

**WORDS TO WIN BY
THE THREE EXISTENCES OF LIFE
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From 'A Sage Perceives the Three Existences of Life,' The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 641–43.

With such perception one can see the distant future by looking at what is close at hand. One can infer what will be from what exists in the present. This is the meaning of [the passage from the Lotus Sutra that says, 'This reality consists of] the appearance...and their consistency from beginning to end.' (WND, 641)

At the beginning of this letter, written to Toki Jonin in 1275, Nichiren Daishonin states, “A sage is one who fully understands the three existences of life—past, present and future” (WND, 641). By sage, he means a Buddha.

Shakyamuni’s prophecy of the future flow of kosen-rufu and the Daishonin’s variety of prophecies, including his prediction of the Mongol invasion, are not based on clairvoyance or the occult. In fact, the Daishonin specifically warns us to “not rely on another’s sharp senses or occult powers” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 16).

The Buddha’s ability to see the future and understand the past is based on a profound grasp of and confidence in the law of cause and effect. “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past,” the Daishonin teaches, “look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (WND, 279).

Understanding the conditions of Japanese society in his time, the Daishonin could foresee that unless a fundamental change took place within the lives of human beings, the rampancy of the three poisons (greed, anger and foolishness) would inevitably lead to conflict and strife both internally and with other nations. He thus predicted with full confidence both internal strife and foreign invasion in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” (WND, 6–32).

We, too, predict the future. We do it all the time. For instance, we can easily predict what will happen tomorrow in the early morning: The sun will rise. This is because we know and have confidence in the laws of gravity and such. We do not have to be astronomers or psychics to know that the sun will rise tomorrow.

We also predict less obvious things on a daily basis. That an arrogant person has relationship problems, for example, does not really surprise us. We do not have to be Oprah to figure that one out.

The point is that cause and effect is a matter of simple common sense. And with our Buddhist practice, we are able to apply the profound insight that we tap from within to this causal law of life. As our practice develops, we, too, can clearly see many causes and effects in the present as links to our future. We can see that the present moment encompasses both our past causes and, most importantly, the opportunity to make the greatest causes for our future happiness.

Perceiving the three existences of life is not a matter of speculation or fortunetelling, then. It is a natural ability that we all have as human beings that is strengthened and sustained by abundant chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. When we fully awaken it, this becomes a wellspring of hope and one of the greatest benefits of our faith.