

**MOVING AHEAD WITH NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S SPIRIT
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In the wake of all that has occurred since Sept. 11, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima reminds us that 'to live Nichiren Daishonin's great spirit to save humanity is to practice Buddhism on the path of the oneness of mentor and disciple.'

As a Buddhist, together with all the members of SGI-USA, I have been steadily offering my sincerest prayers for the peace and happiness of all those who have been affected by the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11. I cannot even begin to imagine the profound pain and sorrow of the families of those killed or missing.

Also, to all who attended memorial services held throughout the country for those who perished in the terrorist attacks and prayed for their repose, I extend my heartfelt appreciation as general director.

Beginning Oct. 7, military action was undertaken by the United States in Afghanistan. I sincerely pray and hope that more innocent people are not killed.

On Sept. 23, 12 days after the attacks, I visited New York City and stood at Ground Zero, the ruins of the World Trade Center. There, where more than 6,000 precious lives were lost in a matter of moments, underground fires were still smoldering with plumes of smoke rising from beneath the massive mountain of rubble. Standing there, I felt something indescribable shaking the depths of my life. I heard—in the plumes of smoke slowly rising heavenward—the anguished cries of not only those who died there, but also of the countless lives lost in too many wars and terrorist attacks in the past.

How much longer must humanity continue to perpetuate such hatred and violence? Can we ever sever the cycle of violence and hatred? Before I knew it, the pain I felt began to coalesce in my mind with the grief of the traveler described in the beginning of Nichiren Daishonin's treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land." That work begins: "Once there was a traveler who spoke these words in sorrow to his host.... Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 6). In this writing, the traveler represents the sovereign of the nation of Japan, but in a broader sense, it represents all of its people.

I then realized that the three calamities and seven disasters described in the Daishonin's treatise are not merely a tale about the state of ancient Japan. The spiral of terrorism and war, which has now touched American soil, is a manifestation in today's world of what the Buddhist sutras describe as the three calamities and seven disasters.

In "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," the Daishonin quotes from the "Benevolent Kings Sutra": "When a nation becomes disordered, it is the spirits that first show signs of rampancy. Because the spirits become rampant, all the people of the nation become disordered" (WND, 8). The Daishonin here explains that calamities and disasters occur due to the negative workings of "spirits," but he identified these with the spiritual or psychological condition of the people. SGI President Ikeda once commented that this rampancy of the spirits that causes the three calamities and seven disasters accords with erroneous beliefs and ideologies, and with their proponents. Their function is the opposite of Buddhism; that is, they disregard life and view people as a means to an end.

It is safe to say that no major religion in the world today justifies the slaughter of innocent people. Any teaching that gravely disrespects and threatens human life can only be termed a gross distortion of the tradition it claims as its source.

In this regard, simply because the perpetrators of the recent atrocity are thought to associate themselves with Islam, we must not mistakenly think that Islam is a teaching of terrorism. The vast majority of the more than 1 billion Islamic believers throughout the world are united with the believers of other faiths in their rejection of terrorism. As Buddhists we uphold the absolute dignity of life as our prime teaching and will never condone or tolerate any act of terrorism.

Behind the world's history of the repeated cycle of terrorism and revenge, most often, are insidious leaders who manipulate religion as a means to gain power and fulfill selfish desires. Religion, originally intended to save and aid the people, is thus used to enslave them or as a weapon against them.

This tendency can be defined as evil, in that its ultimate result is the degradation and destruction of the human spirit and of life itself. The Daishonin saw this self-serving manipulation of religion as the source of all unhappiness, as the workings of life's innate "fundamental darkness."

The Daishonin declared the struggle against this fundamental darkness as his most essential, eternal challenge, and he urged us in "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" to take on this challenge as well. He says, "Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil" (WND, 15).

By "outlaw" he was not proposing legislation to ban erroneous teachings or teachers, but he strongly advocated withdrawing the popular and government support being afforded them.

In this writing, the Daishonin was specifically refuting the teaching of the Pure Land school. He was convinced that the escapist and apocalyptic teaching of the Pure Land school was exploiting people's reverence for Buddhism while surreptitiously undermining the Buddhist ideal of life's value and dignity. It sapped the people's strength and the vitality needed to transform their reality and reform society.

The Pure Land school enjoys little influence in today's world, but the ideologies of escapism combined with selfish materialism are becoming more pervasive, and the cycle of hatred, discrimination and religious conflict seems unending. Furthermore, the potential magnitude of murder and destruction by humans is only escalating.

Upon hearing about the recent tragedy, SGI President Ikeda immediately sent us the following message: "I extend my heartfelt sympathies to the people of the United States. Let us work for kosen-rufu in order to create peace in the United States and in the world." I hope we can all take these words to heart and together rise up like a phoenix from the abyss of sorrow and anger to refresh our pledge for kosen-rufu.

To live the Daishonin's great spirit to save humanity is to practice Buddhism on the path of the oneness of mentor and disciple. For each of us, what does it mean to "outlaw this one evil?" I think it is crucial that we deeply ponder this question today.

This coming Nov. 28 will mark the 10th anniversary of the SGI's "spiritual independence"—10 years since we were freed from the grip of disingenuous authority that is the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under High Priest Nikken Abe. Since that time we have been free to pursue our mission as a united body of common people dedicated to kosen-rufu, directly connected to the heart and spirit of the Daishonin. Taking this anniversary as an excellent opportunity, let us discuss, learn from and inspire one another through our mutual determination and action toward kosen-rufu!