

Striving to realize our vow for Kosen-rufu is the best way to repay our debts of gratitude to others

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Hi there. Thanks for joining us today. This month, we're studying President Ikeda's lecture entitled "Striving to realize our vow for kosen-rufu is the best way to repay our debts of gratitude to others".

As you might expect, the lecture deals largely with the connection between kosen-rufu and repaying our debts of gratitude; but it also has much to say about the mentor-disciple relationship, and many other things besides.

In today's podcast, we'll be highlighting just a few of the main points. You can find the complete article in the June 2018 edition of *New Century*. We hope that you'll find time to read and study the lecture before your district study meeting.

July 3rd is the anniversary of Josei Toda's release from prison in 1945. His mentor, Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, had died in the same prison, a year and a half previously. Both had been arrested and imprisoned for refusing to compromise their faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

As he struggled to rebuild the Soka Gakkai, Mr. Toda felt "a fierce determination to repay his debt of gratitude to Mr. Makiguchi" by making kosen-rufu a reality. This is an important part of the mentor-disciple relationship. In fact, President Ikeda states that "the way of mentor and disciple is the way of repaying debts of gratitude."

President Ikeda certainly feels that way about his own mentor, President Toda. This is President Ikeda talking about his early days with Mr. Toda:

I will never forget how I vowed at that time to advance forever with my mentor. I resolved that, though his businesses might be facing a series of challenges, I would fight on with an indomitable spirit all my life as his disciple, no matter what the situation, and achieve victory without fail.

President Ikeda goes on to say that he continues to put Mr. Toda's teachings and guidance into effect.

"Gratitude is the highest virtue," states President Ikeda, pointing to Nichiren Daishonin as someone who exemplifies this. This month's lecture draws on two of Nichiren

Daishonin's writings in particular: "The Four Debts of Gratitude" and "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude", from which this first passage is taken:

The old fox never forgets the hillock where he was born; the white turtle repaid the kindness he had received from Mao Pao. If even lowly creatures know enough to do this, then how much more should human beings! Thus Yü Jang, a worthy man of old, fell on his sword in order to repay the debt he owed his lord Chih Po, and the minister Hung Yen for similar reasons cut open his stomach and inserted the liver of his dead lord, Duke Yi of Wei. What can we say, then, of persons who are devoting themselves to Buddhism? Surely they should not forget the debts of gratitude they owe to their parents, their teachers, and their country.

But if one intends to repay these great debts of gratitude, one can hope to do so only if one learns and masters Buddhism, becoming a person of wisdom. (WND-1, 690; "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude")

This treatise was written in honour of Dozen-bo, Nichiren Daishonin's teacher when he was a young priest at Seicho-ji temple. Elsewhere in the gosho, the Daishonin explains that he is repaying his debt of gratitude to Dozen-bo, who died in 1276, by dedicating his life to leading others to happiness.

In this passage, the Daishonin gives examples from nature and history to show that even animals and public officials demonstrate gratitude, though sometimes in rather grisly ways. It's a natural human response. But how should we as Buddhists repay our debts of gratitude? President Ikeda says:

The Daishonin tells us that we can do so by studying and gaining a deep understanding of the teachings of Buddhism, thereby becoming people of true wisdom and striving to guide to happiness those to whom we owe debts of gratitude.

At this point, President Ikeda takes a step back to look at what we really mean by a "debt of gratitude". It's not simply a social obligation to someone or some group.

President Ikeda offers this definition:

Recognizing that we owe our present existence to the help and support of many others and, with gratitude for that fact, working in turn to help and support others -- this in itself is what is meant by "knowing one's debts of gratitude" and "repaying one's debts of gratitude"

So, for us, specifically as Buddhists, we need to develop our own lives and help others do the same, in order to show our gratitude in the best way possible. President Ikeda sums it all up by saying “Repaying debts of gratitude in Nichiren Buddhism means taking action to fulfill the vow to lead all people to happiness”.

The second gosho passage in the lecture is also taken from “On Repaying Debts Of Gratitude”:

If one hopes to learn and master Buddhism, then one cannot do so without devoting time to the task. And if one wants to have time to spend on the undertaking, one cannot continue to wait on one’s parents, one’s teachers, and one’s sovereign. Until one attains the road that leads to emancipation, one should not defer to the wishes and feelings of one’s parents and teachers, no matter how reasonable they may be.

Many people may think that counsel such as this runs counter to secular virtues and also fails to accord with the spirit of Buddhism. But in fact secular tests such as The Classic of Filial Piety make clear that there are times when one can be a loyal minister or a filial child only by refusing to obey the wishes of one’s sovereign or parents. And in the sacred scriptures of Buddhism it is said, “By renouncing one’s obligations and entering the Buddhist life, one can truly repay those obligations in full.” Pi Kan refused to go along with his sovereign’s wishes and thereby came to be known as a worthy man. Prince Siddhartha [Shakyamuni Buddha] disobeyed his father King Shuddhodana and yet became the most outstanding filial son in all the threefold world. These are examples of what I mean. (WND-1, 690; “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude”)

Nichiren Daishonin is not really encouraging people everywhere to revolt against their parents, teachers or governments. But he is saying that it’s through our Buddhist practice and our efforts for other people’s happiness that we can best live up to the hopes and expectations of parents, teachers and society.

This is true even though, as the Daishonin points out, there may be times when we have to go against the wishes of those around us. Nichiren Daishonin himself faced opposition from his parents, his teacher and the authorities. But he clearly understood that his actions would lead everyone to happiness in the end.

As President Ikeda points out:

No one was more filial in the truest sense than the Daishonin. The starting point of Nichiren Buddhism is repaying one’s debts of gratitude. No matter what the times, this will never change.

And he goes on, a little later in the lecture:

The Daishonin taught this great path of mentor and disciple -- one that he himself walked, seeking to find the best way to correctly inherit and carry on the Buddhism of Shakyamuni, and repay his debt of gratitude to Dozen-bo, who first instructed him in the Buddhist teachings.

The last gosho passage in this month's lecture is from the writing known as "The Four Debts of Gratitude":

Were it not for them [all living beings], one would find it impossible to make the vow to save innumerable living beings. Moreover, but for the evil people who persecute bodhisattvas, how could those bodhisattvas increase their merit? (WND-1, 43; "The Four Debts of Gratitude")

This passage reinforces the idea that we owe a debt of gratitude to all living beings in the world -- even those who make us suffer. A bodhisattva makes a vow to work for the happiness of everyone. In this day and age, it is we SGI practitioners who are actually fulfilling this vow, and repaying our debt to all living beings.

On a personal note, President Ikeda says that his dream is to accomplish his mentor's dream, which was worldwide kosen-rufu. He also says that he hopes young practitioners will become great leaders of society, and that all of us will offer to young people the same support and kindness that we were given.

In this final section of the lecture, President Ikeda cites another passage from the gosho "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude", where the Daishonin declares that if his "compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity." In our day, it is the SGI that has inherited this great mission.

President Ikeda reminds us that the most important thing now is to pass on the Soka Gakkai spirit to the next generation; and he concludes his lecture by urging all of us to live "with the positive, vibrant Soka spirit of repaying debts of gratitude!"

There is much more in President Ikeda's article, and I hope you'll have a chance to read it in the June 2018 issue of *New Century*. If you're not receiving *New Century* right now, you can order it at your district meeting or from the publications page of this website.

Thanks for spending time with us today. We'll see you next month.

Bye for now.