

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA BUDDHIST STUDY GIVES US COURAGE

‘The joy of studying Buddhism deepens our conviction in faith,’ SGI President Ikeda says, ‘and that conviction fills us with the courage to discuss Buddhism with others.’

The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realized makes all movements full of meaning and joy.” These are the words of the renowned Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore.

As human beings, it is essential for us to earnestly inquire into the validity of various philosophies and, carefully weighing their correctness, superiority and depth, engrave the best, highest philosophy into our lives.

In the “Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko,” we are advised. “Followers of this school should engrave the teachings of the Goshō in their lives” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 1618).



This autumn in Japan, amid a growing tide of expanding dialogue, the waves of Buddhist study are also rising high, as many youth infuse their lives with the great philosophy of Buddhism.

In October and November, respectively, the Study Department’s Advanced Exam for youth and traditional Entrance Exam open to all divisions will be held. I hope that both the candidates for these two exams as well as those helping them study will make the most of this opportunity to deepen their understanding of the boundless philosophy of the Buddhism of the sun.

One of the writings on the study curriculum for the youth exam is the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings.” This is an important text that consists of a transcript of Nichiren Daishonin’s lectures by his disciple and successor, Nikko Shonin.

This oral teaching—compiled through the unity of mentor and disciple—is a profoundly memorable one both for my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, and for me. When I first began studying Buddhism with him, we started with the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings.”

President Toda was a strict teacher. He would grill me about the meaning of Buddhist terms we encountered and ask me to explain various passages. I never knew what kind of question he would spring on me next. These study sessions would make me break out in a cold sweat, but today I am eternally grateful for President Toda’s instruction, which was like the rigorous training of a master swordsman.

The actions of a Buddha are dedicated to people’s welfare, to peace and to bringing happiness and salvation to all humanity. Faith is the starting point for our efforts to conduct ourselves as Buddhas, and study is the driving force for faith. Accordingly, there is no true faith without study; the eternal wellspring of faith is study.



When I was young, I acquired the habit of recording in my diary passages from the Daishonin’s writings that left a deep impression on me. Only by studying with a burning desire to introduce Buddhism to others can we come in contact with the spirit of the

Daishonin. Just memorizing Buddhist teachings and principles in a pedantic, abstract manner is not the way of study within the Daishonin's Buddhism. That is the behavior of arrogantly conceited hypocrites and pseudo-intellectuals.

I recorded the following determination in my diary one chilly autumn night in 1950: "The battle intensifies daily. No other choice but to forge ahead, cherishing the desire to win.

"Work is important, but we must not neglect regular study of the Goshō" (*A Youthful Diary*, pp. 54–55).



Without a sound grasp of Buddhist teachings, we cannot be called true practitioners of Buddhism.

With faith as our inspiration and study as our wings, we can win the hearts of millions as we strive to illuminate their minds and gain their understanding. It is important that we each become such champions of kosen-rufu.

This is how the Mystic Law spreads. Those who have a solid basis in faith and study are genuine leaders of the SGI.

The membership's frightened reaction to the harsh persecution suffered by the Soka Gakkai during World War II keenly drove home to President Toda the need to deepen the members' grasp of the Daishonin's teachings. He knew that these teachings clearly described the way to view various difficulties and phenomena encountered in the course of our Buddhist practice and the appropriate action to take depending on the circumstances.

And he recognized, with hindsight, that there had been no time to fully impart this understanding to his fellow followers in the Soka Gakkai's formative period. In short, the prewar organization was defeated because the membership lacked a firm mastery of Buddhist study.

Allow me to state again, though, that Buddhist study devoid of faith is the mark of hypocrites and pseudo-intellectuals. The pitiful figure of the former Soka Gakkai Study Department leader who abandoned his faith bears eloquent testimony to this.

There was another sad individual who, though holding credentials from a famous university, similarly forsook his faith and embarked on a vicious course of spreading poisonous lies in an attempt to destroy Buddhism and the unity of believers. This is another stark example of Buddhist study without faith—an empty outward show of understanding the Daishonin's Buddhism.

We must not be deceived. The substance of a person's faith can only be determined by whether they are acting in accord with the Daishonin's teachings. It is arrogant and gravely misguided to pride oneself on one's mastery of the Buddhist teachings if one only focuses on study while neglecting the other vital aspects of faith and practice. Such people are headed for certain ruin.



The American Renaissance thinker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote: "The more profound the thought, the more burdensome. Always in proportion to the depth of its sense does it knock importunately at the gates of the soul, to be spoken, to be done."

The Daishonin's Buddhism extols the sanctity of life, declaring that "we ourselves are the treasure tower, we ourselves are the Buddha" (see *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 299). It represents a sure guiding philosophy of peace that offers solutions for our ailing contemporary society.

In the SGI, we always return to the Daishonin's writings—the sutra of the Latter Day of the Law—and from there advance, bathed in the light of infinite courage, wisdom and compassion. These writings blaze with the brilliant life of the Daishonin, who endured all manner of persecution while opening the way for kosen-rufu in the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day.

Through studying the Daishonin's writings, we can acquire the sharp insight that enables us to perceive the essential nature of things and events, such as the unchanging pattern by which those who uphold truth and justice meet with slander and persecution. The fundamental purpose of our Buddhist study is so that we may stand up to the three powerful enemies, who inevitably appear to hinder the advance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and realize kosen-rufu without fail. When we internalize the teachings of Buddhism and read them with our lives, we become the Buddha of the true aspect of all phenomena, embodying the principle that ordinary people can manifest the supremely noble state of Buddhahood, just as they are.

The joy of studying Buddhism deepens our conviction in faith, and that conviction fills us with the courage to discuss Buddhism with others.



Buddhism essentially began by Shakyamuni talking to his friends and convincing them of the truth of the Law to which he had awakened. From its inception, Buddhism has been a religion of dialogue.

The Daishonin's writings might also be described as the crystallization of a passionate spirit of dialogue. Several of his treatises—including “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” a conversation between a host and guest, and “The Selection of the Time”—adopt a dialogue format, in which questions and answers are exchanged. In many of the Daishonin's letters, too, he happily responds to queries from followers and praises them for asking questions.

This tenacious spirit of dialogue, thoroughly grounded in the two ways of practice and study, is the enduring tradition of the SGI. We study, talk to others and study again. The true path of Buddhist practice lies in this vibrant rhythm of study and dialogue fueled by a seeking mind.

President Toda declared: “Begin your study from the most elevated philosophy. If you read and grasp the meaning of the Daishonin's writings, you will understand everything else.”

Young seekers, noble comrades in faith, now is the time to study hard and speak out with confidence! Armed with the Daishonin's writings, the teachings for all humanity, dance out onto the new stage of history! For the sake of a hope-filled future for humanity! And to bring the brilliant light of humanism to shine over our planet!

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