

**WORDS TO WIN BY
ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY
BY RONNIE SMITH, MID-ATLANTIC ZONE LEADER**

From “The Izu Exile,” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 35–38).

A sutra passage states that there are paths by which birds and fish come and go in the sky and the sea.... An ordinary person is a Buddha, and a Buddha is an ordinary person. This is what is meant by three thousand realms in a single moment of life and by the phrase “I in fact attained Buddhahood.” (WND, 36)

To many, a Buddha is a resplendent being like those depicted in the sutras or the sculpted images. For someone unfamiliar with the deeper philosophy of Buddhism and who only knows the more popular versions of the Buddha, the idea that “an ordinary person is a Buddha, and a Buddha is an ordinary person” might sound radical. It was certainly so for the people in Nichiren Daishonin’s day. The idea that the Daishonin, who lived as an ordinary person, was a Buddha was difficult to accept. Even more difficult for them was the idea that they, too, possessed the potential to manifest Buddhahood as ordinary people.

For us as well, while it may be easy to intellectually grasp the idea of our inherent Buddhahood, when it comes to actually putting the idea into practice, we may not find it so easy. Especially when things are not going well—when we are feeling inadequate, weak or discouraged—it can be very difficult to believe that the person staring back at us in the mirror is a Buddha. But our perceptions in this regard are not always reliable.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that people become the people they expect themselves to be. It is really what we feel in our hearts about ourselves and others that is manifested in our daily lives. This perception is what shows up on the movie screen of our lives. However, in a single moment of life we can transform our world of suffering and pain to one of joy and happiness by deeply realizing our true potential as Buddhas. This realization allows us to surmount any walls and barriers that stand in our way.

The Daishonin explains in this writing that there are things human beings might not easily understand, like the “paths by which birds and fish come and go in the sky and the sea.” Nevertheless, they exist. Our Buddha nature is similar to this.

The people of antiquity first noticed the ability of migratory birds and fish to follow paths in the sky or sea visible only to these creatures. Scientists today are still unable to completely explain these phenomena. But the birds and fish certainly know and see these “paths” that are invisible to the human eye. As we continue our Buddhist practice, we start to reveal the unchangeable Buddha nature innate within us. We begin to see what we previously could not, as we continue to follow the path of correct practice.

We discover that the life-condition established through faith in the Gohonzon has the power to transform all things into benefit. Even mistakes and failures can be turned to good account. This is one of the most difficult things to realize when in the midst of obstacles and sufferings.

While the Daishonin says that “an ordinary person is a Buddha,” it is also an extraordinary thing to become a person with this strength of faith. As we come to understand the most precious treasure existing within ourselves, we realize that it also exists within all other people. Out of this strength is born the joyful desire to share the Daishonin’s teaching with others and the commitment to accomplish kosen-rufu.