOSHO ZENSHU, PP. 1381-82)**

The following is an excerpt from a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to one of his followers, which is known today as "The Fourteen Slanders." This is the study material for the December study meetings in the SGI-USA.

In your letter you write: "Since I took faith in this sutra [the Lotus], I have continued to recite the ten factors of life¹ and the verse section of the 'Life Span' chapter and chant the daimoku without the slightest neglect. But how great is the difference between the blessings received when a sage chants the daimoku and the blessings received when we chant it?" To reply, one is in no way superior to the other. The gold that a fool possesses is no different from the gold that a wise man possesses; a fire made by a fool is the same as a fire made by a wise man.

However, there is a difference if one chants the daimoku while acting against the intent of this sutra. There are various stages in the practice of this sutra [and various forms of slander exist accordingly]. Let me sum them up by quoting from volume five of *The Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra"*: "In defining the types of evil, *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* states briefly, 'Expound among the wise but not among the foolish.'² One scholar³ enumerates the types of evil as follows: 'I will first list the evil causes and then effects. There are fourteen evil causes: (1) arrogance, (2) negligence, (3) wrong views of the self, (4) shallow understanding, (5) attachment to earthly desires, (6) not understanding, (7) not believing, (8) scowling with knitted brows, (9) harboring doubts, (10) slandering, (11) despising, (12) hating, (13) envying and (14) bearing grudges.'" Since these fourteen slanders apply equally to priesthood and laity, you must be on guard against them.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of old said that all people have the Buddha nature and that, if they embrace the Lotus Sutra, they will never fail to attain Buddhahood. He further stated that to slight a person is to slight the Buddha himself. Thus, his practice was to revere all people. He revered even those who did not embrace the Lotus Sutra because they too had the Buddha nature and might someday believe in the sutra. Therefore, it is all the more natural to revere those priests and lay people who do embrace the sutra.

BACKGROUND

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter, which is now known as "The Fourteen Slanders," to Matsuno Rokuro Saemon from his small dwelling at Mount Minobu on "the ninth day of the twelfth month in the second year of Kenji (1276)." He was 54 (or 55 according to the traditional counting of age used in Japan at the time, in which a person is considered one year old at birth). The letter was written in his third winter since moving to Minobu after his third and last remonstrance with the shogunate government concerning the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra. In a letter written in the same year as "The Fourteen Slanders," the Daishonin recounts the events that led him to live in this remote mountain

area: “On the eighth day of the fourth month [in 1274], I had a meeting with Hei no Saemon.⁴ As I expected all along, my warnings were unheeded. I now had remonstrated with the authorities three times for the sole purpose of saving Japan from ruin. Mindful that one whose warnings are thrice ignored should retire to a mountain forest, I left Kamakura on the twelfth day of the fifth month” (“Letter to Konichi-bo,” WND, 661).

The Daishonin’s life at Mount Minobu was far from a comfortable “retirement.” The chronic shortage of food and clothing and harsh living conditions, especially in winter, took a heavy toll on his health. A little more than three years after writing “The Fourteen Slanders,” the Daishonin describes his winter at Minobu as follows:

In the midst of these four mountains and four rivers is a flat area no broader than the palm of one’s hand, and here I have built a little hut to shield me from the rain. I have peeled bark off trees to make my four walls, and wear a robe made of the hides of deer that died a natural death. In spring I break off ferns to nourish my body, and in autumn I gather fruit to keep myself alive. But the snow has been piling up, and now, into the first month of the new year, it goes on snowing. My hut is seven feet in height, but the snow outside is piled up to a depth of ten feet. I am surrounded by four walls of ice, and icicles hang down from the eaves like a necklace of jewels adorning my place of religious practice, while inside my hut snow is heaped up in place of rice.

Even in ordinary times people seldom come here, and now, with the snow so deep and the roads blocked, I have no visitors at all. So at the moment I am atoning for the karma that destines me to fall into the eight cold hells, and, far from attaining Buddhahood in this present life, I am like the cold suffering bird. I no longer shave my head, so I look like a quail, and my robe gets so stiff with ice that it resembles the icy wings of the mandarin duck (“Letter to Akimoto,” WND, 1022).

Despite the adverse circumstances at Minobu, the Daishonin made strenuous efforts to lay the groundwork for the future spread of his teaching by giving numerous lectures on the Lotus Sutra to his disciples and producing many of his most important writings such as “The Selection of the Time” (1275), “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude” (1276) and “On the Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice” (1277). He also continued to write many letters to his followers to encourage them in their personal circumstances.

Matsuno Rokuro Saemon, the recipient of “The Fourteen Slanders,” lived in Suruga Province. He is commonly referred to as “Lord Matsuno” or “the lay priest Matsuno.” Not much is known about his life or family background. It appears that he and his wife had many children, as can be inferred from the Daishonin’s statement that the husband had left “many sons behind” (“Wu-lung and I-lung,” WND, 1099). Among them, however, only the eldest son, Rokuro Saemon no Jo; the second son Nichiji, who became one of the Daishonin’s six senior disciples; and a daughter, who became the wife of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro (the mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu), are known. By the time Matsuno Rokuro Saemon received “The Fourteen Slanders,” he had been leading a life of retirement as a lay priest (Jpn nyudo). A lay priest was someone who was tonsured as a priest but continued to live as a layperson. It was a custom in feudal Japan, especially for those in the samurai class, to shave their heads in the manner of a priest when retiring from official secular duties. While this was a matter of social convention, for some it also expressed a deep commitment to Buddhism. It is not certain when and how Matsuno Rokuro Saemon took

faith in the Daishonin's teaching. It is speculated that he became the Daishonin's follower either through his daughter or his encounter with Nikko Shonin at Jisso-ji temple in Suruga Province. Five letters that the Daishonin addressed to Lord Matsuno are known, although one of them seems to have been written for his eldest son. It is likely that the Daishonin had never met Lord Matsuno when he wrote "The Fourteen Slanders." In another letter, dated 1276, the Daishonin writes to Lord Matsuno: "Although we have not yet met, it is wondrous that you have taken faith. It must be solely due to our karmic tie from the past" (GZ, 1379). Although Lord Matsuno probably never met the Daishonin in person, he continued to develop faith in the Daishonin's teaching.

When the Daishonin wrote "The Fourteen Slanders" in 1276, dark clouds of persecution were gathering over the his followers in Suruga Province (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). Because of the successful propagation efforts led by Nikko Shonin, many ordinary people and priests took faith in the Daishonin's teaching. As a result, the established temples of the area began to take an oppressive stance toward the new practitioners. Keenly aware of this ominous development, the Daishonin writes in "The Fourteen Slanders": "I learned that the scholar Nichigen of Jisso-ji temple, upon becoming my disciple, was driven out by his own disciples and lay supporters, and had to give up his lands, so that he now has no place of his own" (WND, 755). The situation ultimately led to the incident known as the Atsuhara Persecution in 1279. In the ninth month of that year, twenty peasants who had converted to the Daishonin's teaching were arrested on trumped-up charges of stealing crops from the rice fields owned by Ryusen-ji temple. Later, three of them were executed, and the rest banished. Nichigen's banishment from Jisso-ji portended the violent crackdown on the Daishonin's followers to come.

The Daishonin's strict stance toward corrupt priests in "The Fourteen Slanders" clearly reflects the circumstances of the time. The priests of prominent temples in Suruga Province such as Jisso-ji and Ryusen-ji were allying themselves with the ruling Hojo clan, which also directly governed the province. These priests, fearing a loss of influence in their parishes, began to instigate official oppression against the Daishonin's followers. At that time, it was crucial for the Daishonin's followers, especially lay believers, to distinguish "the priest who preaches the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 757), or "a true priest," from the kind of priest the Daishonin harshly describes as "an animal dressed in priestly robes" or "a thief who has stolen the title of priest" (WND, 760). At the same time, the priests who were displaced on account of their conversion to the Daishonin's teaching—such as Nichigen, who is mentioned in the letter—needed much support. Thus the Daishonin writes to Lord Matsuno: "As a lay believer, the important thing for you is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo single-mindedly and to provide support for the priests" (WND, 760). It was a time for all the Daishonin's disciples—both lay believers and priests—to unite. So the Daishonin stresses the importance of harmonious unity to Lord Matsuno: "Therefore, it is all the more natural to revere those priests and lay people who do embrace the sutra" (WND, 756). The persecution that developed in Suruga Province at that time provides an important context for us to better understand "The Fourteen Slanders."

It is thought that Lord Matsuno died on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month in 1278. He lived in a tumultuous period of religious persecution, yet he maintained pure faith in the Dai-shonin's teaching and kept supporting his teacher until the end of his life. In fact, "The Fourteen Slanders" was the Daishonin's thank-you letter for Lord Matsuno's offerings. At the beginning, he lists the articles he received from Matsuno: "I have received the string of coins, the horseload of polished rice, and the white quilted robe that you sent"

(WND, 755). After his death, Lord Matsuno's wife, who had also never met the Daishonin, continued to exert herself in faith and provide support for the Daishonin, who could only respond with deep appreciation: "I can only marvel that you so frequently send a messenger to me, when we have never even met....How admirable!" (WND, 960).

THE SYNOPSIS OF "THE FOURTEEN SLANDERS"

This letter explains "fourteen slanders" described in the Lotus Sutra, citing Miao-lo's *Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra."* These slanders are referred to originally in the "Simile and Parable" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Asked if there is a difference in benefits derived when a sage chants the daimoku and when an ordinary person chants it, the Daishonin answers that there is not. "However, there is a difference," he continues, "if one chants the daimoku while acting against the intent of this sutra." He explains what he means by "the intent of the sutra" by referring to the fourteen slanders, which describe various actions or attitudes that run counter to the Sutra's intent.

The first ten of the fourteen slanders concern one's attitude and action toward the Law, that is, the Buddha's teachings, and the last four, toward people who believe in and practice the Law.

Emphasizing the importance of unity among believers, the Daishonin says, "Always remember that believers in the Lotus Sutra should absolutely be the last to abuse one another." The reason he gives is that "all those who keep faith in the Lotus Sutra are most certainly Buddhas, and one who slanders a Buddha commits a grave offense." In other words, he warns particularly against committing the last four of the fourteen slanders: "despising, hating, envying, and bearing grudges" against fellow believers.

The Daishonin next recounts in detail the story of the boy Snow Mountains, who offers his body to a fierce demon in exchange for learning a Buddhist teaching. He encourages Matsuno to make this bodhisattva's spirit a model for his own faith and practice. He further clarifies that a priest who lacks the spirit to study and practice Buddhism diligently and to strive to refute its slanderers, is "no better than an animal dressed in priestly robes," a thief who has stolen the title of priest.

The Daishonin concludes by instructing Matsuno how to practice Buddhism as a lay believer. He encourages the lay priest to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, provide support for the priests, and, in accord with the Lotus Sutra, put effort into spreading the Law. Clearly, in light of the preceding paragraphs, "priests" here indicates not any priest, but the Daishonin's disciples — those who are practicing in accord with the spirit elucidated in this letter. (From "Background," WND, 761-62)

COMMENTARY

EQUALITY BASED ON THE UNIVERSALITY OF BUDDHAHOOD

After thanking Lord Matsuno for his offerings and commenting on the priest Nichigen's eviction from Jisso-ji temple, Nichiren Daishonin takes up Lord Matsuno's question: "How great is the difference between the blessings received when a sage chants the daimoku and the blessings received when we chant it?" (WND, 756). The Daishonin's answer is succinct: "To reply, one is in no way superior to the other. The gold that a fool possesses is no different from the gold that a wise man possesses; a fire made by a fool is the same as a fire

made by a wise man” (WND, 756). Here “a fool” refers to a person ignorant of Buddhism, and “a wise man” to a person who has a profound grasp of Buddhism. From the perspective of Lord Matsuno, “a fool” probably meant a lay believer, like himself, who would typically in medieval Japan be uneducated about Buddhism (and in most cases illiterate), and “a wise man,” a priest, like the Daishonin, who had received a formal education. No matter what level of intellectual understanding of Buddhism people may possess, as long as they chant the daimoku, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, with faith in their own innate Buddha-hood, they will attain the “blessings” of becoming Buddhas in this lifetime. The Daishonin clarifies the impartiality and universality of Buddhist practice—whether they are priests or lay believers, educated or uneducated. What matters is our Buddhist practice, not social status or intellectual aptitude. This Buddhist concept of equality is based on the conviction that all people are equally endowed with the Buddha nature—the potential for Buddhahood.

The quintessence of Mahayana Buddhism—the popular Buddhist movement that developed around the beginning of the Common Era—is the capacity to recognize the Buddhahood in all people and enable them to realize their supreme potential. In the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which is the ultimate Mahayana sutra, Shakyamuni explains to his leading disciple Shariputra:

You should know
that at the start I took a vow,
hoping to make all persons
equal to me, without any distinction between us...
(*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 36)

Shakyamuni’s hope to “make all persons equal” to him reflects his strong conviction that all people have the same potential to reveal their innate Buddhahood. If he had thought it impossible to “make all persons equal” to him, he would not have made such a vow. All people are potentially Buddhas—this is the foundation of the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin established the way for all people to reveal their innate Buddhahood. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with the faith that they, too, share the same potential as Shakyamuni and the Daishonin, practitioners are carrying out a practice that crystallizes the spirit and intent of the Lotus Sutra. The key is to believe in the truth that we all have the “gold” of Buddhahood and the “fire” of enlightenment within us, as the Daishonin expresses through this metaphor. This truth, although it was self-evident to Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren Daishonin, is often obscured in our minds. Like athletes in a slump, we often doubt our true worth by judging ourselves solely upon our temporary “performance,” or how others view us in our socially prescribed roles. But such externals as appearance, status or wealth are not fundamentally related to our supreme potential of Buddhahood. In moments of doubt, we will do well to remind ourselves of our inner “gold” and “fire.” The first step toward realizing the value of gold or fire is to recognize that we can possess gold or the ability to make fire. Similarly, in order to actualize our innate Buddhahood, we must first recognize the existence of our Buddha nature.

This is the function of faith. Faith in Buddhism means to believe in our own potential for Buddhahood. Everything we want in life, all fulfillment or satisfaction, happiness, accomplishment, ability, and capacity reside as potentials within us. The supreme positive expression of this innate potential is Buddhahood or enlightenment. Faith, therefore,

means to believe in our own potential, and in the certainty of realizing it through Buddhist practice.

THE MEANING OF “SLANDER” IN BUDDHISM

After emphasizing the impartial benefit of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin adds: “However, there is a difference if one chants the daimoku while acting against the intent of this sutra” (WND, 756). The Daishonin cautions Lord Matsuno that although he diligently recites the Lotus Sutra and chants daimoku, if he goes against “the intent of this sutra,” he will not enjoy the benefit of Buddhist practice as he otherwise should. No matter how earnestly we may feel we are practicing Buddhism, if we were to act “against the intent of the Lotus Sutra,” we would be undoing all our efforts. Therefore, it is critical for us to understand “the intent of the Lotus Sutra” and uphold it through our Buddhist practice.

The Daishonin then goes on to list the “fourteen slanders” as the causes that prevent Buddhist practitioners from attaining enlightenment. The concept of the fourteen slanders was formulated by Miao-lo (711-782), a scholar and priest of the T’ien-t’ai school in China, based on the following passage from the “Simile and Parable” chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni states (underline added for clarity and emphasis):

Also, Shariputra,
to persons who are arrogant or lazy
or taken up with views of the self,
do not preach this sutra.
Those with the shallow understanding of ordinary persons,
who are deeply attached to the five desires,
cannot comprehend it when they hear it.
Do not preach it to them.
If a person fails to have faith
but instead slanders this sutra,
immediately he will destroy all the seeds
for becoming a Buddha in this world.
Or perhaps he will scowl with knitted brows
and harbor doubt or perplexity.
Listen and I will tell you
the penalty this person must pay.
Whether the Buddha is in the world
or has already entered extinction,
if this person should slander
a sutra such as this,
or on seeing those who read, recite,
copy and uphold this sutra,
should despise, hate, envy,
or bear grudges against them,
the penalty this person must pay...(LS, 74)

The brief meaning of each of the fourteen slanders is as follows: (1) “arrogance” – to

slight Buddhism; (2) “negligence” in one’s Buddhist practice; (3) “wrong views of the self” that prevent one from seeking a correct teaching; (4) “shallow understanding” that prevents one from seeking a correct teaching; (5) “attachment to earthly desires” that prevents one from seeking a correct teaching (“the five desires” in the sutra text refers to the sensual desires that stem from our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch); (6) “not understanding” indicates the lack of desire to understand Buddhism; (7) “not believing” in the correct teaching; (8) “scowling with knitted brows” indicates one’s contempt toward the correct teaching; (9) “harboring doubts” indicates one’s doubt and confusion about the correct teaching and (10) “slandering” indicates one’s calumny toward the correct teaching. Those first ten “slanders” are directed toward a correct teaching, that is, the Lotus Sutra, and the rest of the four slanders toward those who uphold and practice a correct teaching, that is, (11) “despising,” (12) “hating,” (13) “envying” and (14) “bearing grudges” against the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

In one sense, taking faith in the Gohonzon and sincerely praying can do away with the first ten “slanders”. This is because they are mainly related to the lack of will and desire to practice the correct teaching. So those already practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching, like Lord Matsuno, should be especially mindful of the last four slanders, those of “despising,” “hating,” “envying” and “bearing grudges” against other fellow practitioners. This is why the Daishonin writes to Lord Matsuno in the same letter: “Always remember that believers in the Lotus Sutra should absolutely be the last to abuse one another. All those who keep faith in the Lotus Sutra are most certainly Buddhas, and one who slanders a Buddha commits a grave offense” (WND, 756).

“Slander” in the context of the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin’s Buddhism means to “slander the Lotus Sutra.” To borrow the Daishonin’s expression, “slander” is to “act against the intent of the Lotus Sutra.” The intent of the Lotus Sutra, as mentioned before, lies in the universality of Buddhahood—that Buddhahood is a potential within all life. The sutra, therefore, stresses the importance of developing fundamental respect for all people, especially for those who actively seek to manifest their Buddhahood while encouraging others to do the same. In fact, Shakyamuni’s entire preaching of the Lotus Sutra ends with the following injunction: “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” (LS, 324). The Daishonin calls this passage “the foremost, supreme transmission” of Buddhism (GZ, 781). In other words, “slander” in the Daishonin’s Buddhism is to reject the existence of supreme humanity in each person and debase the dignity of people’s lives. From another perspective, “slander” may be described as obstinate disbelief in one’s own Buddhahood as well as in that of others. This is why the Daishonin states: “Therefore, the substance of the fourteen slanders expounded in the ‘Simile and Parable’ chapter derives from disbelief” (GZ, 97). Put another way, as long as we continue to cultivate respect for the lives of others as well as our own based on the universality of Buddhahood, we cannot possibly commit any fundamental “slander” in the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The process of our attaining Buddhahood may be described as a process in which we strive to always strengthen our conviction in the universality of Buddhahood and act upon it. “The fourteen slanders” are not simply a list of “thou shalt nots.” Rather, they should be regarded collectively as a reminder of our necessity and responsibility to develop respect for life. (For more discussion on the concept of slander, please see “The Meaning of Slander and Religious Tolerance” in *Living Buddhism*, February 1999, pp. 8-13.)

BODHISATTVA NEVER DISPARAGING

Probably no figure in the Lotus Sutra expresses its spirit of fundamental respect for life more eloquently than Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. So it is no surprise that the Daishonin uses this character to explain to Lord Matsuno the importance of respecting all people:

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of old said that all people have the Buddha nature and that, if they embrace the Lotus Sutra, they will never fail to attain Buddhahood. He further stated that to slight a person is to slight the Buddha himself. Thus, his practice was to revere all people. He revered even those who did not embrace the Lotus Sutra because they too had the Buddha nature and might someday believe in the sutra. Therefore, it is all the more natural to revere those priests and lay people who do embrace the sutra (WND, 756).

The Buddha nature is a potential for the highest human state, a condition rich with compassion and wisdom. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging perceives the Buddha nature in all people he meets and tells them: “I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood” (LS, 266-67). This passage—consisting of twenty-four characters in the Chinese translation by Kumarajiva (344–413)—is known as “the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra,” for it captures the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

Many in the West have recognized the sanctity of the human being as well. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, for example, in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, asserts that we must pattern our actions after a “categorical imperative,” which states: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.”⁵ Kant explains that since every rational being wants to be free, his or her existence should be regarded as an end in itself. If the existence of a rational being is treated as a means, it will never be free, and its worth will become relative to what it is good for. While Kant argues that the “absolute worth” of human existence derives from its “rational nature,”⁶ Bodhisattva Never Disparaging sees the Buddha nature as the source of dignity in every person that deserves respect from everyone. Setting aside the difference between the “rational nature” and the “Buddha nature,” we could say that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging puts Kant’s categorical imperative into practice in the sense that he follows the only possible course of action toward something of absolute worth: respect. Viewing each person as an end rather than a means, and acknowledging his or her absolute worth, is a fitting imperative for all humanity in the twenty-first century, and the Daishonin’s Buddhism has much to contribute toward making this a reality. (For more discussion about Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, please see “The Courage to Respect All People: Learning from Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” in *Living Buddhism*, August 1999, pp. 8-15.)

RESPECT FOR LIFE AS THE BASIS OF PROPAGATION

Toward the end of the letter, the Daishonin urges Lord Matsuno to exert himself in spreading Buddhism: “You should also teach the sutra to the best of your ability” (WND,

760). Bodhisattva Never Disparaging serves as one of the most excellent models in the Lotus Sutra for our efforts to communicate the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism to others, for he makes respect for each person the very basis of propagation. This might well be one reason why the Daishonin introduces the story of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in this letter.

When Bodhisattva Never Disparaging meets people, he sees their Buddha nature, something of absolute worth that demands his respect. He cannot remain silent about the existence of this supreme potential, so he tells them, in spite of their violent reaction: "You...are certain to attain Buddhahood" (LS, 267).

This bodhisattva is said to have lived in "the period of Counterfeit Law" when "monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power" (LS, 266). Buddhism had degenerated into mere formality, something that these arrogant monks capitalized upon, and few practiced Buddhism correctly. So when the bodhisattva tells people, "You are all practicing the bodhisattva way" (LS, 266), he is expressing his expectation that "if they embrace the Lotus Sutra, they will never fail to attain Buddhahood," as the Daishonin interprets this statement (WND, 756). Bodhisattva Never Disparaging respects people for their yet-to-be realized potential and encourages them to practice the bodhisattva way, regardless of who they are or what they do now.

This is easier said than done, however. It is no easy task to look at a person who is in the depth of suffering and confusion, who is given to bad or destructive behavior, and envision a truly happy person full of wisdom and compassion. It is as difficult as seeing a giant oak tree in an acorn. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging does exactly this, however. He is like a gardener who sees a giant tree of happiness in a tiny seed left neglected on the parched ground. He patiently cares for the acorn by planting it in good soil where there is plenty of sunlight and water, always reminding it that it will certainly grow into a magnificent tree. And imagine this acorn not only refusing to be cared for, but also trying to attack the gardener!

The story of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging teaches us that at the core of our efforts to spread the Daishonin's teaching must be our respect for the supreme potential that all people possess. We must have wisdom not to judge them based on how they appear today and have courage to believe in what they can become down the road. When we develop such respect, we can benefit not only others, but also ourselves; for when we respect the Buddha nature of others, we are praising our own as well. In this regard, the Daishonin explains: "There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back" (GZ, 769). All people, regardless of who they are, or what they believe in, share the Buddha nature. When we respect them for it, we are treating ourselves with the same respect. From the viewpoint of the Daishonin's Buddhism, therefore, failing to respect others is failing to respect ourselves.

"Background" and "Commentary" by the SGI-USA Study Department.

1. Presumably this indicates the first section of the "Expedient Means" chapter, which ends with "The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between

Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance...and their consistency from beginning to end.”

2. Chapter 3 of the Lotus Sutra says that one should not expound this sutra among the foolish in order to protect them from committing the evil of slandering the sutra.

3. This “one scholar” has been identified as the Dharma Characteristics scholar, Tz’u-en, by Ts’ung-i in his *Supplement to T’ien-t’ai’s Three Major Works*. The attribution, however, is dubious. Tz’u-en in his *Praising the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra* mentions slanders, but does not enumerate or enlarge upon them.

4. A leading official of the Hojo regency, also known as Hei no Saemon-no-jo and Taira no Yorituna. He served two successive regents, Hojo Tokimune and Hojo Sadatoki, and wielded tremendous influence as deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself). He played an active role in persecuting Nichiren Daishonin and his followers (“Glossary” WND, 1235).

5. Kant, Immanuel. *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. p. 80.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 79.