

DECEMBER STUDY MATERIAL
“THE KALPA OF DECREASE”
(WND, PP. 1121–122; GOSHO ZENSHU, P. 1466–467)

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin explains that the world declines as a result of human delusion. As greed, anger and foolishness increase, progressively higher teachings are needed to check their influence.

The following is an excerpt from “The Kalpa of Decrease,” the study material for December study meetings in the SGI-USA.

Now in this latter, evil age, great evil arises less from secular wrongdoing than in connection with the doctrines of the religious world. When people today, who are unaware of this, endeavor to cultivate roots of good, events that lead to the ruin of the world occur all the more. Although superficially it may seem to be an act of good to provide support to the priests of the Tendai, True Word, and other schools of the present age, in reality it is a great evil surpassing even the five cardinal sins¹ and the ten evil acts.²

For this reason, in order that peace reign in the age, if a wise man existed in the world with wisdom like that of the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, and if he met with a worthy ruler like King Sen’yo³; and if together they devoted themselves to putting an end to these acts of good and committed the great evil of censuring, banishing, cutting off alms to, or even beheading those persons of the eight schools⁴ who are thought to be men of wisdom, then the age may be pacified to some extent.

This is explained in the first volume of the Lotus Sutra where it says, “The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas.” In the phrase “consistency from beginning to end,”⁵ “beginning” indicates the root of evil and the root of good, and “end” indicates the outcome of evil and the outcome of good. One who is thoroughly awakened to the nature of good and evil from their roots to their branches and leaves is called a Buddha. T’ien-t’ai stated, “Life at each moment is endowed with the Ten Worlds.”⁶ Chang-an stated, “The Buddha intended these as his ultimate teachings. How could they ever be easy to understand?”⁷ Miao-lo added that “this principle is the ultimate revelation of his [T’ien-t’ai’s] final and supreme teaching.”⁸ The Lotus Sutra states, “[The doctrines that they preach ...] will never be contrary to the true reality.”⁹ T’ien-t’ai commented on this, saying that “no worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality.”¹⁰ A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather, one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world is governed.

When the Yin dynasty became corrupt and the people were suffering, T’ai-kung Wang¹¹ appeared in the world and beheaded King Chou¹² of the Yin, bringing an end to the people’s misery. When the Second Emperor of the Ch’in dynasty¹³ caused the people to taste bitterness, Chang Liang¹⁴ appeared and restored order to the world, enabling them to know sweetness. Though these men lived before the introduction of Buddhism, they helped the people as emissaries of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. And though the adherents of the non-Buddhist scriptures were unaware of it, the wisdom of such men contained at heart the wisdom of Buddhism.

If there were a ruler of outstanding wisdom in the world today, at the time of the great earthquake of the Shoka era, or at the time of the great comet of the Bun’ei era,¹⁵ he

would surely have heeded me, Nichiren. Or even if that had not happened, when strife broke out within the ruling clan in the ninth year of Bun'ei (1272), or when the Mongols attacked in the eleventh year of the same era, he would have welcomed me as King Wen of the Chou dynasty welcomed T'ai-kung Wang, or sought me out as King Kao-ting¹⁶ of the Yin dynasty sought out Fu Yüeh from seven *ri*¹⁷ away. Thus it is said that the sun and moon are not treasures to one who is sightless, and that a worthy man will be hated by a foolish ruler. Rather than go on at length, I will stop here. The heart of the Lotus Sutra is just as I have explained. You should not think of it as otherwise. Great evil portends the arrival of great good. If all of Jambudvipa¹⁸ were to be thrown into chaos, there could be no doubt that [this sutra would] "be widely propagated throughout Jambudvipa."¹⁹

1. The five most serious offenses in Buddhism. Explanations vary according to sutras and treatises. The most common version is: (1) killing one's father, (2) killing one's mother, (3) killing an arhat, (4) injuring a Buddha, and (5) causing disunity in the Buddhist Order.
2. Killing, stealing, unlawful sexual intercourse, lying, flattery (or random and irresponsible speech), defaming others, duplicity, greed, anger, and foolishness (or the holding of mistaken views).
- 3 The name of Shakyamuni in a previous existence. According to the Nirvana Sutra, the king Sen'yo was the ruler of a great kingdom and a believer in the Mahayana sutras. When five hundred Brahmans slandered the Mahayana teachings, he had them put to death. Because of this act, he was never thereafter in danger of falling into hell. This story is not meant to condone killing of slanderers but rather to demonstrate the gravity of slander and the importance of protecting the Law. Sen'yo is the Japanese rendering of his name; his Sanskrit name is unknown.
4. The eight major schools of Buddhism in Japan before the Kamakura period (1185–1333). They are: the Dharma Analysis Treasury (Jpn Kusha), Establishment of Truth (Jojitsu), Precepts (Ritsu), Dharma Characteristics (Hosso), Three Treatises (Sanron), Flower Garland (Kegon), Tendai, and True Word (Shingon) schools. The first six schools flourished in the Nara period (710–794), while the Tendai and True Word schools rose to prominence during the Heian period (794–1185).
5. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2. This phrase concludes the passage describing "the true aspect of all phenomena." The full passage reads, "The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end."
6. *Great Concentration and Insight*.
7. *The Annotations on "The Treatise on the Observation of the Mind."*
8. *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight."*
9. Lotus Sutra, chap. 19.
10. *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*.
11. T'ai-kung Wang was teacher and adviser to Hsi Po, the Earl of the West (later known as King Wen of the Chou dynasty). His strategies are said to have enabled Hsi Po's son, King Wu, to overthrow the Yin dynasty and establish the Chou dynasty.
12. The last ruler of the Yin (Shang) dynasty, which ended in the eleventh century B.C.E. Infamous as an oppressive ruler, together with King Chieh of the Hsia dynasty, he is regarded as the epitome of tyranny. He was prone to drunkenness and debauchery, and was encouraged in his evildoing by his favorite concubine, Ta Chi. Because of his corruption and cruelty, the feudal lords and people of the kingdom eventually turned against him. He was finally defeated by King Wu of the Chou dynasty.

13. The Second Emperor of the Ch'in dynasty refers to Hu Hai (229–207 B.C.E.). A puppet ruler, he was controlled by the eunuch official Chao Kao, who eventually forced Hu Hai to commit suicide to further his own ambitions.
14. (d. 168 B.C.E.) A statesman and strategist who assisted Liu Pang, or Emperor Kao-tsu, in the overthrow of the Ch'in and the establishment of the Former Han dynasty of China.
15. References are to a major earthquake that leveled much of Kamakura in 1257 and to a large comet that appeared in 1264.
16. Kao-ting was the twenty-second ruler of the Yin dynasty. According to *Records of the Historian*, he sought to revive the declining Yin dynasty, but was unable to find capable advisers. At length he learned of Fu Yüeh, and though he had been living in retirement, Kao-ting appointed him his minister. Because of Fu Yüeh's counsel, Kao-ting was able to revive the dynasty.
17. (Jpn) A unit of linear measurement. The exact definition of *ri* (Chin *li*) differed in China and Japan, and from era to era. In Japan at different times it equaled about 450, 545, or 655 meters. In China it equaled about 250, 400, or 530 meters.
18. One of the four continents situated in the four directions around Mount Sumeru. Jambudvipa is located to the south and is the place where the Buddhas appear. It is often used in the sense of the entire world.
19. The Daishonin alludes here to a passage from chapter 28 of the Lotus Sutra that states, "After the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvipa and will see that it never comes to an end."

BACKGROUND

Neither the date nor addressee of this letter is known. Judging from the concluding paragraph, Nichiren Daishonin may have sent it via his disciple Acharya Daishin to someone in the clan of the late lay priest Takahashi Rokuro Hyoe, a believer who lived in Kajima in Fuji District of Suruga Province. In the opening statement the Daishonin says, "The kalpa of decrease has its origin in the human heart." He then explains that the world declines as a result of human delusion, and that, as the greed, anger and foolishness of people's hearts intensify, progressively higher teachings are needed to check that influence. In the present time, the Latter Day of the Law, those three poisons are so pervasive that the provisional teachings not only fail to restrain them, but aggravate them all the more. In this age, the Daishonin explains, the worst evils actually arise, not from secular misdeeds, but from attachment to the doctrines of the various schools of Buddhism, whose practice no longer leads one to salvation. Citing the passage from the "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra "The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas," the Daishonin explains that only the Buddhas' wisdom is capable of discerning the supreme truth that will bring about peace in the world. He also explains that a person of true wisdom is not one who carries out the Buddhist practice in isolation from the world, but who thoroughly comprehends the principles by which the world may be governed. This is in keeping with the Lotus Sutra's teaching that the ultimate reality is manifest in all phenomena. In this sense, the wise ministers who helped bring peace to their dynasties in China in the ages before the introduction of Buddhism may be said to have grasped a portion of the Buddhist Law.

Though the ruler of Japan did not heed the Daishonin's admonition that only faith in the Mystic Law could restore peace to the land, the Daishonin nevertheless was convinced that his teaching would one day flourish. As suggested by the title of this letter, the disasters besetting society in his time were viewed by the Daishonin from one perspective as stemming from

human delusion and attachment to inferior teachings. However, as indicated by the statement “Great evil portends the arrival of great good,” the Daishonin also interpreted them from another perspective as heralding the rise and spread of the supreme Law.

COMMENTARY

“Now in this latter, evil age, great evil arises less from secular wrongdoing than in connection with the doctrines of the religious world. When people today, who are unaware of this, endeavor to cultivate roots of good, events that lead to the ruin of the world occur all the more....”

The perversion of religion is often a cause for much violence, destruction and misery in the world. Since religion forms the basis of human activity, dogma that disregards the dignity of life or a teaching originally founded upon the humanistic principles that is perverted by irrational zealots will debase human life into a means for selfish ends. Here, Nichiren Daishonin explains that in the Latter Day of the Law, erroneous interpretations of Buddhist doctrines will actually bring more suffering and unhappiness upon the people than will secular wrongdoing. Because people can easily recognize secular wrongdoing, such as stealing or killing, as bad, they usually avoid committing such acts. However, because actions based on erroneous interpretations of religious doctrines often appear on the surface to be sincere acts, many people may inadvertently go against the true, humanistic purpose of religion despite their good intentions. Such perversion of religion, furthermore, provides a psychological context in which believers rationalize “secular wrongdoing” and ultimately the irrational disregard for human life, as some terrorists invoke the “holy war” to justify the killing of innocent citizens. The debasement of religion into authoritarianism is not only the greatest harm done to religion itself, but also undermines the absolute dignity of life.

This is why the Daishonin encourages us time and again to develop keen intellect in order to discern what is good and what is evil — that is, what empowers human life and what enfeebles human life; what encourages the freedom, reason and independence of an individual and what discourages those essential human qualities; and ultimately what leads people to happiness and what leads them to suffering. The standard for good and evil is often confused in a self-righteous, sectarian debate of ideology and religion. In “The Kalpa of Decrease,” however, the Daishonin points out that people’s happiness is the cornerstone of Buddhist wisdom and the ultimate good.

One way to discern good from evil in interpreting Buddhist teachings is to examine everything from the perspective of the fundamental purpose and spirit of Buddhism. Buddhism recognizes the potential for the supreme life-condition of Buddhahood in all people — as Shakyamuni addresses one of his leading disciples in the Lotus Sutra, “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). The Lotus Sutra recognizes the essential equality of all people based on their potential to reveal themselves as Buddhas. The fundamental posture of Buddhism toward life, therefore, is respect for the dignity of each person’s life, regardless of social status, race, sex or beliefs. In other words, the fundamental spirit of Buddhism can be called humanism as it encourages the revelation of each person’s highest potential.

Unfortunately, as the Daishonin cautions us in the above passage, Buddhism is not exempt from the misinterpretation of its intent and teaching that has also plagued many other religions.

The tendency to deviate from the original spirit of Buddhism is noted especially in the clergy, the Daishonin points out. Because they tend to practice apart from the ordinary people, they easily lose sight of the purpose of their practice — the happiness of the people. The ultimate purpose of Buddhism, or any religion, must exist in the happiness of people. When the freedom and integrity of individuals are subordinated to ideology or dogma, great suffering results. Such distortion of religion takes place so subtly that it often escapes the attention of most people, and people’s devotion to such perverted religion could appear only as a sign of sincerity and piety. This is one of the reasons why some religions in the world have been used as an instrument of, rather than the solution to, violence and misery. Keenly aware of religion’s tendency toward corruption, the Daishonin is reminding us of this danger.

“For this reason, in order that peace reign in the age, if a wise man existed in the world with wisdom like that of the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment, and if he met with a worthy ruler like King Sen’yo; and if together they devoted themselves to putting an end to these acts of good and committed the great evil of censuring, banishing, cutting off alms to, or even beheading those persons of the eight schools who are thought to be men of wisdom, then the age may be pacified to some extent.”

Recognizing that authoritarian ideology and dogma lead people to suffering, here the Daishonin explains the importance of developing wisdom and taking concrete steps to prevent the spread of misleading religion. The Daishonin’s solution to the confusion and misery of society lies in the building of the solidarity between “a wise man” and “a worthy ruler;” that is, the establishment of humanism as one’s spiritual basis and the establishment of government capable of actualizing humanism in the political and economic reality of the ordinary people. Judging from the context of the letter, it is clear that “wisdom like that of the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment” refers to the Buddhist wisdom to recognize the dignity of life in all people and “a worthy ruler” to a government that encourages people to actualize their innate dignity in their personal and social life.

In the above passage, the Daishonin speaks of “beheading those persons of the eight schools.” His intent behind this seemingly violent expression is rhetorical and symbolic, rather than literal. As decapitation was the punishment his society meted out for the offender of most heinous crimes, the Daishonin here impresses the gravity of the offense committed by those who pervert religion into a dogma that enslaves and enfeebles people. Furthermore, the beheading of corrupt priests symbolically signifies the prevention of corrupt priests from further spreading their authoritarian dogma.

As a realistic measure to prevent the spread of erroneous Buddhist teachings, the Daishonin emphasized the cessation of financial support for corrupt priests. In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin explains the meaning of the Nirvana Sutra that describes the killing of slanderous monks. The Daishonin writes: “My only hatred is for the act of slandering the Law. According to the Buddhist teachings, prior to Shakyamuni slanderous monks would have incurred the death penalty. But since the time of Shakyamuni, the One Who Can Endure, the giving of alms to slanderous monks is forbidden in the sutra’s teachings. Now if all the four kinds of Buddhists within the four seas and the ten thousand lands would only cease giving alms to wicked priests and instead all come over to the side of the good, then how could any more troubles rise to plague us, or disasters come to confront us?” (WND, 23).

As he clearly explains in this passage, the Daishonin’s prime focus is on clarifying people’s attachment to misleading teachings so that they may establish a correcting understanding of

life. So long as people support a corrupt religious authority, financially or otherwise, with good intent or out of ignorance, they not only remain blind to the supreme truth of Buddhahood, but also commit the same offense of destroying Buddhism from within.

“One who is thoroughly awakened to the nature of good and evil from their roots to their branches and leaves is called a Buddha.... A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather, one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world is governed.”

In this paragraph, the Daishonin explains what type of understanding is necessary if we are to distinguish good from evil and establish peace in the world. He calls this in the previous paragraph the “wisdom like that of the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment.” The Daishonin, furthermore, issues a strict warning against the clergy of his day that religious leaders must remain involved with the lives of ordinary people and society, for Buddhism is an *engaged* religion that does not exist apart from the lives of ordinary people.

Citing the phrases from the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin says, “One who is thoroughly awakened to the nature of good and evil from their roots to their branches and leaves is called a Buddha.” The concept of good and evil is often confusing because standards used to distinguish good from evil seem to change constantly in history. A similar use of physical force, for example, could be deemed courageous or cowardly, noble or ignoble, depending on the circumstances. One’s service to the nation could be regarded as patriotism or fanaticism. As mentioned earlier, Buddhism simply explains that *good* means happiness or positive value for human life and that *evil* means unhappiness or anti-value for human life.

The “root of evil” refers to the fundamental cause of unhappiness and suffering, which Buddhism calls the “fundamental darkness” or the innate human tendency to ignore or deny one’s supreme potential of Buddhahood. “The root of good” indicates the fundamental cause of happiness, which Buddhism identifies as the “fundamental enlightenment,” the “Dharma nature,” or the “Buddha nature.” When these “roots” of good and evil manifest themselves in both our individual lives and society as “branches and leaves,” we will experience them as either happiness or suffering.

The true aspect of all phenomena is the law that permeates the universe, the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Because Buddhas understand this fundamental law of life and the universe, they can also perceive the consistency between causes (“beginning”) and effects (“end”). In this sense, the Buddha’s wisdom can be called the ability to discern the fundamental cause of suffering. It may be relatively easy to trace the sequence of events back to a superficial cause of a problem, such as traffic accidents or illness; however, it is rather difficult to deeply understand the fundamental cause of suffering, that is, our ignorance of Buddhahood. The mere intellectual understanding of our Buddhahood lacks the ability to influence our action. Only when such an idea is deeply felt and becomes the foundation of our personal belief will the idea be capable of manifesting the reality it represents. It is through our sincere prayer that we can experience and appreciate the greatness of our Buddhahood. So, when we face obstacles, instead of disparaging ourselves, we should summon forth our courage to believe in the strength of our innate Buddhahood. Our prayer, in this sense, is a process of our self-affirmation, not of self-denial; it is a struggle to challenge our tendency to disregard life’s dignity.

Next, referring to T’ien-t’ai’s famous passage, the Daishonin teaches us that a person of wisdom is one who thoroughly understands the various aspects of society and uses wisdom to actualize the Buddhist ideal of humanism within society. “A person of wisdom,” in this sense,

specifically refers to the Daishonin himself. When the Daishonin taught his followers the profound Buddhist teachings, he made it easier for them to understand by using examples from many aspects of society, such as politics, foreign diplomacy, literature, history and, most importantly, people's actual daily living. Wisdom in the Daishonin's teachings is never merely an accumulation of knowledge and information; it is the power of intellect and character that enables one to use knowledge and information for the sake of people's happiness.

In the phrase, "wisdom like that of the World-Honored One of Great Enlightenment," the World-Honored One, one of the ten honorable titles of a Buddha, means an awakened one, endowed with great wisdom and virtue, who can naturally win the respect of all people. From this, we can also understand that a person of wisdom is one who can benefit all people and earn their respect by respecting them equally. The Buddha's wisdom goes far beyond mere knowledge of worldly affairs to include using that knowledge to serve the well-being of people.

In "The Mongol Envoys," the Daishonin states, "One who can, in accordance with the time, discern without the slightest error what is important both for oneself and for the country is a person of wisdom" (WND, 628). Considering the condition of today's world, what is vital to ourselves as well as to humanity? The wide-ranging issues — such as terrorism and war, environment and human rights, and a sense of powerlessness that plagues people not only in developing nations, but also developed, democratic societies like ours — are critical to the safety and happiness of the people worldwide. In this light, our challenge as "persons of wisdom" is to tackle these global, local and personal issues confronting us today through empowering our own lives by our Buddhist practice and spreading the Buddhist ideal of life's sanctity, based on our thorough understanding of "the principles by which the world is governed." From this perspective, we can better understand our SGI activities to promote peace, culture and education as concrete expressions of the Buddha's wisdom that the Daishonin teaches in this letter.

"Though these men lived before the introduction of Buddhism, they helped the people as emissaries of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. And though the adherents of the non-Buddhist scriptures were unaware of it, the wisdom of such men contained at heart the wisdom of Buddhism."

Nichiren Daishonin emphasizes that Buddhism is an engaged religion that is open to society. Buddhism does not exist apart from our mundane existence. Rather, it is the role of Buddhism to influence society so that all aspects of society — such as politics, economics, culture, science and technology — may function to help people become free and happy.

When we look at today's society, so many institutions created by people — such as government, business, church and even culture and fashion — tend to enslave their own creators, rather than serving their happiness. People are working for the companies and the nations, not the other way around. People are serving religion, instead of religion serving people. Since Buddhism is a religion that seeks to relieve people of their fundamental sufferings (i.e., the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death), we as Buddhists have a great role to play in society and should always strive to find out what people are seeking and how we can help them to attain happiness. Since this is the fundamental spirit of Buddhism, those who genuinely work for people's happiness share the spirit of Buddhism, regardless of their faith or their actual knowledge of Buddhism. So it is vital for us to forge the bonds of trust and friendship with those who believe in life's sanctity and work for the improvement of human life beyond the difference of religion, for such solidarity represents a spread of Buddhist wisdom.

In the above paragraph, the Daishonin praises T'ai-kung Wang and Chang Liang, who understood the people's hearts and worked to relieve them of suffering, as "emissaries of Shakyamuni Buddha" despite their ignorance of Buddhism. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni states: "If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work" (LS, 162). The Daishonin calls those who work for the people's happiness the "emissaries of Shakyamuni Buddha" because their efforts represent the spirit of the Lotus Sutra and "the Thus Come One's work." In the same letter, however, the Daishonin condemns the corrupt priests of other Buddhist sects, although they were regarded as religious experts at that time, for not understanding the intent and purpose of Buddhism. Praising non-Buddhists as Buddhists for their humanism and condemning Buddhists as non-Buddhists for their authoritarianism — in these contrasting attitudes, we can see the Daishonin's broad and tolerant perspective on humanity, transcending a narrow, religious sectarianism. The Daishonin here seems to encourage us to overcome any dogmatic or self-righteous attitude to discriminate against non-Buddhists as well as other Buddhists who practice outside the SGI. At the same time, we must maintain our strict watch against any form of authoritarianism both within our own lives and in our environment.

In this sense, our Soka Spirit movement lies in the efforts to cultivate our compassion so that we may embrace all people transcending any difference and, at the same time, challenge any influence on people that denies their dignity, freedom and happiness. It is important to understand that those seemingly conflicting aspects of our tolerance toward humanity and our challenge against authoritarianism stems from the same root of compassion and respect for humanity. Without compassion, our tolerance of others would become a selfish attitude of detachment from others, literally *tolerating* others despite our fundamental contempt toward them. Without love and respect for humanity, our challenge against authoritarianism would become a contest of ego, solely driven by the desire to prove our superiority. Through the Daishonin's own example, we can learn that true tolerance for humanity and intolerance toward injustice are one and the same at the root of compassion.

“Great evil portends the arrival of great good. If all of Jambudvipa were to be thrown into chaos, there could be no doubt that [this sutra would] ‘be widely propagated throughout Jambudvipa.’”

In the paragraph that contains the above passage, the Daishonin explains that he is a person of wisdom who is needed to bring peace to the troubled world. Observing the people's suffering caused by repeated disasters, such as the great earthquake of the Shoka era, the Daishonin identified the cause of people's misery as their ignorance of their innate Buddhahood and offered faith in the Lotus Sutra as a solution. He repeatedly remonstrated with the shogunate government to save the people from their current plight. His voice, however, fell on deaf ears. As he had predicted in "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," the disasters of internal strife and foreign invasion soon became a reality.

In February 1272, Hojo Tokisuke, an elder half-brother of the regent Hojo Tokimune, was killed for plotting a revolt against his younger brother. In October 1274, the Mongol forces, in massive numbers, swept through the islands of Tsushima and Iki, and struck Kyushu in the southern part of Japan. Through the Daishonin's efforts to remonstrate with the authorities and the fulfillment of his prophecies, it should have been obvious to the Japanese military

government that he was a sage whose wisdom could bring peace to society. On the contrary, instead of heeding his advice, the military government severely persecuted the Daishonin. As he explains in this letter, “A worthy man will be hated by a foolish ruler.” The government officials, who were only concerned about the preservation of their power, could not understand the Daishonin’s wisdom for the sake of people’s happiness.

Toward the end of this paragraph, the Daishonin, faced with great crises in society, affirms that the Mystic Law will spread and bring peace throughout the entire world, saying, “Great evil portends the arrival of great good.” During the Daishonin’s time, the people in Japan were suffering from repeated violence and war, widespread pestilence and famine. Today we are also facing great crises — continuous violence and conflicts such as the indiscriminate destruction of human life we witnessed on Sept. 11. We also continue to face environmental destruction, disease and troubled economies on a global scale. Through this passage, the Daishonin encourages us to take these global crises as an opportunity to bring peace to the world based on the Buddhist ideal of humanism and life’s absolute dignity.

In many writings, the Daishonin views the crises of Japanese society at that time from two perspectives. First, the Daishonin identifies the crises as the effect of people’s slander of the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the universality of Buddhahood. In other words, the Daishonin explains that people are suffering because they, overcome by the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness, do not grasp the absolute dignity of life.

From another perspective, however, the Daishonin considers the tragic disasters of his time as an omen of the spread of the Mystic Law, of the humanistic philosophy of Buddhism. Regarding these two different viewpoints, in “On Rebuking Slander of the Law and Eradicating Sins,” the Daishonin writes: “Question: With regard to the great earthquake of the Shoka era, in your remonstrative letter ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,’ which you entrusted to the lay priest Yadoya for submission to His Lordship, the late lay priest of Saimyo-ji, on the sixteenth day of the seventh month in the first year of the Bunno era (1260), with the cyclical sign *kanoe-saru*, you stated your opinion that heaven and earth had become angered because the people of Japan were destroying Buddhism by their reliance on Honen’s *Nembutsu Chosen Above All*, and that this error would bring about rebellion within the country and invasion from countries abroad. But now you say that the earthquake was an auspicious omen of the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. How do you explain the discrepancy between these two views?”

“Answer: That is a very good question. The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra says, ‘Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?’²⁰ And in the seventh volume, referring again to the time ‘after his passing’ when things will be much worse, the Buddha says, ‘After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa.’²¹ So we see that the hatred that abounds after the passing of the Buddha will come about in the last five-hundred-year period when Myoho-renge-kyo will spread. And immediately following the above passage, the Buddha warns of dangers from ‘evil devils, the devils’ people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, and kumbhanda demons’” (WND, 441).

Quoting from the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin, in the above passage, states that we should regard the Latter Day of the Law, that is, our present age, as the time of *kosen-rufu* and exert ourselves in spreading the Mystic Law. Although we face many hardships and obstacles, he explains, we should regard the present time most positively as the auspicious omen of the worldwide spread of the humanistic ideal of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Essentially, all phenomena are effects that have causes. In our lives, therefore, it is important

to understand the causes of our suffering in order to find correct solutions. But if we stop here, all we do is just recognize our problems and their causes—doing nothing to change our suffering in reality. Sometimes the magnitude of our problems discourages us from taking further action. For this reason, it is important to respond to our personal problems as well as to our global issues with a determination to create value for the future. In this process, it is crucial for us to have faith in our strength to improve our situation, that is, faith in our own Buddhahood. The process of overcoming an obstacle — whether it is personal or global — is our challenge to overcome a feeling of powerlessness; it essentially depends on the strength of our faith to make a meaningful change in our lives as well as in society.

The Daishonin understood the cause of people’s suffering, but he did not stop there. Understanding people’s inner strength to change their lives and society, the Daishonin viewed the crises in Japanese society as an omen of peace and harmony, further strengthening his resolve to spread the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra. In this regard, it is most important to approach an obstacle in the most positive manner, just as the Daishonin did, to create value for the future. Sometimes when we face our deeply rooted negative karma, we feel incapable of changing it and lose hope. In this passage, however, the Daishonin teaches us to use our innate Buddha wisdom to look at our problems positively so that we may continue to challenge them until we overcome them. This is not merely positive thinking. This kind of powerful, optimistic attitude comes from our strong conviction in our Buddhahood.

There is a scene in the movie *Limelight* where an old, shabby comedian, played by Charlie Chaplin, encourages a young ballet dancer who has lost hope because of her disabled legs, saying: “Think of the power that’s in the universe — moving the Earth, growing the trees. And that’s the power within you. If you only have courage and a will to use it!” In another scene, Chaplin says to the ballet dancer: “I’m an old weed. The more I’m cut down, the more I spring up again.” Some scientists hold that living creatures display their maximum potential under “sub-optimal” conditions. In this letter, the Daishonin is saying to us that a crisis is the best condition to bring forth from our lives the great wisdom, courage and compassion of a Buddha.

The greater the suffering we face, the more profound the wisdom we can tap within our lives and the more hope and courage we can summon forth. In this regard, Carl Hilty, a Swiss philosopher, commented, “Unhappiness is essential to happiness” and “Through our victory over cares, comes the most essential part of human happiness” (*Happiness: Essays on the Meaning of Life*, trans. Francis G. Peabody, p. 119, p.104). The source of wisdom, hope and courage to overcome unhappiness is our faith in the Gohonzon, that is, our faith in our innate Buddhahood. Expressing joy and hope in the face of the great persecutions and obstacles, in “Great Evil and Great Good,” the Daishonin says: “Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows. Since great slander already exists in our land, the great correct Law will spread without fail. What could any of you have to lament? Even if you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should all perform a dance. Even if you are not Shariputra, you should leap up and dance. When Bodhisattva Superior Practices emerged from the earth, did he not emerge dancing?” (WND, 1119).

With such profound optimism displayed by the Daishonin, let us continue our efforts for kosen-rufu, no matter how disheartening the situations around us may look. Let us not forget that a crisis is a chance to tap our greatest courage and hope from within.

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20. Lotus Sutra, chap. 10.

21. Ibid. chap. 23.

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