

**WORDS TO WIN BY
THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASPING THE TIME
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From the "The Selection of the Time," The Writings of Nichi-ren Daishonin, pp. 538–94.

When it comes to studying the teachings of Buddhism, one must first learn to understand the time.... The cuckoo sings when spring is waning, the cock waits until the break of day to crow. If even these lowly creatures have such an understanding of time, then how can a person who wishes to practice the teachings of Buddhism fail to make certain what time it is? (WND, 538)

By using metaphors from the natural world of the instinctual timing of the cuckoo's song and the cock's crow, Nichiren Daishonin explains the importance of practitioners of Buddhism correctly grasping the time.

The year before this letter was written, 1274, Japan had been attacked by the Mongol expeditionary force. Due to severe storms, the invasion attempt was thwarted, but the nation of Japan was thrown into turmoil. The Daishonin lays blame for the disasters that have befallen the country including the present "ca-lamity of invasion from foreign lands" on belief in erroneous teachings.

According to Buddhist scholars, the Latter Day of the Law would be a time of unrest and chaos, when people's lives, clouded by illusions originating in fundamental darkness, would be filled with suffering. The most prevalent Buddhist teaching of the time was the Pure Land sect, which defined this world as an impure land and asserted that one can attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss by relying on the power of Amida Buddha.

But the Daishonin perceived the Latter Day of Law to be the very time when the great pure Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo would provide people the path for achieving Buddhahood without changing their form as ordinary people. The Daishonin thus exhorts, "One must first learn to understand the time" (WND, 538).

Time is one of the five criteria or guidelines for propagation: the teaching, the people's capacity, the time, the country and the sequence of propagation. "The Selection of the Time" places the greatest emphasis upon the factor of time.

It is at times of uncertainty and change that religion emerges as a means to guide and sustain humanity. SGI President Ikeda thus writes that "there was a period in the history of the Holy Roman Empire called the Great Interregnum. During that period the empire's throne was vacant for all practical purposes. Interestingly, this coincides with the period in which the Daishonin lived. Today, after the Cold War, we are living in a Great Interregnum of Philosophy, an era in which there is an absence of any guiding philosophy. That is why this is precisely the time to speak of the Lotus Sutra, long known as the king of sutras" (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, pp. 7–8).

The Daishonin conveys in the passage above his unwavering conviction that in any age, what people seek deep in their hearts is the happiness that wells forth from the depths of life. He explains that by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to the Gohonzon and teaching this philosophy to others, we can transform our lives at the most fundamental level and attain Buddhahood. We can change the direction of times in this way, too.

The Daishonin asks us to be secure in the knowledge that because we embrace and

propagate faith in the Gohonzon, we will definitely establish happiness as solid and indestructible as a diamond. We will continue do so in lifetime after lifetime throughout the Latter Day — for the happiness of ourselves and for others.

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