

STUDY MATERIAL FOR FEBRUARY
“ON REPAYING DEBTS OF GRATITUDE”
(WND, P. 736; GOSHO ZENSHU, P. 329)

The following is an excerpt from Nichiren Daishonin’s treatise titled “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.” This is the study material for February study meetings in the SGI-USA.

If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. Its benefit surpasses that of Dengyo¹ and T’ien-t’ai,² and is superior to that of Nagarjuna³ and Mahakashyapa.⁴

A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in the impure world. Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. This is in no way because of Nichiren’s wisdom, but simply because the time makes it so. In spring the blossoms open, in autumn the fruit appears. Summer is hot, winter is cold. The season makes it so, does it not?

Background

This lengthy treatise is one of Nichiren Daishonin’s five major writings. [The above passages are excerpted from the concluding section of “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.”] It is dated the twenty-first day of the seventh month, 1276, a little more than two years after the Daishonin had taken up residence at Minobu. It was prompted by the news of the death of Dozen-bo, a priest of Seicho-ji temple in Awa Province, who had been the Daishonin’s teacher when he first entered the temple as a boy of twelve. Nichiren Daishonin wrote this treatise to express his gratitude to Dozen-bo and sent it to Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, senior priests at the time he entered the temple, who later became his followers. He entrusted this text to Niko, one of his disciples, and requested that it be taken to Seicho-ji on his behalf and read aloud at Kasagamori on the summit of Mount Kiyosumi where had first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and again in front of the tomb of his late teacher.

In 1233, Nichiren Daishonin entered Seicho-ji temple to study under Dozen-bo. At that time, temples served as centers of learning as well as religion. During his stay at this temple, the Daishonin developed his extraordinary literary skills that later proved so valuable in propagating his teachings. He also embarked on a lifelong journey to find and proclaim the unique truth of Buddhism, which had been all but obscured by the emergence of various misleading schools.

On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, 1253, the Daishonin proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be the sole teaching leading directly to enlightenment in the Latter Day of the Law, while denouncing the doctrines of the then-prevalent Pure Land school. Tojo Kagenobu, the steward of the area and a fervent Pure Land believer, became furious on hearing of this and sent his men to the temple to arrest the Daishonin. Dozen-bo, a devotee of the Pure Land teaching, could not defend him openly, but instructed the two

senior priests, Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, to guide his young disciple to safety.

Nichiren Daishonin and his former teacher met again in 1264, when the Daishonin visited his home in Awa after returning from exile on the Izu Peninsula. He later wrote that Dozen-bo had asked him on this occasion if his practice of the Pure Land teachings would lead him into the hell of incessant suffering. In reply, the Daishonin told Dozen-bo that he could not free himself from the effects of his slander unless he revered the Lotus Sutra as the fundamental teaching. Afterward, though Dozen-bo did not entirely abandon his belief in Amida, he carved a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Daishonin rejoiced that Dozen-bo was apparently beginning to see his error because he felt indebted to this man who had initiated him into the priesthood and earnestly desired to lead him to the correct teaching. (From “Background,” WND, 738)

Commentary

Upon hearing of the death of his former teacher Dozen-bo, Nichiren Daishonin penned this treatise. In it, the Daishonin traces the history of the transmission of Buddhism from India to China and Japan and explains the significance of his efforts to spread the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the Lotus Sutra. He concludes the treatise by stating: “The benefit that I have been speaking of will surely accumulate in the life of the late Dozen-bo” (WND, 737). Less than two years later, the Daishonin reiterated his feeling toward his late teacher when he wrote, “The blessings that Nichiren obtains from propagating the Lotus Sutra will always return to Dozen-bo” (WND, 909). Under the tutelage of Dozen-bo, the youthful Daishonin began his quest for the essential truth of Buddhism. Although Dozen-bo was unable to fully embrace the Daishonin’s teaching, his support for the Daishonin enabled him to accumulate good karma. At the end of “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” the Daishonin makes it clear that those who support the practitioners of the Mystic Law will gain immense benefit although they may be ignorant of the Daishonin’s teaching.

In the passages excerpted above from the concluding portion of the treatise, the Daishonin alludes to the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent—the virtues with which a Buddha is said to protect, guide and nurture all living beings. In his extensive commentary on “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” Nichikan (1665-1726), the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, explains that “Nichiren’s compassion” refers to the virtue of parent, “the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living creature in the country of Japan” to the virtue of teacher, and “it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” to the virtue of sovereign.⁵

Stressing the importance of compassion as the foundation of the spread of Buddhism, the Daishonin declares, “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more.” Despite the repeated government persecutions, the Daishonin continued to spread his message: All people have the potential for Buddhahood, or absolute happiness, and the key to unlocking this hidden potential is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in it. The Daishonin’s compassion for the people sustained his seemingly futile efforts in the face of great adversity.

The very source of the global spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism that we see today is his compassion, just like that of parents willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children. Immediately preceding the excerpted passages, the Daishonin compares the spread of Buddhism to a river: “The farther the source, the longer the stream” (WND, 736).

The “source” of the stream of Buddhism depends not on how far back into the past it originated, but rather on the depth of compassion in the life of each practitioner and the profundity of the teaching itself. The Daishonin clarifies that compassion is the inexhaustible spring from which Buddhism will flow for all eternity. Like a river without its water source, a Buddhist movement without compassion will eventually die out. On the other

hand, sincere prayers and efforts for others’ well-being, no matter how small they may seem, will grow into a mighty flow of hope and happiness, as demonstrated by the history of the Soka Gakkai International. Also, the further spread of the Daishonin’s teachings in the twenty-first century is certain as long as each of us continues to develop compassion for others.

“The beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being” refers to the virtue of teacher. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has the power to awaken people to their innate wisdom and help them overcome their fundamental ignorance of their own Buddha-hood. Many people are, in a sense, blind to their own nature. One of the most difficult things for us to do is to see ourselves as a whole—not only our potential for evil, but also our potential for good that enables us to overcome any hardship. The Daishonin states in this regard: “We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance. Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts” (“New Year’s Goshō,” WND, 1137). Self-knowledge is one of the greatest things we can learn. Without a sound understanding of self, the glorified progress of science and technology could only increase people’s suffering and misery, as the existence of nuclear weapons is proof of human “devolution.” In this sense, the Daishonin is one of the greatest teachers for humanity since he left us with the universally accessible way to see our true self—chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with faith in our innate Buddhahood.

The Daishonin goes on to state that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo “blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering.” According to the Buddhist cosmology of India, the hell of incessant suffering is located at the bottom of the world of desire where living beings are controlled by selfish desires. The hell of incessant suffering is so called because its inhabitants must suffer without a moment’s respite. The Daishonin, however, sees this “place” as an analogy for the “state” of our lives. He explains: “Closer examination, however, reveals that both [hell and the Buddha] exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother” (“New Year’s Goshō,” WND, 1137). The practice of the Daishonin’s Buddhism allows us to see “the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” — the path of greed, anger and foolishness—and choose instead the path of the Buddha within us. The Daishonin’s teaching ultimately protects humanity from its own folly by pointing out an alternative to the road toward self-destruction. As more and more people embrace the Daishonin’s view of life and use it as the basis of their lives—from speaking up for a bullied classmate to signing a peace treaty with an old enemy—the world will surely be spared from falling into “the hell of incessant suffering.” In this sense, the Daishonin was a great protector of humanity, and SGI members function in the same capacity as they help others awaken to life’s inherent dignity through sharing the Daishonin’s Buddhism with them.

The passages from “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude” also show that the Daishonin had a rare ability to see the importance of one’s present action with an understanding of the past and a vision for the future. He was aware of his place in the history of Buddhism as it migrated from India to China and then to Japan. The Daishonin saw the transmission of

Buddhism in those three countries according to the “three periods” of the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law, that is, the three stages of the development, maturity and decline of a Buddhist teaching. To represent the development of Buddhism in India during the Former Day are Mahakashyapa and Nagarjuna. The Daishonin also cites T’ien-t’ai of China and Dengyo of Japan to represent the maturing phase of Buddhism during the Middle Day when Buddhist teachings were increasingly formalized in both doctrine and ritual. During the Latter Day, the period of decay and confusion, the Daishonin uses himself as a figure to represent the efforts to revive the original teaching of Buddhism. (Please see the sidebar for more on the Daishonin’s view of the “three time periods.”)

To clarify the confusion of Buddhism and restore its original spirit, the Daishonin delved deeply into the Lotus Sutra and revealed the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the sutra’s essence. To spread this teaching was no easy task for the Daishonin because the people during the Latter Day of the Law were profoundly confused about Buddhism and the nature of their own lives. The Daishonin faced numerous persecutions, including near-execution and exile to a distant island. But he never gave up on his efforts to lay the foundation for the future spread of his teaching, probably because he viewed the act as a historical necessity, rather than a matter of choice, that it was as natural as summer being hot and winter being cold.

The Daishonin defined his role in the history of Buddhism as a restorer of its original spirit and fixed his gaze on the distant future of “ten thousand years and more,” envisioning humanity’s peace and happiness. A profound awareness of history leads to a far-reaching vision for the future. It is important, however, to note that the Daishonin was never absent from his immediate reality. In the midst of hardship, the Daishonin was keenly aware that the future spread of his teaching depended on his compassionate practice in the present. This is why the Daishonin stresses the significance of “one day’s practice in the impure world” or “an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.”

The Daishonin says, “A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in the impure world,” because the purpose of our Buddhist practice is to develop our inner strength with which to overcome any obstacle, not to eliminate life’s problems, which is merely a fantasy. The Land of Perfect Bliss, according to the Pure Land school, is a place of Amida Buddha, located in a western region of the universe. The Pure Land devotees are said to go to this paradisiacal place in the afterlife. As Sir Thomas More named his imaginary island “Utopia” (“no place” in Greek), a play on the word “Eutopia” (“good place”), the Land of Perfect Bliss is nowhere to be found in the reality of our “impure world.” To practice Buddhism in the imaginary Land of Perfect Bliss is like lifting weights in the space where there is no gravity; it takes no effort and produces no result. When the Daishonin says, “A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in the impure world,” he is not exaggerating. He is making a point: To practice Buddhism is to challenge our immediate reality and change it for the better. Buddhahood or absolute happiness is not a state of “perfect bliss” to be attained in an afterlife; it is the process of ongoing self-improvement in the imperfect world. The Daishonin here cautions us against an escapist desire to be somewhere else. The place of our Buddhist practice is nowhere but where we are now, and that is also where we can enjoy unshakable happiness.

The Daishonin also states, “Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.” In the Latter Day of the Law, people are filled with confusion and suffering

and therefore in need of the profound teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The efforts of those who propagate a superior teaching is of greater significance, and their benefit is naturally greater.

In those passages, the Daishonin teaches us that our actions now are most important, not only for our present lives, but also for the future spread of Buddhism. The Daishonin encourages us to live in the here and now, in the midst of “the impure world.” What we do today is what counts. It is easy to dwell on past mistakes or daydream about the future; it is also tempting to be everywhere but here. Wisdom, however, is to see the past and the future existing in the present, for the present is the effect of the past and the cause for the future. And happiness is to challenge one’s immediate circumstances and still enjoy the present.

As the Daishonin says, “the time makes it so,” our efforts to practice the Daishonin’s teaching and share it with others in today’s ailing society are extremely significant, and the positive effects stemming from such efforts are immense on both our lives and the lives of others. Immediately after the passages we are studying, the Daishonin quotes from the Lotus Sutra: “After I [the Buddha] have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvipa and never allow it to be cut off” (WND, 736). From Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation of this passage the Daishonin made a frequent use of the phrase *kosen-rufu*, which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters here rendered as “spread it [i.e., the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely.” The Daishonin understood that the spread of Buddhism or *kosen-rufu* is like a flow, not a stagnant pool. It is a movement continuing through time and space, not a state to be achieved once and for all. In this flow of *kosen-rufu*, each practitioner moves ever forward, so each present moment is self-purifying and fulfilling.

“Commentary” by the SGI-USA Study Department

1. Dengyo (767-822)— The founder of the Tendai school in Japan.
2. T’ien-t’ai (538-597)— The founder of the T’ien-tai school in China.
3. Nagarjuna (n.d.)— A Mahayana scholar who lived in southern India between 150 and 250.
4. Mahakashyapa— One of Shakyamuni’s ten major disciples; he was known as the foremost in ascetic practices. After Shakyamuni’s passing, he became head of the Buddhist Order.
5. *Nichikan Shonin mondan shu* [The Collected Commentaries of High Priest Nichikan]. Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun Press, 1980. p. 438.

**THE THREE VIRTUES OF SOVEREIGN, TEACHER
AND PARENT AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SGI’S EFFORTS FOR
PEACE, EDUCATION AND CULTURE
BY DAISAKU IKEDA**

The following is an excerpt from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s book Learning From the Goshu: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin (pp. 60-64), published in 1997.

Nichiren Daishonin says that he is “sovereign, teacher, father and mother to all the

people of Japan.” The three virtues — sovereign, teacher and parent — indicate the state of life, brilliant as the sun, of a true person of justice.

A passage from “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” comes immediately to mind:

“If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” (WND, 736).

High Priest Nichikan interprets this passage as referring to the Daishonin’s three virtues. “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity” indicates his immense compassion, or virtue as the parent. “It has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan” indicates the power to open people’s minds or inner eyes, i.e., the teacher. And, “it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” indicates the sovereign who struggles to ensure that the people do not slip into misery. [...]

In a general sense, the sovereign, teacher and parent might be thought of—to put it in modern terms—as the three necessary attributes of leaders. The virtue of the sovereign lies in protecting people; this corresponds to an unwavering sense of responsibility. The virtue of the teacher lies in guiding people; this is the shining wisdom to guide people along the path of happiness. And the virtue of the parent lies in lovingly raising people; this is a warm, if strict, compassion.

A sense of responsibility, wisdom and compassion—are not these the most important qualities for leaders, and for all people, to possess? If even a few more leaders possessed these three attributes, it would contribute immensely to easing tension and the general happiness of humankind. But the fact of the matter is that the tendency of all too many leaders in society is just the opposite.

The antithesis of the virtue of the sovereign is irresponsibility. We have leaders who carry on in a self-aggrandizing and high-handed manner, but who avoid addressing difficult issues, using the rationale that “someone else will take care of it,” or that “things will somehow work themselves out.” They order other people around, and then try to shirk responsibility. Even though they may have the appearance of leaders, they do not qualify as such. They lack the requisite virtue.

The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains the three virtues of the essential teaching. “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” (LS16, 230) indicates the virtue of the sovereign who works resolutely to ensure the peace and tranquility of the land or community for which he or she is responsible.

“Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting” (LS16, 229) indicates the virtue of the teacher. As indicated by the word constantly, meaning “without rest or interruption,” a teacher unstintingly uses his or her voice to help others.

The virtue of the parent is indicated by the line, “I am the father of this world” (LS16, 231). The parent loves people because they are children of the Buddha who will one day become Buddhas, and takes action on their behalf.

Leaders also must have the ability to provide training, protection, guidance and instruction. When someone has a problem, they need to provide kind guidance as well as necessary instruction. By so doing, they can ensure that people do not become deadlocked.

A genuine leader protects people when they are tired, and nurtures them by providing training appropriate to their levels of development. If people are given strict training under

circumstances that require protection instead, they will go under. And if they are protectively coddled when instead they need guidance, they will stop growing.

If we relate these desirable leadership attributes to the three virtues, the ability to protect corresponds to the virtue of the sovereign, the ability to provide guidance and instruction to the virtue of the teacher, and the ability to provide training to the virtue of the parent. The determination, prayer and strength to help people become happy are the keys to outstanding leadership.

In connection with the characterization in “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” of the virtue of the sovereign as “blocking off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering,” High Priest Nichikan asks, “How could the opening or closing of roads be left up to a retainer? [Matters of such importance must be attended to by the sovereign.]” The virtue of the sovereign lies in closing off paths of evil and opening up paths of good.

“I want to close off the path leading to Hell.” This was the spirit with which Josei Toda declared his opposition to the use of nuclear weapons: “Anyone who threatens the right to live is a devil, a Satan and a monster.” To resolutely close off the path to war and open up the path to peace—this is the virtue of the sovereign, and the responsibility of leaders.

The SGI, as the true inheritor of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, has opened a path of peace spanning the globe. Twenty years ago, when China and the Soviet Union were in conflict and the Americans and the Soviets were mired in the Cold War, who could have imagined the state of the world today? The Soka Gakkai, despite storms of criticism, has bravely taken action to close off the path to confrontation and open the path to friendship.

“There must never be World War III!” We have prayed and taken action with a sense of responsibility to see that such a calamity never comes to pass. Toward that end, we have developed a movement of peace, culture and education based on Buddhism.

Broadly speaking, creating a land of peace and tranquility—as in the passage, “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil”—indicates the virtue of the sovereign. Education represents the virtue of the teacher. And culture, because it fosters people’s inner lives, relates to the virtue of the parent. We are extending this path of the three virtues throughout the entire world.

Once a path is opened, those who come after can travel along it with composure and ease. Nichiren Daishonin, as the Buddha of the Latter Day possessing the virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent, opened a path to the enlightenment of all people. For this we owe him our eternal gratitude.

To extend and expand the path that the mentor has graciously opened is the mission of disciples. And the path that the Daishonin opened now spans the entire world. Through the struggles of our fellow members—the wondrous Bodhisattvas of the Earth—the great path of happiness now runs through 163 countries. The sun of justice has begun to rise. I am absolutely convinced that the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, accords the highest praise to those who dedicate themselves to this noble task.

NICHIREN DAISHONIN AND THE THREE PERIODS OF THE FORMER, MIDDLE AND LATTER DAYS OF THE LAW

In “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law” (WND, 736). He is here referring to the concept of the three periods of Buddhism—the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the

Law (or Shakyamuni's teaching). These are the three consecutive stages into which the time after Shakyamuni Buddha's death is divided.

During the Former Day of the Law, the pure spirit of Buddhism remained intact, and people could attain enlightenment through its practice. During the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism became firmly established in society. However, the emphasis was on formalities, and fewer people could benefit from it. In the Latter Day of the Law—the present age—the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness taint people's lives and Shakyamuni's Buddhism has lost the power to lead them to happiness.

There are several views on the length of the three periods. The Daishonin adopted the explanation found in the Sutra of the Great Assembly (Jpn Daishutsu Sutra), which describes five consecutive five-hundred-year periods following the Buddha's death. The first two five-hundred-year periods are regarded as the Former Day of the Law, and the following two five-hundred-year periods as the Middle Day of the Law. The fifth five-hundred-year period is regarded as the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, which continues indefinitely. The concept of the three time periods explains that as time passes, the conditions and capacity of the people also change and an appropriate teaching must be spread for each of the three periods.

There are several views regarding the date of Shakyamuni's death and when the Former Day of the Law began. Old legends and theories set it somewhere in the range between the eleventh century B.C.E. to the sixth century B.C.E. Chinese historians adopted 609 B.C.E. Recently, scholars have estimated Shakyamuni's death to have been around 480 B.C.E. or 380 B.C.E. This estimate is based on the discovery of a monument to King Ashoka in India. Inscriptions on the monument indicate the year when King Ashoka was enthroned. Since King Ashoka is believed to have been enthroned either 100 or 200 years after Shakyamuni's death, there is a 100-year variance in this estimation. Generally, it is now accepted that Shakyamuni lived in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E.

Nichiren Daishonin adopted the generally accepted view of his day—that of 949 B.C.E.—and estimated his time period, the thirteenth century, as 2,200-some years after Shakyamuni's death; this was 200-some years into the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. But if we base our calculation on recent findings, the Daishonin's time would be only 1,600 or 1,700 years after Shakyamuni's passing. When examining this discrepancy, it is important to note that the Daishonin took a close look at the conditions of religion and society in light of statements in various sutras. This fact is more significant than simple arithmetic. Therefore, it can be said that the Daishonin was living in the midst of conditions that could best be characterized as those of the Latter Day of the Law. Thirteenth-century Japan presented many characteristics of the Latter Day as described in the sutras—a strife-ridden period when the essence of Buddhism is lost and Buddhist priests become corrupt. The Sutra of the Great Assembly states that it will be an “age of conflict” when monks will disregard the precepts and feud constantly among themselves, erroneous views will prevail and Shakyamuni's Buddhism will perish.

It was under these circumstances that the Daishonin spread the Mystic Law contained in the Lotus Sutra—*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*—and faced numerous persecutions as predicted in the sutra. He spread the Mystic Law in an age of corruption and confusion, following Shakyamuni's injunction in the Lotus Sutra: “After I have passed into extinction, in the last five hundred year period you must spread it abroad widely and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils' people ... to seize the advantage!”

(LS23, 288). In contrast to other sutras, the Lotus Sutra views the Latter Day as the time when the essence of the Lotus Sutra, transferred to Bodhisattva Superior Practices at the Ceremony in the Air, will be propagated. It is important to keep in mind that whatever hypothesis we adopt regarding the date of Shakyamuni's passing, the time period in which the Daishonin lived was a reflection of predictions characteristic of the Latter Day. It was under horrific conditions that the Daishonin spread the Mystic Law and established the true object of devotion, the Gohonzon. In 1273 he wrote, "At this time the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear and establish in this country the object of devotion, foremost in Jambudvīpa" ("The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period After the Thus Come One's Passing," WND, 376).

The Daishonin's view of the Former and Middle days is not simply based on the number of consecutive years following Shakyamuni's death, but rather on the migration of Buddhism through India, China and Japan. In "The Selection of the Time," the Daishonin explains that the Former Day of the Law is the period in which Shakyamuni's Buddhism is spread by the twenty-four successors in India—those who inherited the lineage of his teachings ("The Selection of the Time," WND, 544-45). It was a time when Buddhism flourished in India—a view in accord with historical records. Aryasimha, the last of the twenty-four successors, is believed to have lived in central India during the sixth century. From around the seventh century, Buddhism became more esoteric and began to decline in that country.

In his discussion about the migration of Buddhism into China in "The Selection of the Time," the Daishonin explains that in the fifteenth year of the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was brought to China and that for one thousand years thereafter, it spread in China and Japan (WND, 545). Buddhism was imported into China in 2 B.C.E. or 65 C.E. So the beginning of the Middle Day, according to the Daishonin, falls around the beginning of the Common Era. Therefore, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai (538–597) lived around the middle of the Middle Day of the Law.

From his description in "The Selection of the Time," the Daishonin clearly did not view the transition from the Former to the Middle Day as a simple time-line. Rather, he thought of the Former and Middle days as the migration of Buddhism through India, China and Japan. Although the last several centuries of the Former Day in India and the first several centuries of the Middle Day in China overlap, this does not discount the merit of the Daishonin's view of the 2,000-year period of the Former and Middle days.

In "On the Buddha's Prophecy," the Daishonin states: "The moon appears in the west and sheds its light eastward, but the sun rises in the east and casts its rays to the west. The same is true of Buddhism. It spread from west to east in the Former and Middle Days of the Law, but will travel from east to west in the Latter Day" (WND, 401). According to the Daishonin, the Latter Day of the Law is when Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō will spread from Japan to the rest of the world. The SGI is fulfilling the Daishonin's prediction for the Latter Day of the Law as its members are introducing Buddhism to their friends the world over.

By the SGI-USA Study Department