

Youth and Faith—Awakening to Our Own and Others’ Dignity

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Hello everyone, welcome to SGI Canada’s February study podcast. My name is Sadaji. This month, we’ll be studying Ikeda Sensei’s lecture, entitled “Youth and Faith—Awakening to Our Own and Others’ Dignity”.

The three founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai have always considered young people as protagonists in the advancement of kosen-rufu. This lecture was originally published in Japanese in July 2022. In this article, Ikeda Sensei’s lecture focuses especially on the young people, expecting the dynamic growth of the youth division and the future division members, awakening to our own and other’s dignity. In the opening paragraphs, he says,

Since the time of our founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, fostering youth and producing leaders of the next generation have been the unchanging tradition and spirit at the heart of the Soka Gakkai.

The first Gosho passage selected by Sensei in this article is a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to a young disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu.

["The Teacher of the Law" (10th) chapter in the] fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If there is someone who seeks the Buddha way and for the space of a kalpa presses palms together in my [Shakyamuni Buddha's] presence and recites numberless verses of praise, because of these [expressions of praise for] the Buddha [that person] will gain immeasurable blessings. And if one lauds and extols those who uphold this sutra, one's good fortune will be even greater" [see LSOC10, 203].

The point of this passage is that one will gain greater blessings by giving alms to the votary [practitioner] of the Lotus Sutra, who in

the evil world of the latter age is so intensely hated, than by giving alms to the Buddha for a whole medium kalpa. And if you should wonder who is making such a wild statement, it is none other than Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, himself. Whether you doubt or believe him is up to you. (WND-2, 499; “On the Offering of a Mud Pie”)

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in November 1274 to his young disciple 16-year-old Nanjo Tokimitsu, who had sent him offerings. In the passage you’ve just listened to, the Daishonin praises Tokimitsu’s sincerity, saying that Tokimitsu will gain greater benefits than by giving offerings to the Buddha.

Why is that? Ikeda Sensei delves into the reasons for this, with an overview of the storyline of the 10th chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It teaches that people in the Latter Day of the Law after Shakyamuni’s passing do not receive teachings directly from Sakyamuni, but connect with the correct teachings of Buddhism and enter the path of faith by encountering the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. This is what makes practitioners of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day so noble.

The Daishonin expects young Tokimitsu to advance on the same noble path as the Daishonin himself and to strive for the happiness for self and others. Through this article, Sensei fervently hopes that the youth will shoulder the full responsibility for kosen-rufu and that the Men’s and Women’s Group members will continue to foster the youth who will carry the future.

The Lotus Sutra repeatedly teaches that various difficulties compete with each other for those who spread the correct teaching in the Latter Day of the Law. For example, the 10th chapter states that “Hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world. How much more will this be so after the Buddha's passing?” Knowing this, the Daishonin dedicated his life to leading people to enlightenment despite facing numerous persecutions.

When striving to achieve something, we face various difficulties. We experience this in our daily lives. Nevertheless, by not being defeated by those difficulties, we can awaken the boundless potential and dignity within ourselves, and those around us also discover their own dignity. In this article, Sensei says,

The inner light radiating from those who have triumphed over such hardships will illuminate everyone around them, leading even those who once opposed Buddhism to awaken to their own inner dignity and worth. In this way, one person after another will shine as an infinitely noble being, creating an ever-growing forest of treasure towers. This is the formula for kosen-rufu in the age after Shakyamuni's death.

He continues:

[T]he Daishonin no doubt hoped to pass on his indomitable commitment to kosen-rufu to his young disciple.

In describing the reality of his struggle to lead people to enlightenment, the mentor here, I feel, is calling on his disciple to stand beside him so they may take action and win together. Learning of the Daishonin's noble efforts, Tokimitsu was doubtless inspired to stand up with a deep commitment of his own.

The Daishonin's entire life, in which he tirelessly spread the Mystic Law while enduring endless difficulties, was dedicated to the happiness of the people. It exemplifies the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, which teaches that all people can attain enlightenment.

I became actively involved in Soka Gakkai activities when I was a university student. During a summer training course, Sensei spoke about Napoleon and highlighted that our kosen-rufu movement, unlike his, is a non-violent revolution. Hearing that we would change the world armed only with strength of spirit, I felt proud to be part of that noble struggle. I studied the Goshō, read Sensei's guidance including *The Human Revolution*, put red lines that resonated with me, memorized inspiring parts and shared Nichiren Buddhism with others. This is what I still do today. Interestingly, as my Buddhist practice grows, the parts that resonate with me change.

Well, now let's move onto the second Goshō passage, which is a part of a letter the Daishonin wrote to a high ranking official in the Kamakura government.

A month has passed since my letter to you in the eighth month and, whether intentionally or unintentionally, you have not yet responded. This weighs heavily on my heart. Perhaps it has slipped your mind because you are busy. Or perhaps I am deemed too insignificant to warrant even a single line.

A certain sutra says, "The lion neither disdains the small hare nor

fears the great elephant.” . . .

The ultimate path in the study of Buddhism is to willingly give one’s life to repay the debt of gratitude to one’s country. Therefore, what I am doing is not for my own sake. (GZ, new ed., 853; “A Further Letter to the Lay Priest Yadoya”)

At the beginning of 1268, an official letter from the Mongol Empire arrived, demanding that Japan become one of its tributaries. The Daishonin attempted his second remonstrations with the government through the intermediary of the lay priest Yadoya, a high ranking official. This writing is a part of a follow-up letter from the Daishonin, prompted by the lack of response to the letter he sent the previous month.

In the Gosho passage, the Daishonin states,

The ultimate path in the study of Buddhism is to willingly give one’s life to repay the debt of gratitude to one’s country. Therefore, what I am doing is not for my own sake.

As Sensei explains, the Daishonin risked his life by fiercely remonstrating with the authorities. He did it not for his own sake but for the security and happiness of the people and to build a peaceful society.

After discussing this, Sensei redirects the topic back to Nanjo Tokimitsu. Tokimitsu received profound guidance from the Daishonin in his youth and steadfastly maintained faith in the Lotus Sutra throughout his life. Through Tokimitsu’s struggles as a disciple of the Daishonin, Ikeda Sensei teaches us:

By dedicating our lives to kosen-rufu along with our fellow members and exerting ourselves in bodhisattva practice, we break through the shell of ego, our lesser selves. We establish lives based on our true, strong, greater selves and live them dauntlessly. We can accumulate everlasting treasures of the heart and lead fulfilling, triumphant lives with assurance and joy.

This is the ultimate purpose of our Buddhist practice. Young people who learn of this sure way to indestructible happiness can confidently walk the noble path of contributing to the betterment of their societies. They can live the days of their youth with clear direction, purpose, and conviction. There is no greater good fortune.

It's so crucial for us now, who know Ikeda Sensei, to carry and pass on the spirit of Sensei to the next generation. In order to receive a baton, the following runner needs to run without stopping, don't they? In this traditional month of February, let's reach out to our friends and challenge ourselves to have dialogues around Nichiren Buddhism. Lastly, I'd like to conclude this podcast by quoting the words by Sensei towards the end of the article.

The relationship of mentor and disciple in Buddhism is to embrace the same great ideals and take action together while walking the same path. In the Lotus Sutra, we find the passage "Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers" (LSOC7, 178). These words point to the vow of mentors and disciples to strive faithfully together lifetime after lifetime in the bodhisattva practice of relieving people's sufferings.

Thank you for listening, everyone. I hope you have joyful discussion at your study meeting. If you have any questions, please feel free to send them to us at study@sgicanada.org. Bye for now.