

**WORDS TO WIN BY  
THE VESSEL OF FAITH  
BY KATHLEEN OLESKY  
NORTHEASTERN ZONE VICE WOMEN'S LEADER**

*From "Letter to Akimoto," The Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin, pp. 1014–22.*

**But a vessel is susceptible to four faults. The first is being upset or covered, which means that the vessel can be overturned or covered with a lid. The second is leaking, which means that the water leaks out. The third is being defiled, which means that the contents can be contaminated. Though the water itself may be pure, if filth is dumped into it, then the water in the vessel ceases to be of any use. The fourth is being mixed. If rice is mixed with filth or pebbles or sand or dirt, then it is no longer fit for human consumption (WND, 1014).**

Nichiren Daishonin sent this letter from Mount Minobu on Jan. 27, 1280 to Akimoto Taro Hyoe-no-jo, thought to be a 20-year practitioner. He begins by expressing appreciation for Akimoto's gifts of thirty cylindrical vessels and sixty plates.

By referring to the vessels the Daishonin illustrates the importance of a correct attitude in faith. The vessels stand for our bodies and minds and the water for Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Buddha's wisdom. He explains that vessels are susceptible to four faults, being overturned, leaking, becoming contaminated or being mixed.

There may be times when we are practicing diligently and are so filled with benefit it feels like we are going to burst. Conversely, if we become complacent, lose our seeking spirit and begin to practice merely from force of habit, we can cause the water of our faith to spill out. Or, we may encounter evil influences or various obstacles and out of shortsightedness or foolish emotionalism, abandon our faith at the crucial moment. In this way "the vessel can be overturned or covered with a lid." Again, regardless of the amount of water poured into a leaking vessel, it will not fill up. Likewise, if we are inconsistent, practicing faith only sporadically, we will fail to realize the true benefit of the Mystic Law. This might be equated this with a "leaking vessel."

Another cause for concern is if we begin to hold grudges, jealousy, hatred or contempt toward other believers, who are all fundamentally Buddhas. In this way we are dumping filth into pure water and it "ceases to be of any use"—the benefit of the Law stops flowing in our lives.

"Or we may be the kind of practitioners of the Lotus Sutra whose mouths are reciting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo one moment, but Namu Amida Butsu the next. This is like mixing filth with one's rice, or putting sand or pebbles in it" (WND, 1014).

This "mixing" occurs when we depend on something outside ourselves to attain happiness. It refers to combining the practice of Buddhism with inferior teachings that place the Law outside ourselves. This could be anything that comes between us and the Gohonzon, that undermines or weakens our sincere prayer.

The Daishonin says: "If the embankments around a moat do not leak, then the water will never escape the moat. And if the mind of faith is perfect, then the water of wisdom, the great impartial wisdom, will never dry up" (WND, 1015). With an ever-seeking mind toward the Gohonzon, as we strive together joyfully with the SGI and President Ikeda for kosen-rufu, we are able to build a perfect vessel, enjoying the clean, clear water of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo flowing inexhaustibly within us.