

Faith, Practice and Study: The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism—Part 3 [of 3]

The Buddhist Study of the Soka Gakkai: Elevating People's Life State

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Welcome to the podcast. I am Tony Meers. This month we are studying the third of President Ikeda's lectures on faith, practice and study. As we approach July 3, the Day of Mentor and Disciple, let's reconfirm the spirit of mentor and disciple as the essence of Buddhist faith, practice and study.

This lecture, "The Buddhist Study of the Soka Gakkai: Elevating People's Life State," makes it clear that the Gosho, the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, are the essential teachings upon which our faith is based. President Ikeda describes the courageous battles waged by the three founding presidents amid severe persecutions, which enabled them to embody the life state of Buddhahood by "deeply taking to heart and actualizing the Daishonin's writings through their actions."

The lecture takes us to the very heart of the Daishonin's spirit. We are inspired by the examples of our mentors, whom we should not only admire but also emulate with the full realization that each of us has the same limitless potential when our focus is on the people—starting with those who are closest to us and radiating out to all of humanity.

The first Gosho passage is from "Letter from Sado," which reads:

There is very little writing paper here in the province of Sado, and to write to you individually would take too long. Nevertheless, if even one person fails to hear from me, it will cause resentment. Therefore, I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement. (WND-1, 306; "Letter from Sado")

We are able to feel the depth of Nichiren Daishonin's compassion for each of his beloved disciples, as well as his undefeatable spirit to strive for kosen-rufu regardless of the persecutions he might face. Reading this Gosho, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were moved to tears with an indescribable intensity of feeling, as was the youthful Daisaku Ikeda, who wrote in his diary, "Where shall sensitive youth turn for an answer? As I read

the Gosho, I tremble with delight. Buddhism, clearly expounding the origin and basis of all, offering true happiness.”

We understand Buddhism through faith and through our efforts to strive for kosen-rufu, which enable us to elevate our state of life, even by reading just a sentence or short passage.

We read the Gosho to generate hope in the face of despair, deadlocks or illness, summoning the fearless spirit of a lion king. We should study the Gosho with the attitude that the Daishonin is speaking directly to us, and that every ounce of his being is directed at encouraging us to attain the same sublime state of life as his. As President Ikeda states:

To engrave the Daishonin’s writings in one’s heart, bring forth the invincible life state of Buddhahood, and advance toward fulfilling the great vow for kosen-rufu while struggling with one’s karma—this is the path of Buddhist study that leads directly to a life of happiness and victory.

The next Gosho passage, from “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light” reads:

One who, on hearing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, makes even greater efforts in faith is a true seeker of the way. T’ien-t’ai states, “From the indigo, an even deeper blue.” This passage means that, if one dyes something repeatedly in indigo, it becomes even bluer than the indigo leaves. The Lotus Sutra is like the indigo, and the strength of one’s practice is like the deepening blue. (WND-1, 457; “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light”)

This section focuses on perseverance to defeat fundamental darkness, using the metaphor of the indigo plant, which becomes a deeper blue with repeated dyeing. This letter was addressed to the mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu in her struggle with the death of her husband and the hardships of raising her family alone. President Ikeda explains:

By reading the Gosho again and again in the midst of our struggles, we engrave in our lives the Daishonin’s courageous and just actions, his boundless compassion for his disciples, and, above all, his passionate commitment to propagating the Mystic Law. In this way, we imbue, or “dye,” our lives with Buddhahood. As the Daishonin assures us in another letter: “Those who are imbued with the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] will invariably become Buddhas” (WND-2, 675; “Snow and Lacquer”).

President Ikeda goes on to point out the paramount importance of studying the Goshō. He recounts Mr. Toda's assertion that the Soka Gakkai leaders who were arrested with him and Mr. Makiguchi quit the organization to avoid imprisonment because they lacked a foundation of Buddhist study. This is why, after the war, he stressed the crucial importance of studying Nichiren Buddhism in order to "foster disciples who would remain undaunted in the face of any persecution or opposition."

As with the first lecture on faith, President Ikeda again speaks about the four powers—the power of faith and the power of practice, which give rise in equal proportion to the power of the Buddha and the power of power of the Law. Faith is the motivation for practice, and study is what enables us to strengthen our power of faith.

President Toda described his own benefits as being beyond imagination, and he wanted every member to experience such benefit and become happy. For us to experience such infinite benefit it is crucial that we have a powerful seeking spirit, which requires both absorbing the teachings and taking action for the advancement of kosen-rufu.

The final Goshō selection is the famous passage from "The True Aspect of All Phenomena":

Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase. (WND-1, 386; "The True Aspect of All Phenomena")

President Ikeda emphasizes that practice and study are the heart of Buddhism, which must always be directed toward happiness for self and others. As he says:

In Nichiren Buddhism, it isn't enough that we practise for our own happiness alone. There is no such thing as a selfish Buddha who is satisfied with attaining personal enlightenment and cares nothing for anyone else. The wisdom of the Buddha exists to lead all people to happiness.

In the Soka Gakkai, study is based on the mentor-disciple spirit. It is study for winning. It is study for sharing the Mystic Law with others and realizing kosen-rufu. It is study for inner transformation and human revolution. And faith in the Gohonzon is the indestructible axle, represented by the Soka Gakkai Joju Gohonzon, enshrined in the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu.

President Ikeda concludes his lecture by saying:

Our destiny is to live as proud Soka Gakkai members and fulfill our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It is to dedicate our lives to kosen-rufu, which is building happiness for the entire human race.

Thank you very much!