

**SEPTEMBER STUDY MATERIAL
THE TREATMENT OF ILLNESS
(WND, P. 1113; GOSHO ZENSHU P. 997; FEB. 2000 DAIBYAKURENGE)**

The following is an excerpt from “The Treatment of Illness,” the study material for October study meetings in the SGI-USA.

Question: If, as you have stated, the benevolent deities inflict punishment on this country because it does harm to the votary of the Lotus Sutra, then epidemics should attack only the slanderers. Why is it that your own disciples also fall ill and die?

Answer: Your question is reasonable. Nevertheless, you are aware of only one side of the situation and not the other. Good and evil have been inherent in life since time without beginning. According to the provisional teachings and the schools based on them, both good and evil remain in one’s life through all the stages of the bodhisattva practice up to the stage of near-perfect enlightenment. Hence people at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment or below have faults of some kind, [but not those at the highest stage]. In contrast, the heart of the Lotus school is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage of perfect enlightenment. The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Brahma and Shakra, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven. The benevolent deities hate evildoers, and evil demons hate good people. Because we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, it is natural that evil demons should be everywhere in the country, just like tiles, stones, trees, and grasses. Good demons are few because sages and worthies are rare in this world. One would therefore expect to find more victims of the epidemic among Nichiren’s followers than among the believers of Nembutsu, or priests of the True Word, Zen, and Precepts schools. For some reason, however, there is less affliction and death among Nichiren’s followers. It is indeed mysterious. Is this because we are few in number, or because our faith is strong?

BACKGROUND

This letter was originally thought to have been written in 1282, but it now seems more likely that it was 1278. The month and the day of the letter are exactly the same as those of a letter written to Saemon, commonly known as Shijo Kingo, which may very well be the letter mentioned in the first paragraph (WND,1111). Nichiren Daishonin was living at Mount Minobu at the time.

The Daishonin’s life at Minobu was by no means easy. Winters were bitterly cold, and his shelter was inadequate. Food was another problem. Moreover, for nearly the entire first half of 1278, he had suffered from debilitating and chronic diarrhea. Shijo Kingo, who was well versed in the art of healing, had prescribed a medicine and sent it to the Daishonin, along with other offerings. Another grave concern for the Daishonin was the persecution of his followers in and around the village of Atsuhara, which began in July 1278.

“The Treatment of Illness” was a reply to Toki Jonin, who had anxiously written about the rampant epidemic. The Daishonin first classifies all diseases into two categories, physical and mental. Physical illness, can be cured by skilled physicians. However, illnesses of the mind are more complicated. Those that arise from the three poisons can be treated with the Hinayana

teachings, but those caused by slandering the correct or “essential” teaching can be cured only with the essential teaching. The Daishonin uses this term to indicate the Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo that lies in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

In the Latter Day of the Law, he says, evil demons prevail, attacking the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. “One would therefore expect,” the Daishonin tells Toki Jonin, “to find more victims of the epidemic among Nichiren’s followers than among” the believers of the other schools. “However,” he adds, “there is less affliction and death among Nichiren’s followers.”

In closing, the Daishonin points to the way to end the epidemic. The only way to do so is to demonstrate clearly that “this teaching” of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is supreme. By this, he means participating in and winning public debate on the relative superiority of the Buddha’s teachings. Then he clarifies the difference between the three thousand realms in a single moment of life expounded by T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo and what he himself expounds. He identifies this doctrine as Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

COMMENTARY

Question: If, as you have stated, the benevolent deities inflict punishment on this country because it does harm to the votary of the Lotus Sutra, then epidemics should attack only the slanderers. Why is it that your own disciples also fall ill and die?

The section of the letter we are studying begins with Nichiren Daishonin asking a question about why his followers also suffer from the epidemics afflicting the country. He often employed this style of question-and-answer dialogue in his writings to address the doubts and concerns of his disciples. The Daishonin may have heard this doubt expressed, or perhaps he wished to forestall it before it could arise. We note from many of his writings that he never avoided the doubts and questions of his followers but always anticipated them and addressed them forthrightly.

Leading up to this question, the Daishonin argues that the reason people are suffering from epidemics is that the country is filled with slander of the true teaching. In other words, their lives are in conflict with the law of the universe because they follow erroneous teachings. The appearance of epidemics is just one of the symptoms that indicate people’s internal lives are in disharmony. Because people and the environment in which they live are inseparable, the environment — the land, the country ... even the weather — reflects disharmony. The source of this disharmony is that people base their lives on incorrect teachings. To make this point, he uses the principle of the fivefold comparison.

The fivefold comparison is one criteria for the comparative evaluation of philosophies and religions. Nichiren Daishonin established this principle in 1272 in “The Opening of the Eyes” to demonstrate the supremacy of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo over all other teachings (see page 15). The five successive levels of comparison are 1) Buddhism is superior to non-Buddhism; 2) Mahayana Buddhism is superior to Hinayana Buddhism; 3) true Mahayana (the Lotus Sutra) is superior to provisional Mahayana (pre-Lotus Sutra); 4) the essential teaching or latter half of the Lotus Sutra is superior to the theoretical, first half of the Lotus Sutra; and 5) the Buddhism of sowing, Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, is superior to the Buddhism of the harvest, Shakyamuni’s Buddhism.

He addresses the selfish reasons why the country’s priests and ruler cannot admit the truth of his assertions — why they persecute the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Priests will lose all they have gained through donations and the support of the emperor if they suddenly abandoned the teachings of their schools. And the ruling powers will not oppose the majority and tradition handed down from previous rulers. As a result, they are filled with hatred and fear toward Nichiren Daishonin and all positive universal forces no longer protect the country.

The Daishonin then poses the question: if his followers are following the correct teaching, why are they also suffering?

Answer: Your question is reasonable. Nevertheless, you are aware of only one side of the situation and not the other. Good and evil have been inherent in life since time without beginning. According to the provisional teachings and the schools based on them, both good and evil remain in one's life through all the stages of the bodhisattva practice up to the stage of near-perfect enlightenment. Hence people at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment or below have faults of some kind, [but not those at the highest stage]. In contrast, the heart of the Lotus school is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage of perfect enlightenment. The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Brahma and Shakra, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven. The benevolent deities hate evildoers, and evil demons hate good people.

The argument has been made as to why a country full of slander is being punished, but what would cause the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra to suffer as well?

Although one may speak of the protection of benevolent deities or of attack by demons, these are no more than the externally manifested workings of the good or evil within people's lives. Since the country is filled with slanderers, the workings of demons predominate, and demons by nature hate votaries of the Lotus Sutra. The wonder is not that some believers fall ill and die in the epidemics, but that those stricken are so few.

The appearance of devils can be the result of slandering the Law but also they appear to persecute those who propagate the Law. The "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra predicts what opposition will face votaries of the Lotus Sutra who propagate the Law in the Latter Day. In "The Teaching, Capacity, Time, and Country," the Daishonin states: "In the 'Encouraging Devotion' chapter of the Lotus Sutra, it is recorded that, in the last five-hundred-year period, or two thousand or so years after the Buddha's passing, there will be three types of enemies of the Lotus Sutra. Our present age corresponds to this last five-hundred-year period. And as I, Nichiren, ponder the truth of the Buddha's words, I realize that these three types of enemies are indeed real. If I allow them to remain hidden, then I will not be the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Yet if I cause them to appear, then I am almost certain to lose my life" (WND, 52-53).

The persecutions predicted by Shakyamuni to occur in the Latter Day of the Law to those who propagate the true teaching prove the identity of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. As votaries of the Lotus Sutra, they pledged to overcome all obstacles to propagate the teaching that would relieve the suffering of all humanity.

In saying, "Good and evil have been inherent in life since time without beginning," the Daishonin teaches that all people are originally endowed with both delusion and enlightenment. In other words, all people possess the fundamental nature of enlightenment, or the Dharma nature, as well as fundamental darkness, which is the source of all illusions.

This view is far more profound than that of the provisional teachings. According to these teachings, people advance toward enlightenment as they progressively eradicate evil (desire and illusion). Buddhas have totally rid themselves of all evil and thus essentially differ from common mortals. However, the Lotus Sutra denies this view. According to its teaching, all human beings, common mortals and Buddhas alike, are equally entities of three thousand realms in a single moment, or the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. Even the Buddha has inherent evil—broadly meaning the six paths or, more specifically, the world of Hell. Because Buddhas retain these lower worlds, they can feel compassion for the people suffering in these states and are able

to save them. Similarly, even the most depraved common mortal has the potential for good—broadly indicating the four noble worlds, and specifically, the world of Buddhahood.

This view wipes out at a single stroke any spiritual gap between a Buddha and an ordinary person. The Buddha is not a saint or supernatural being divorced from ordinary people, for he or she retains all the nine worlds of an ordinary person's life.

In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda writes of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment after the Buddha triumphed over devilish forces and ponders whether or not to teach what he had realized: "If no one can comprehend this Law, any attempt to teach it to others would not only be futile, but could cause people to curse and berate me. Lack of understanding might even prompt some to persecute me." According to one account, at this point, demons reappeared to torment Shakyamuni. This episode can again be interpreted as a struggle with the devilish functions in his own life, which were now attempting to dissuade him from teaching the Law to others.

"Devilish functions thus continued to plague Shakyamuni even after he had become a Buddha. They vied to attack him through even the smallest breach in his heart.

"A Buddha is not a superhuman being; one who has attained this state continues to experience problems, suffering and pain and is still subject to illness and to temptation. For that reason, a Buddha is a person of courage, tenacity and continuous action who struggles ceaselessly against devilish functions" (NHR, vol. 3, pp. 152-53).

There is, nevertheless, a vital difference between a Buddha and a common mortal. Buddhas fully manifest the fundamental nature of enlightenment, and thus, though still possessing the lower states of life, they do not commit evil in their conduct. In common mortals, the nature of enlightenment is obscured by various illusions arising from the fundamental darkness. Accordingly, they do not see the true aspect of things and are led into various wrong actions, bringing suffering upon themselves. The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to elevate our basic state of life from the lower worlds to the higher ones, gradually establishing the world of Buddhahood as our fundamental condition. We will never eliminate Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger in the process, for they are "inherent in life since time without beginning." But as we continue to strengthen the world of Buddhahood through our sincere prayer to the Gohonzon, these as well as the others of the nine worlds will all come to function in an enlightened way.

This inner struggle between our deluded self and enlightened self, or the worlds of Buddhahood and Hell, is continuous. Without a proactive approach, we can easily fall into the lower worlds. Attaining the higher states of life requires concerted effort in our practice and action in daily life. If we perceive our inner fundamental darkness but fail to make efforts to conquer it, our lives become tainted by it. A good person is someone who struggles against evil. It is by opposing forces that cause suffering that we eradicate those forces within our lives.

Because we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, it is natural that evil demons should be everywhere in the country, just like tiles, stones, trees, and grasses. Good demons are few because sages and worthies are rare in this world. One would therefore expect to find more victims of the epidemic among Nichiren's followers than among the believers of Nembutsu, or priests of the True Word, Zen, and Precepts schools. For some reason, however, there is less affliction and death among Nichiren's followers. It is indeed mysterious. Is this because we are few in number, or because our faith is strong?

When one brings forth the fundamental nature of enlightenment, then, according to the principle of the oneness of life and its environment, various factors in one's surroundings will work to protect one. In "The Three Kinds of Treasure," Nichiren Daishonin states, "When the Buddha nature manifests itself from within, it will receive protection from without" (WND, 848). These

protective workings are personified in Buddhist texts as benevolent deities, such as Brahma and Shakra. On the other hand, when one's life is shrouded by the fundamental darkness, this delusion will manifest itself as negative workings in the environment that function to produce chaos and suffering.

These destructive functions are personified as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven and his attendant demons. People in the Daishonin's time were accustomed to the notion of gods, demons, devils, benevolent spirits and the like, so he often uses such terminology in his writings. Here, however, he makes clear that human beings are in no way controlled by supernatural, external forces; rather, both gods and demons are the outward expressions of one's own state of life.

The Latter Day of the Law is traditionally viewed as a corrupt age when the pure Law will be obscured and lost. Moreover, as the Daishonin explains, the vast majority of his contemporaries had become deluded as to which teachings were inferior and which superior, and accordingly became slanderers of the Law. Thus, in terms of the nation as a whole, the power of the protective gods is weak, while that of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven is thriving. Since the nature of this diabolical function is to obstruct the practice for enlightenment, one would expect, the Daishonin says, that more of his followers would fall victim to the epidemics than do believers in the provisional teachings. Yet the contrary is the case.

The Daishonin formally suggests two possible reasons for this phenomenon, saying "Is this because we are few in number, or because our faith is strong?" But this is a rhetorical question. In light of everything he ever taught, the latter is the valid explanation. Faith in the Gohonzon is more powerful than the most terrible array of evil forces. Faith has the power to conquer the workings of devils, and in conquering them, to grow stronger. Moreover, the power of faith has nothing to do with numerical odds. Even one individual isolated in a thoroughly life-denying environment will be protected and eventually emerge victorious, so long as that person maintains strong faith. Buddhism is win or lose, a struggle of good over evil.

By the SGI-USA Study Department

THE FIVEFOLD COMPARISON

Nichiren Daishonin established the fivefold comparison as a criteria for the comparative evaluation of philosophies and religions. This principle demonstrates the supremacy of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo over all other teachings.

1 Buddhism Is Superior to Non-Buddhist Teachings

Non-Buddhist teachings included Brahmanism in India, and Confucianism and Taoism in China.

Non-Buddhist teachings are not as profound as Buddhism in that they do not reveal the causal law of life that penetrates the three existences of past, present and future. Without such a causal view of life and the world, the teachings cannot serve as a guide for the people's ultimate happiness. Only through Buddhism, which elucidates the profound law of causality working within one's life, can all people attain absolute happiness.

Buddhism attributes the cause of all phenomena that bring about human happiness or unhappiness to the law of cause and effect functioning in the life of each individual, thereby enabling us to realize that the path to happiness lies within our lives, rather than outside. In contrast, non-Buddhist teachings generally ascribe the cause of such phenomena to external factors outside ourselves, such as transcendent beings or deities. That is why this comparison is called the comparison of the "Inner Way" (Buddhism) with the "Outer Way" (non-Buddhist teachings).

2 Mahayana Buddhism Is Superior to Hinayana Buddhism

Hinayana Buddhism is a teaching of personal emancipation only. In contrast, Mahayana Buddhism aims at both personal salvation and the salvation of others. Hinayana Buddhism is expounded for persons of the two vehicles (Learning and Realization—or voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones) and belongs to the teachings of what is known as the “age of meditation,” the second of the five periods in T’ien-t’ai’s classification of Shakyamuni’s teachings according to the order of preaching. It is called Hinayana (lesser vehicle) because it leads only a limited number of people to enlightenment.

Hinayana Buddhism regards one’s earthly desires as the cause of all suffering and asserts that suffering is eliminated only by eradicating those earthly desires. Hinayana practitioners aim at emancipation through austere practices. However, the ultimate goal of their practice can only be achieved at death, when both body and mind — the sources of suffering — are extinguished.

Their practice has accordingly been derided by Mahayanists as the teaching of “annihilating one’s consciousness and reducing one’s body to ashes.” Such a teaching, far from enabling all people to attain salvation, is entirely impossible to practice.

In contrast, Mahayana Buddhism is the teaching that expounds the bodhisattva practice as the means toward the happiness of both oneself and others. It is called Mahayana (greater vehicle) because it can carry many people to enlightenment. Where Hinayana teaches the elimination of earthly desires, Mahayana aims at redirecting and transforming them into a source of enlightenment by awakening us to our innate Buddha nature and establishing the Buddha nature as our fundamental state of life.

3 True Mahayana Is Superior to Provisional Mahayana

True Mahayana is the Lotus Sutra, a full and direct statement of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment. In contrast, provisional Mahayana, or the pre-Lotus Sutra Mahayana teachings, were expounded in various ways according to the people’s capacity, in order to prepare them to understand the Lotus Sutra.

In the provisional Mahayana teachings, the people of the two vehicles, women and evil persons, are excluded from the possibility of attaining enlightenment; in addition Buddhahood is attained only by advancing through progressive stages of bodhisattva practice over innumerable lifetimes. In contrast, the Lotus Sutra reveals that all people have the Buddha nature inherently, and that they are able to attain Buddhahood immediately by realizing that nature. Furthermore, the provisional Mahayana teachings assert that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time in India and do not reveal his original attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past, nor do they reveal the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. For these reasons, the provisional Mahayana teachings are inferior to the true Mahayana teachings.

4 The Essential Teaching of the Lotus Sutra Is Superior to the Theoretical Teaching

The twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra are divided into two parts: the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching, according to the role and status of Shakyamuni Buddha depicted in each. The theoretical teaching consists of the first fourteen chapters of the Lotus Sutra, and the essential teaching, the latter fourteen chapters.

In the same manner as the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, the theoretical teaching takes the form of preaching by the historical Shakyamuni who first attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree near the town of Gaya in India. Thus the theoretical teaching was expounded by Shakyamuni in a transient role, or aspect that he had assumed in order to save the people.

In contrast, the essential teaching, especially its core, the “Life Span” chapter, takes the form of preaching by Shakyamuni who discarded his transient status and revealed his true identity as the Buddha who had attained Buddhahood in the remote past. The Buddha of the essential teaching is called a true Buddha, as opposed to the provisional Buddha of the pre-Lotus Sutra and theoretical teachings, who conceals his true identity.

The essential teaching treats Buddhahood as a reality manifested in the life of Shakyamuni Buddha who gained his original enlightenment in the inconceivably distant past. Though Shakyamuni of the essential teaching had already attained Buddhahood, he was nevertheless born into this world as a common mortal, thus showing through his own example that Buddhahood is inseparable from ordinary human experience. For this reason, the essential teaching is considered superior to the theoretical teaching.

5 The Buddhism of Sowing Is Superior to the Buddhism of the Harvest

This is a comparison between Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism of sowing, which reveals the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo indicated in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter, and the Buddhism of the harvest, which is Shakyamuni’s essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

The process by which the Buddha leads people to enlightenment may be divided into three stages, called “sowing, maturing and harvesting.” The Buddha first plants the seed of enlightenment in people’s lives by teaching them the Law, then nurtures it through his preaching to elevate their capacity and finally brings them to full enlightenment, just as ripened grain is finally harvested.

The Buddhism of the harvest can save only those who have already accumulated good causes, that is, who have already received the seed of enlightenment from Shakyamuni in the remote past and nurtured it through Buddhist practice over the course of many lifetimes. For this reason, the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra was propagated for the sake of the people during Shakyamuni’s lifetime and the Former and Middle Days of the Law, who had already received the seed of Buddhahood from Shakyamuni and nurtured it over many lifetimes.

In contrast, the Buddhism of sowing, Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, implants the fundamental seed of Buddhahood, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, directly in the lives of the people of the Latter Day of the Law. Consequently, they can manifest Buddhahood in this lifetime by receiving the seed of enlightenment, that is, by embracing the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo hidden in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter, the core of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Although Shakyamuni Buddha revealed his enlightenment in the remote past as the effect of his Buddhist practice, he did not specify the original cause for his enlightenment, that is, the Law that led him to the supreme state of Buddhahood. In other words, Shakyamuni did not clarify the fundamental Law he himself had practiced to attain enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin disclosed that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the ultimate cause for the enlightenment of all Buddhas, as well as the fundamental Law that Shakyamuni Buddha had practiced to attain enlightenment. Nichiren Daishonin embodied this Law in the form of the object of devotion, the Gohonzon. In “The Teaching for the Latter Day” he states: “Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, neither the Lotus Sutra nor the other sutras lead to enlightenment. Only Nam-myoho-renge-kyo can do so” (WND, 903).

The comparison of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and that of Shakyamuni Buddha concludes the fivefold comparison and declares that the Daishonin’s Buddhism of sowing is the only way to enlightenment for all people in the Latter Day of the Law.