

Everything Begins with Prayer Infused with the Shared Vow of Mentor and Disciple

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Welcome to the September podcast.

On June 5, we began a new chapter of Canadian kosen-rufu with the appointment of Glenn Turner as our new General Director of SGI Canada. To launch our efforts toward 2030, the 100th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai, SGI President Ikeda gave us three mottoes:

Canada, courageous and true to the great vow for kosen-rufu
Canada, united and fostering an endless stream of capable individuals
Canada, ever-advancing and blazing with hope

It is fortunate that we are studying this lecture at this important point of departure. In the lecture, President Ikeda explains the most important principle for victory in life and achieving kosen-rufu—that everything begins with prayer infused with the shared vow of mentor and disciple. He begins his lecture with the following statement:

Prayer in Nichiren Buddhism means making a vow to win without fail.
Everything begins with prayer. I myself have begun every great effort for kosen-rufu with prayer. Whenever I faced difficulties, I challenged them with prayer as my foundation, chanting wholeheartedly and overcoming them one by one.

This year is the 70th anniversary of the famous February Campaign in 1952, which took place in Kamata Chapter. This momentous achievement led to the fulfilment of the vow that President Toda made upon his inauguration to achieve a membership of 750,000 households within his lifetime.

The youthful Daisaku Ikeda responded to his mentor's call in February 1952, igniting the incredible wave of growth that led to the accomplishment of President Toda's vow. The key factor to this achievement was prayer infused with the shared vow of mentor and

disciple.

President Ikeda introduces four pillars that form the key to victory in kosen-rufu and life: (1) prayers of practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, (2) prayers to change poison into medicine, (3) prayers infused with the shared vow of mentor and disciple, and (4) prayers to realize the Daishonin's ideal of "establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land."

The first of these four pillars is described in the following Gosho passage, which expresses the certainty of the fulfilment of prayers offered by a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra:

The prayers offered by a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra will be answered just as an echo answers a sound, as a shadow follows a form, as the reflection of the moon appears in clear water, as a mirror collects dewdrops, as a magnet attracts iron, as amber attracts particles of dust, or as a clear mirror reflects the color of an object. (WND-1, 340; "On Prayer")

The benefits of chanting the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra are immeasurable. The emergence of our Buddha nature is perfectly natural, as Nichiren Daishonin illustrates through the similes in this passage and in other of his writings. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo permeates the entire universe and has limitless power. Bringing forth that power depends on the strength of our prayers, as Sensei explains:

What's important is that our prayers are filled with powerful conviction and the determination to realize them, come what may. When we earnestly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our prayers reach every corner of the universe.

When we pray to the Gohonzon, we bring forth the fundamental nature of enlightenment, and this activates the protective functions of the universe. We are not always able to perceive this, so we may have doubts and worry that our prayers won't be answered. These doubts and worries are delusions arising from fundamental ignorance. Prayer is a battle to conquer fundamental ignorance. Focused, determined and courageous prayer gives rise to wisdom and victory.

The phrase in the Gosho, “the prayers offered by a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra,” specifically refers to Nichiren Daishonin himself, but it also includes “genuine disciples who dedicate themselves to the great vow of spreading the Mystic Law.” Sensei explains:

Founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi taught the importance of being active practitioners as opposed to passive believers.

Practitioners are those who practise in exact accord with the Buddha’s teaching... people of action who persist courageously in faith, no matter what happens.

Our efforts to chant daimoku, share our philosophy with others, and encourage our fellow members all demonstrate that our prayers are the prayers of practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, and therefore each of them will be realized without fail. The protective forces, called the heavenly deities, are compelled to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, so we can feel greatly assured.

The second pillar is prayers to change poison into medicine. This is Buddhism in action in the realities of life. We can transform sufferings into happiness through the power of the Mystic Law. When we practise Buddhism, everything that happens has profound significance, and we can move everything in a positive direction, confident that our prayers will be fulfilled.

To have encountered the Mystic Law is the greatest good fortune. When we embrace the Mystic Law, the Mystic Law embraces us. We can therefore chant to the Gohonzon honestly and with our hearts open wide, while also putting our full faith in the power of the Gohonzon. Sensei warmly encourages us, saying:

When we turn our problems into prayers, their significance changes. By turning them into prayers filled with determination and conviction, we can expand our state of life. Our hardships then become the groundwork for carrying out our human revolution, and our karma even changes into our mission for kosen-rufu. In this way, all our struggles become the fuel for fresh growth and development. This is the meaning of changing poison into medicine. It is what the Daishonin describes when he writes: “The sufferings of hell will vanish instantly” (WND-1, 199).

Our efforts to chant daimoku with sincerity and determination, especially when we sincerely pray for the happiness of others as well as for ourselves, awaken our Buddha nature and summon forth the Buddha nature of all living beings.

Sensei concludes this section saying:

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, we come into contact with the Daishonin's spirit and manifest the same great life state as the Daishonin, the life state of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, in our own beings. That's how we bring forth limitless wisdom, compassion, and courage, powerfully overcome every difficulty, and change poison into medicine. How fortunate we are!

The next Gosho passage reveals the third pillar, which is the theme of this lecture: prayers infused with the vow of mentor and disciple. Mentor and disciple pray with a shared vow for kosen-rufu. This shared vow is the essence of Nichiren Buddhism. It has been practised with exactly the same spirit by the founding presidents and members of the Soka Gakkai.

If lay believers and their teacher pray with differing minds, their prayers will be as futile as trying to kindle a fire on water. Even if they pray with one mind, their prayers will go unanswered if they have long made the error of attacking greater teachings with lesser ones. Eventually, both lay believers and their teacher will be ruined. (WND-1, 795; "The Eight Winds")

Nichiren Daishonin's disciple Shijo Kingo, the recipient of this Gosho, courageously faced persecution with his mentor, even at the risk of his own life. "The Eight Winds" is an important writing from which we can learn the importance of never being swayed by good things or bad things, and of aligning our hearts with the heart of our mentor. Sensei states:

The prayers of mentor and disciple united in spirit are invincible.

Concretely speaking, this means chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with a seeking spirit, asking oneself what one's mentor would do, and resolving that now is time to stand up as a disciple.

In the Lotus Sutra, as described in the *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*,

the mentor and disciples are likened to the lion and its cubs, saying, “The [lion’s] “roar” is the sound of the teacher and the disciples chanting in unison.” Sensei says:

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith based on the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple is the true lion’s roar in Nichiren Buddhism. It enables us to give free play to the immeasurable wisdom and power we inherently possess.

Both Presidents Makiguchi and Toda acted just as the Daishonin taught, basing their prayers on the shared vow of mentor and disciple and opening the way to kosen-rufu through their selfless devotion to propagating the Mystic Law.

“Three things are required—a good teacher, a good believer, and a good teaching—before prayers can be effective and disasters banished from the land.” This passage means that striving with the same spirit as the mentor enables the disciple to attain the same state of Buddhahood as the mentor, while also enabling countless other people to enter the same path. Sensei explains:

Nichiren Buddhism takes the way of mentor and disciple to a more profound level, revealing the oneness of mentor and disciple. And it is the mission of the disciple to fulfill the vow they have shared with their mentor since time without beginning.

The fourth pillar is prayers for “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land,” Sensei states:

Our prayers are grounded in action to realize the Daishonin’s ideal of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land and the entire world. They are the prayers of courageous individuals committed to transforming the destiny of humankind. That is the true meaning of prayers infused with the vow of mentor and disciple...

Establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land is the effort to make the sun of hope rise in the lives of those filled with sorrow and despair. When we cause the sun to rise in our hearts, we can help others do the same. Whatever the times or the place, prayer and action based on the vow for kosen-rufu create an endless chain reaction of joy and hope.

Sensei concludes his lecture, encouraging us to continue striving toward 2030 to create a hope-filled world that embodies the Daishonin’s ideal of “establishing the correct teaching

for the peace of the land.”

I hope you have a wonderful September study meeting. Thank you very much.