

## **To our Future Division Members, the Torchbearers of Justice—Our Hope for the Future**

### **“Letter to the Brothers”—The Soka Gakkai Tradition of “Faith for Overcoming Obstacles”**

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Hello everyone, welcome to February’s study podcast!

Nichiren Buddhism teaches us that we can tap into our fundamental inner strength, bring forth courage and wisdom, undefeated by life’s hardships and become happy without fail.

President Ikeda addresses this and subsequent installments to us especially the Future Division members. The Daishonin’s “Letter to the Brothers” which we study this month is a source of immense strength and inspiration for fearlessly confronting any storm of difficulty.

President Makiguchi and President Toda had shared with us their struggles and overcome their difficulties. Both Presidents were arrested and detained while fighting persecution by Japan’s wartime militarist authorities.

President Makiguchi was fighting for the truth with the “heart of a lion king”. He declared: “It is only natural that the three obstacles and four devils should have assailed me; it is just as the Lotus Sutra states.”

Kosen-rufu is the great vow to help all people attain Buddhahood. It is inevitable that this great struggle to realize happiness and peace for all humanity would be met with obstacles and persecution. We encounter obstacles because we practice the correct Buddhist teaching. We can challenge the devilish functions based on faith as genuine practitioners.

We will study the first Goshō passage from “Letter to the Brothers” addressed to the Ikegami brothers.

**Believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions—even more than invasion now by the Mongols. This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. (WND-1, 495; “Letter to the Brothers”)**

The Ikegami brothers’ father, a follower of the True Word Precepts school was hostile to the Daishonin. He disowned his elder son Munenaka as he opposed his faith in the Lotus Sutra. Munenaka lost the right to inherit the family estate, economic base, and social status.

The younger son, Munenaga, is forced to choose between his faith or becoming the new heir. The father is attempting to drive a wedge between the two brothers. This is the workings of devilish functions.

In the Goshō passage, the Daishonin states that those who believe in and practice the Lotus Sutra should be more on guard against “those who attempt to obstruct their practice”. The obstructive individuals are “evil friends,” functioning to destroy the minds of sincere practitioners and lead them into evil paths. In particular, it refers to evil priests and ill-intentioned individuals who seek to obstruct and destroy people’s faith.

If we allow ourselves to be swayed by negative influences, then doubt, uncertainty, confusion, and disbelief will steal into our minds. We can lose sight of correct faith. The ultimate source of these negative workings is the devil king of the sixth heaven.

The Daishonin tells us that the devil king uses our family members and people with power and influence as his agents to obstruct the faith of those who embrace the Mystic Law. He seeks to lead people into evil paths by any means possible, confusing their minds by “causing them to drink the wine of greed, anger, and foolishness”.

The Daishonin asserts that the devil king of the sixth heaven is the fundamental ignorance or darkness existing in the depths of our lives, which refers to (or which can be described as) our inability to believe that each one of us embodies the Mystic Law and possesses the life state of Buddhahood.

The devil king of the sixth heaven is not a special being. It is the deluded aspect of the

mind that is unable to believe in our inherent dignity and potential and can devalue and destroy us. We must not succumb to them.

‘Belief’ or ‘faith’ is the sharp sword that overcomes fundamental darkness or ignorance and by rousing strong faith and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, we can bring forth our innate Buddhahood and vanquish them without fail.

The Daishonin writes: “Put into flames, a rock simply turns to ashes, but gold becomes pure gold”. Practitioners of the Lotus Sutra are people of “gold”; by challenging and overcoming every difficulty and making lives shine brightly, powerfully, and expansively as “pure gold.” Obstacles and difficulties are tests of whether our faith is genuine. Our faith grows stronger through confronting and challenging our karma head-on. The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to establish a serene, unshakable state of happiness.

Nichiren Buddhism is a teaching that enables people to change their destiny, and personal hardships and difficulties are opportunities for changing our destiny or karma. Our mission is to demonstrate to others the greatness of the Mystic Law.

The second passage, from “Letter to the Brothers” states:

**If you propagate [this teaching], devils will arise without fail. If they did not, there would be no way of knowing that this is the correct teaching. One passage from the same volume [the fifth volume of T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight*] reads: “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere. . . . One should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If one falls under their influence, one will be led into the paths of evil. If one is frightened by them, one will be prevented from practising the correct teaching.” This statement not only applies to me, but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations. (WND-1, 501; “Letter to the Brothers”)**

In this passage, the Daishonin teaches that when we engage in correct Buddhist practice, devilish functions that seek to obstruct our faith are certain to arise.

T'ien-t'ai's Great Concentration and Insight states: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere".

The three obstacles are: (1) the obstacle of earthly desires; (2) the obstacle of karma; and (3) the obstacle of retribution. "Obstacle" here means something that blocks or obstructs our Buddhist practice.

The four devils are: (1) the hindrance of the five components; (2) the hindrance of earthly desires; (3) the hindrance of death; and (4) the hindrance of the devil king. A devil is a negative working that saps from within the vibrancy and vitality of practitioners of the correct teaching. The three obstacles and four devils are forces that obstruct and hinder our Buddhist practice. Of them all, the hindrance of the devil king is the most serious.

The devil king employs every conceivable means to attack and harass practitioners of the correct teaching. This includes manifesting within figures of power and authority in society and manipulating them to persecute the Mystic Law practitioners. The Daishonin tells us that our response to such obstructions should be to "be neither influenced nor frightened by them."

Not to be influenced means not to fall under the sway of devilish functions. Not to be frightened means to defeat them with the wisdom that sees through them and the courage to confront them. When we do this, we can carry out our human revolution and change our karma.

In a separate letter to the younger Ikegami brother, Munenaga, the Daishonin writes: "The three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat." He is telling Munenaga to see the appearance of the three obstacles and four devils as an opportunity bringing him closer to attaining Buddhahood, and to overcome this challenge with the spirit of faith of the wise who rejoice.

At the end of the passage, the Daishonin writes: "This statement not only applies to me, but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations."

Here the Daishonin is saying that the path of shared struggle must be passed on to future generations as part of the struggle to ensure the eternal perpetuation of the Law.

The brothers overcame their obstacles, and with solidly united faith eventually succeeded

in converting their father to the Daishonin's teachings.

It is important to have the courage of our convictions in faith. Courage is an expression of strong faith. The key is to remain steadfast in faith and practice all your life, whatever happens, and to keep moving forward courageously.

This month's study material is dedicated especially to the Future Division members. Let's continue to try to involve the Future Division members in our study meetings.

We will be celebrating March 16<sup>th</sup> Kosen-rufu Day next month. It is a time for us to renew our determination to accomplish *kosen-rufu*. In the current Year of Youth and Triumph, with the youth at forefront, let us be united to lead humanity toward happiness and peace.

Thanks very much.