

**WORDS TO WIN BY  
PUTTING RESPECT INTO ACTION  
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*From 'A Sage Perceives the Three Existences of Life,' The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 641–43.*

**My disciples, know this! I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra. Since I follow in the footsteps of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, those who despise and slander me will have their heads broken into seven pieces, while those who believe in me will amass good fortune as high as Mount Calm and Bright. (WND, pp. 641–42)**

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appears in the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra to propagate Buddhism through bowing in deepest respect toward all people, toward their innate Buddhahood. However, in spite of his altruistic practice, people ridicule and attack him. Although they fall into hell for this slander, after expiating the negative effects they have made, they are again reborn with him and attain Buddhahood by practicing the correct Law.

This story and the above quotation illustrate the two principles of benefit and punishment in Buddhism. In fact, both the ideas of benefit and punishment are written on either side of the Gohonzon. Based on the law of causality, the good cause of embracing the Gohonzon will be rewarded with benefit, while the bad cause of slandering it will generate negative reward or punishment.

We need not be overly anxious about punishment, since the very act of carrying out our Buddhist practice is the greatest good cause we can make. At the same time, though, if we discontinue this practice we neglect the seed of Buddhahood in our lives. Neglecting our true selves in this way ultimately leads to negative effects.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “The heart of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the ‘Never Disparaging’ chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND, 851–52). As this passage indicates, Buddhism teaches people how to conduct themselves as human beings, how to accumulate lasting happiness. The sure path to do so is found in the behavior of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, in making his intent our own. That intent is expressed in our respect for others.

But this respect is not simply based on emotion. We must take action through dialogue. SGI President Ikeda explains: “We tell others about Buddhism because, fundamentally, we venerate their lives. If, on the other hand, we had the attitude ‘Even if I tell this person about Buddhism, it couldn’t possibly do them any good,’ then we simply would not bother talking to them. ... Because we trust the person, we can conduct tenacious dialogue” (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 85).

The Daishonin’s declaration “I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra” is a call from the depths of his life to each of us. “I know the ultimate path for living as a human being,” he is saying. He is challenging us, his disciples, to dedicate our lives, too, to this ultimate path.