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'The purpose of faith is to receive benefit. The Soka Gakkai organization and its leadership exist to ensure that each member receives benefit. If we lose sight of this, our organization will lose its vigor, stagnate and become idle.'

Nichiren Daishonin remonstrated with Hojo Tokiyori, the de facto ruler of Japan in his day, and harshly rebuked the slanderous behavior of Ryokan [a Shingon-Ritsu priest] of Gokuraku-ji temple, a powerful religious figure. The Daishonin's struggle was one of swift words and actions. He always responded immediately to attacks from his enemies, as well as to reports from his disciples. In particular, the Daishonin's response when his disciples were in trouble or some incident had occurred was astonishingly rapid, on the mark, and detailed.

In June 1277, Shijo Kingo fell into disfavor with his lord and was being pressed to sign a vow to give up his faith in the Lotus Sutra. The source of the problem was a trumped-up report that Shijo Kingo along with others had disrupted the preaching of a priest named Ryuzo of the Tendai school. Reading the document Kingo urgently sent to him explaining the incident, the Daishonin immediately discerned the reality of the situation and took up his brush to write a letter to Kingo's lord on Kingo's behalf called the "Letter of Petition from Yorimoto." [Yorimoto is part of Shijo Kingo's full name.] In it, the Daishonin came boldly to Kingo's defense, declaring, "That is a groundless falsehood" (*The Writings of Nichi-ren Daishonin*, p. 803).

Silence allows the darkness of falsehood to spread. Communicating the truth is the light that breaks through that darkness. To stand by and watch as people suffer shows an utter lack of compassion. Failing to speak out for truth and justice when dark clouds of iniquity threaten to obscure the skies of truth is cowardice.

During the Atsuhara Persecution in October 1279, the Daishonin wrote letter after letter, including "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage," "Reply to Reverend Hoki [Nikko Shonin] and Others," "Petition of Ryusen-ji" and "Reply to Sages." Some of them are encouragement to his former disciples who were being persecuted, while one is a petition declaring their innocence that the Daishonin wrote the authorities on behalf of his disciples. In another, he gives detailed instructions to Nikko Shonin and other priests regarding a court appeal in the Atsuhara case. In this way, the Daishonin took control of the situation and responded swiftly to the rapidly changing circumstances.

It is crucial to always obtain correct information and respond to it quickly. In a battle with one's enemies, speed can make the difference between life and death. Furthermore, for words to be truly powerful and effective, they must expose the very nature and essence of injustice.

The Daishonin identified Ryokan, who had the support of the military government and was looked up to by many as a "living Buddha," as the third of the three powerful enemies described in the Lotus Sutra. He denounced Ryokan for pretending to be a sage but in reality caring only for fame and profit, and for deceiving the people. Ryokan hated the Daishonin for this, and so made false statements about him to the authorities and plotted his destruction.

In March 1275, a fire broke out at Ryokan's Gokuraku-ji temple and the complex burned to the ground. There was also a fire at a palace of the military government, which was strongly supportive of Ryokan. In light of the sutras, it was clear that the fundamental cause of the fires was Ryokan's slander of the correct teaching. When the Daishonin learned of these incidents, he referred to Ryokan as "Priest Two Fires." [In a play on words, the Daishonin refers to Ryokan-bo (Priest Ryokan) as Ryoka-bo, Priest Two Fires, to show that the burning of Gokuraku-ji and the government's palace stemmed from Ryokan's slander of the Lotus Sutra.] And he strongly rebuked him, saying that Gokuraku-ji [Paradise Temple] had been reduced to Jigoku-ji [Hell Temple] (see WND, 488). He also warned that the fires not only "ravaged the country in this existence," but foretold that the "teacher and his disciples throughout Japan will in their next life fall into the hell of incessant suffering, where they will burn in the Avichi flames" (WND, 488). By calling Ryokan "Priest Two Fires," the Daishonin was exposing him flat-out as a false sage.

These words were much more than mere insults. They were a relentless bombardment of truths based on the scriptures and clear reasoning. If wrongdoing is not stopped, good will be lost forever. If the truth is not declared, lies will spread unchecked. If the correct teaching perishes and erroneous teachings reign, it is the people who will suffer.

The Daishonin's fierce and tireless volley of words came from his deep commitment to the correct teaching (see WND, 302). Achieving victory for the people through the power of words is no easy feat. There will be all sorts of difficulties and obstacles along the path of kosen-rufu, just as there were during the Daishonin's lifetime.

However, like the Daishonin who said, "But still I am not discouraged" (WND, 748), what is important is to continue speaking out for justice. Such an invincible cry of the spirit moves the hearts of others. A true warrior of words is a person with indomitable conviction. Shin'ichi Yamamoto hoped that the Writers Department would comprise such people.

The Kyoritsu Auditorium in Kanda, Tokyo, where the first all-Japan general meeting of the Writers Department was being held, teemed with the excitement of such "warriors" from across the nation. At the meeting, Vice General Director Kazumasa Morikawa announced that a fourth group of the Writers Department was being established specifically for members of the young women's division, who had been in Group 1 with the young men. With this change, each of the four divisions now had a group in the Writers Department.

This announcement was followed by activity reports and two speeches denouncing corruption in the mass media titled "Critique of Modern Journalism" and "The Distorted Mass Media."

Following words from several leaders, President Yamamoto took the podium. Praising what the Writers Department had accomplished over the last two years, he spoke of the importance of the written word in achieving kosen-rufu: "Using the power of words to change society is fundamental to democracy. Writing about the truth is a weapon to protect the people and to create a world in which the people come first and are triumphant. This is the movement of kosen-rufu."

Emphasizing that freedom of expression must never be compromised, he pointed to the abuse that can occur in the name of free speech. This was evident, he said, in the proliferation of irresponsible and arbitrary journalism, as well as of the kind that distorted the truth and deceived the people.

Freedom of speech does not mean a license to spread lies and rumors. “What will happen,” asked Shin’ichi, “if Japan falls under the control of a small group of ill-intentioned journalists or leaders who are able to agitate and influence the people?”

“The mission of the Writers Department is to challenge such malicious reporting, to expose lies, and to forge a fresh climate of public opinion in which true peace and happiness can develop. I declare that the age when the freedom of speech can be exploited by a handful of critics or so-called important people is over. Freedom of speech must never be the exclusive right of the privileged few. Let us raise the curtain on a new age through a passionate war of words waged by an alliance of good!”

True freedom of speech will only be realized when the people boldly speak out for truth and justice. Every abusive and unfounded statement must be met with ten declarations of the truth. It is just such effort that gives life to the Daishonin’s teaching “The voice does the Buddha’s work.”

In closing, Shin’ichi called on the members of the Writers Department to always be allies of the people and to be courageous champions in the great struggle of words who move people’s hearts with their passion, ideals and penetrating logic.

Many analysts in Japan believed that the strength of the Soka Gakkai lay in its gathering and organizing of ordinary people. However, it wasn’t being organized in itself that gave the Soka Gakkai its strength. As members of the organization, ordinary people were able to foster a spirit of independence as well as proudly voice their opinions. As a result, they were able to contribute to society. This is what gave rise to such a solid alliance of the people’s power, a force that would not bow to authority.

On July 30, Shin’ichi visited Nagano City to attend the Chubu No. 2 Headquarters Leaders Meeting at the Nagano Civic Hall. At the time, the headquarters included chapters from the Koshin and Hokuriku regions. When the meeting was first announced, the members of Chubu No. 2 Headquarters began a serious effort to introduce many people to the Daishonin’s Buddhism in order to welcome President Yamamoto amid the joy of triumph.

Tremendous progress was made in July. In particular, Koshin General Chapter, which encompassed the area where the meeting was to be held, achieved the top results, beating general chapters in Tokyo and Osaka that were known for their strength in propagation.

Located in a basin, Nagano is very hot in the summer. On the day of the meeting the temperature continued to rise from the morning, until it reached 99 degrees inside the auditorium before the meeting began at 2:30 in the afternoon. Many members from Kanazawa and Toyama in central Honshu had left home by bus the previous evening, arriving in Nagano at 6:00 a.m. Shin’ichi was worried that everyone would be exhausted, but the participants were all in high spirits.

Shin’ichi sensed in their hearty applause the joy that came from living their lives dedicated to kosen-rufu. People who work for kosen-rufu experience great joy and benefit. At the meeting, Shin’ichi said: “Nothing makes me happier than seeing you all so full of energy. Since you are all so vigorous, may I assume that each of you is receiving great benefit?”

The members applauded in response. Shin’ichi asked another question: “How many of you have experienced benefit since becoming a member? Please raise your hands.”

“I have!” came the thunderous reply as they all raised their hands.

“That’s wonderful,” Shin’ichi said. “You can lower your hands now. Since that’s the

case, I can end my speech here. The purpose of faith, after all, is to obtain benefit.”
Laughter filled the auditorium.

The purpose of faith is to receive benefit. That is also the purpose of Buddhist practice and Soka Gakkai activities. The Soka Gakkai organization and its leadership exist to ensure that each member receives benefit. If we lose sight of this, our organization will lose its vigor, stagnate and become idle.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.
The events take place in 1963.