

PASSAGES TO VICTORY (6)
LIVING BY EXAMPLE VERSUS SPREADING A METHOD
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Particular passages from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have become favorites of those who practice his Buddhism. This series introduces some of those passages and the people whose lives they have impacted, proving that it is, indeed, a living Buddhism.

In judging the relative merit of Buddhist doctrines, I, Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 599)

The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being. (WND, 852)

I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism by a former acting coach whose life so resonated "something special," that I had to inquire into the source. I remember how little she told me other than the simple statement, "I wouldn't do anything for ten minutes that didn't work." I believed her. The rest was up to me. In this simple act of suggestion, the seed of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and a sense of leadership were planted within me.

Instead of trying to convince me of what was "right," her life itself motivated me to want to know more. I was forced to be a leader in my own quest for truth and understanding. I was instantly forced to take ownership of my life. Isn't it too easy to just say, "Hey look, I found the right way, so I'm okay"? Such a perspective does not promote a true seeking mind. Through my Buddhist practice, I have developed a state of life where people now ask me about that "something special" they see in me. I simply point them in the direction of the SGI and explain the essence of the practice, which is faith, practice for oneself and others, and study. When they ask me what that means, I say, "Go find out! If you have questions, I'll make myself available to discuss them with you." This method of propagation has worked well for me.

Most religions that I am aware of have the concept of propagation associated with them. The need to spread one's religion or philosophical truth throughout the world generally stems from the hope that such an act will bring individuals together and so create a more peaceful, fulfilling, loving and dynamic society.

Religious propagation in the simplest sense is about helping people and society become infinitely happy. Yet, the very idea [method] of propagation can separate individuals instead of bringing them together. What is it that causes this separating factor in regard to religious propagation? Perhaps the separating factor occurs when those who propagate don't just make new information available, but make "right" information available. This "right" factor separates rather than unites and is the difference between striving for value as opposed to truth.

In *Education for Creative Living: Ideas and Proposals of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi*, the first president of the Soka Gakkai states the importance of distinguishing between value and truth. To be value creative is to take into account each person or situation before determining the best method or approach to any circumstance rather than finding the right approach for all circumstances. Hence, what is "correct" will change, be loose in its effectiveness, and so will always be of a fluid nature. This is the difference between propagation and propaganda.

Propaganda, by definition, is to purport news or fact — a statement that is certainly or strictly true. A philosophical truth of value, on the other hand, is never constant, but changing, just as the universe is always in flux and moving and changing.

This wisdom, I assume, enabled Nichiren Daishonin to go against what was believed to be “right” regarding the Buddhism of his era. By looking beyond what was generally perceived as correct, he was able to proclaim that all people were equally capable of enlightenment in their current lifetime. That which was true changed and so had value.

The Daishonin saw the essence of Buddhism, which is the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He saw that the Law does not exist outside our own lives — our lives are the Law. His writing “Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion,” states, “The daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] of the Lotus Sutra should be the object of devotion” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 365–66). The Lotus Sutra became Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which could be viewed simply as faith. When we practice the Law, we are engaged in the mysteriousness or unknown outcomes (Myoho) of our daily actions (Renge) and dialogue (Kyo). Emphasizing our Buddhist practice could be more valuable than emphasizing the Law, because it is the practice of Buddhism as actual proof that accesses the Law.

A method [Buddhist practice] is only as good as its practitioners. C.J. Jung appropriately states: “In reality, everything depends on the man and little or nothing on the method. The method is merely the path; the direction taken by a man, the way he acts, is the true expression of his nature. If it ceases to be this, the method is nothing more than an affectation, something artificially pieced on, rootless and sapless, serving only the illegitimate goal of self-deception. It becomes a means of fooling oneself and of evading what may perhaps be the implacable law of one’s being.”¹

Historically, religions, in their quest for peace or unity, have separated themselves from the “other” who held differing belief systems. An appropriate question for all truly spiritual or religious people is to find out how to choose a religious belief system without making other people wrong and so separating themselves from them. This is a difficult thing to do, in part because we are often taught to see things as either/or and right versus wrong. Can we hold our views as true and another’s as true and so honor what we really are, which is part of the same “one universe” that is constantly changing, evolving and growing? In doing so, we then bring ourselves to what really matters regarding religious methods of emancipation, which are the individuals rather than the method.

If we separate ourselves by ideas, are we not then promoting a division of people, versus unity or peace? And is this not a form of passive violence? In our quest for world peace, might it be worth asking if the Mystic Law of cause and effect can be expressed in many ways? I believe it can and such a perspective honors the fluidity of truth, creates value and supports the dynamic nature of our minds. Which also fosters the continual deepening of one’s enlightenment, which never ends. This is the meaning of human revolution. Human revolution is the continual process of understanding changing truths, which fosters acceptance, unity and harmony among people.

This is essential because it clarifies the essence of propagation as I see it, which is living by example versus spreading a method. Faith can then really be what spreads the Law of the universe. Human revolution then becomes kosen-rufu versus kosen-rufu being the spreading of the Law. Open suggestions enable a true transcendence from the realm of theory to actual knowing derived from real experience. It is impossible for someone to make another deeply understand something with just words. Telling someone the “right” answer is assuming too much authority, and prevents them from fully understanding the inner working of their own

minds. We have experienced this firsthand with the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in their dogmatic attitude of hierarchy, which also keeps Buddhism within the realm of theory versus experience.

As President Ikeda states in *For Today & Tomorrow*: “To lead a life in which we are inspired and can inspire others, our hearts have to be alive; they have to be filled with passion and enthusiasm. To achieve that, as President Toda also said, we need the courage to ‘live true to ourselves.’ And to live true to ourselves, we need the strength of mind not to be swayed by our environment or be obsessed with the vanity of superficial appearances. Rather than borrowing from or imitating others, we need the conviction to be able to think for ourselves and to take action from our own sense of responsibility.” I agree wholeheartedly. How can we “live true to ourselves,” if we are being told what is right, what to do and what to believe in? I believe that religions in general lose influential power by using language that emphasizes the institution versus the people or practitioners of a particular religion.

We of the SGI, I believe, have a responsibility to always check in with each other to be sure that we never fall into this dogmatic approach. Of course, I am not suggesting that all members come from this perspective. Each of us shares our faith to the best of our ability according to the circumstances and our wisdom. It might be worth investigating how we explain our ideas to others and the language used in those efforts. Things like, “Let’s spread the Law and the Daishonin’s Buddhism” could be rephrased as, “Manifesting your goals or your life as actual proof is spreading the Law.” Phrases like, “the Gohonzon knows” and “trust the Gohonzon” are limiting as they could easily cause people to seek the Gohonzon outside their own lives. It might be worth putting more effort into explaining that these phrases mean, “trust your Buddha nature” or “Buddha wisdom” which also suggests the need to go beyond our ordinary consciousness instead of relying on a visceral response and “your Buddha nature knows.”

Kosen-rufu means to create peace through propagating or making people aware of the Daishonin’s Buddhism as a vehicle toward world peace. When President Ikeda speaks with world figures, does he tell them that they have to chant and that chanting is the only way to world peace? He probably just explains why he feels our practice is valuable. In a nutshell, he emphasizes his life as actual proof versus telling others about a “right” way. It is a matter of true human revolution versus persuasive dialogue. Rather than striving to prove another religion “wrong,” is it not more value-creative to just prove ours right by living it?

1. C.G. Jung, *Psychology and the East* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press) 9.