

The Brilliant Light of Humanistic Philosophy (5)

“It Is the Heart That Is Important”—Continuously Strive to Deepen and Strengthen the Bonds of Mentor and Disciple

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This month, when we commemorate May 3, Soka Gakkai Day and Soka Gakkai Mothers Day, we are studying the fifth instalment of the series *The Brilliant Light of Humanistic Philosophy*, titled “It Is the Heart That Is Important”—Continuously Strive to Deepen and Strengthen the Bonds of Mentor and Disciple.

On May 3, we are also announcing the second SGI Canada Introductory Study Exam, which will be held this year on Sunday, October 25. It will be offered to new members, youth and Future Division members, all members and interested friends who have not yet taken an SGI Canada exam, and those who didn't pass the previous Introductory Exam. The announcement with further information will be published in June. I'm sure we will all be supporting our fellow members and friends to help them experience the great joy of studying Nichiren Buddhism, which expands our life condition and deepens our faith and practice.

Let's now turn to our study for this month.

The central theme of this lecture is expressed in Nichiren Daishonin's declaration, “It is the heart that is important.” The bond of mentor and disciple, the strongest bond in Buddhism, means being united in heart and striving together for the universal spread of the Mystic Law. This bond of mentor and disciple is ever-present and eternal, transcending any distance.

“The Drum at the Gate of Thunder” is Nichiren Daishonin's letter to the lay nun Sennichi, who was the wife of Abutsu-bo. They became his devoted disciples on Sado Island when the Daishonin was exiled there, risking their lives to protect him and taking leading roles in sharing his teachings with the people on Sado. This letter expresses his deep

appreciation for the offerings Sennichi sent to him. He praises her unwavering sincerity for sending her husband to visit him almost every year.

The struggles of the Daishonin's disciples and his compassionate encouragement embody the bond of mentor and disciple. When we study this writing, we can feel the same bond in a deeply human way.

Let's read the first passage from this letter.

Those who make offerings to the Lotus Sutra will receive the same benefit as they would by making offerings to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions, because all the Buddhas of the ten directions originate from the single character *myo*. Suppose a lion has a hundred cubs. When the lion king sees its cubs attacked by other beasts or birds of prey, he roars; the hundred cubs will then feel emboldened, and the heads of those other beasts and birds of prey will be split into seven pieces. The Lotus Sutra is like the lion king, who rules over all other animals.

A woman who embraces the lion king of the Lotus Sutra never fears any of the beasts of hell or of the realms of hungry spirits and animals. (WND-1, 949)

This passage teaches the benefit of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra. "Making offerings to the Lotus Sutra" means chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the absolute happiness of ourselves and others, as well as our efforts to share this teaching to enable as many people as possible to benefit from it. President Ikeda states in his lecture:

The benefit of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra is boundless. Through that benefit, we can triumph over any obstacle and devilish function. And nothing is stronger than a person whose life is instilled with this confidence.

Nichiren Daishonin states that this is so "because all the Buddhas of the ten directions originate from the single character *myo*," and the purpose of the entire Lotus Sutra is to express, teach and transmit the mystic principle of *myo* of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which enables all people to attain Buddhahood. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo opens and brings forth the innate enlightened state of life that we innately possess.

In the next part of this passage, Nichiren Daishonin uses the metaphor of a lion with a hundred cubs.

The Lotus Sutra, with the infinite power of *myo*, is likened to the lion king, and the lion's cubs represent those who make offerings to the Lotus Sutra. The other beasts and birds of prey represent the lower states of Hell, Hunger and Animality. When the lion king roars, the hundred lion cubs are filled with courage and are able to defeat the lower worlds. The immeasurable power of "the single character *myo*" results from making offerings to the Lotus Sutra and enables us manifest the state of Buddhahood and win out over those in such negative life states.

President Ikeda states:

The Lotus Sutra is the lion king of the sutras. Therefore, the Daishonin encourages Sennichi, saying: "A woman who embraces the lion king of the Lotus Sutra never fears any of the beasts of hell or of the realms of hungry spirits and animals" (WND-1, 949).

Let's now read the second passage, which speaks about the title of this writing, "The Gate of Thunder":

It is a thousand *ri* [miles] across the sea and mountains from Sado Province to this province [of Kai where Mount Minobu is located]. You, as a woman, have held fast to your faith in the Lotus Sutra; and over the years you have repeatedly sent your husband here to visit me in your place. Surely the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions know of your devotion. For example, though the moon is forty thousand yojanas high in the heavens, its reflection appears instantly in a pond on earth; and the sound of the drum at the Gate of Thunder is immediately heard a thousand, ten thousand *ri* [miles] in the distance. Though you remain in Sado, your heart has come to this province.

The way of attaining Buddhahood is just like this. Though we live in the impure land, our hearts reside in the pure land of Eagle Peak. Merely seeing each other's face would in itself be insignificant. It is the heart that is important. Someday let us meet at [the pure land of] Eagle Peak, where Shakyamuni Buddha dwells. (WND-1, 949)

President Ikeda explains:

The Daishonin writes: “Though you remain in Sado, your heart has come to this province.” He is telling Sennichi that even though she hasn’t set foot outside of Sado, which is far away across mountains and sea, her heart has reached him at Mount Minobu. It may be that deep inside Sennichi felt sad at the thought that she might never see the Daishonin again in her lifetime, and the Daishonin may well have understood this. But in our Buddhist practice, there is no need to lament. Based on faith in the Mystic Law, our heart of faith can instantaneously cross any distance. The Daishonin’s words of encouragement convey the message: “You are fighting alongside me in spirit.” We can easily imagine how much courage and hope they must have given Sennichi.

In this passage, the Daishonin assures Sennichi that even across great distance, her heart has reached him. In Buddhism, our heart of faith transcends all distance, allowing us to fight alongside our mentor in spirit.

Nichiren Daishonin then explains that, despite the sufferings we encounter in this world, we can experience absolute and indestructible happiness, which is the life state of Buddhahood, by embracing the correct teaching. President Ikeda explains the deep meaning of the Daishonin’s statement, “It is the heart that is important,” saying:

As he indicates when he says, “Merely seeing each other’s face would in itself be insignificant,” faith is not determined by meeting face-to-face with the mentor. “It is the heart that is important,” he asserts. And our hearts manifest in our actions. In the case of Sennichi, her devotion is revealed in her sending Abutsu-bo to visit the Daishonin almost every year. It is an expression of her unchanging commitment to faith. In the succinct statement, “It is the heart that is important,” the Daishonin conveys to Sennichi that he is fully aware of her sincere dedication and that this dedication is the way to attaining Buddhahood.

President Ikeda states:

The Daishonin concludes this writing by saying: “Someday let us meet at [the pure land of] Eagle Peak, where Shakyamuni Buddha dwells.” These words are a declaration that Sennichi’s faith is genuine and that she will definitely be able to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime and meet the Daishonin at the pure land of Eagle Peak. The bonds of mentor and disciple in Buddhism are eternal and everlasting.

Abutsu-bo and Sennichi's seeking spirit was also embraced by their son, Tokuro Moritsuna, who carried on, as his father's had, to visit Nichiren Daishonin at Mount Minobu. President Ikeda concludes his lecture with following powerful encouragement:

The oneness is something that exists inside you. The unity of mentor and disciple transcends distance and time. The hearts of mentor and disciple compose an eternal history of united struggle.

Upholding the great philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism that teaches that the heart is most important, let us apply ourselves with even greater sincerity and dedication in our ongoing efforts for kosen-rufu.

The oneness of our hearts with the heart of Nichiren Daishonin and with our mentor, Ikeda Sensei, is exactly the same.

At our study meetings this month, let's share our experiences of this most important point in our own lives.

Thank you very much.