

DISCARDING THE SHALLOW IN ORDER TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES

On the twelfth day of the ninth month of last year, between the hours of the rat and the ox (11:00 P.M. to 3:00 A.M.), this person named Nichiren was beheaded. It is his soul that has come to this island of Sado and, in the second month of the following year, snowbound, is writing this to send to his close disciples. [The description of the evil age in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter seems] terrible, but [one who cares nothing about oneself for the sake of the Law has] nothing to be frightened about. Others reading it will be terrified. (1)

Kosen-rufu is the struggle whereby all people may attain enlightenment through knowing and understanding the teaching of the Lotus Sutra with their own lives. Those who take on this challenge will come up against obstacles, because the negative nature that is inherent in life will manifest without fail. It is precisely by battling against this negative nature and overcoming it that we can achieve Buddhahood in this existence and make Kosen-rufu a reality.

In Nichiren Daishonin’s case, the greatest persecution that he faced in his endeavours to spread the Law, was the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, and his subsequent exile in Sado.(2) But, in

the end, none of the forces deployed against him could bring about his death. The Daishonin says: “I even survived the persecution at Tatsunokuchi”(3) Not only did he overcome uncountable adversities and obstacles in the course of his life, but, in addition, he triumphed over this particular persecution at the hands of the authorities, who directly tried to take his life.

Even though fundamental darkness, as represented by the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, the personification of which had mobilized forces “dominated by evil demons”(4) – that is to say, arrogant lay people, arrogant and cunning priests and arrogant false priests who are res-

pected by the general public (the three powerful enemies) – and had tried to eliminate the Daishonin and destroy Kosen-rufu, it could not do so. The immense life state of the Daishonin, who resisted each attack from these negative forces, is the true expression of his identity as the Buddha of Limitless Joy, enlightened since time without beginning.

When the Daishonin says “this person named Nichiren was beheaded”; he is announcing that from the time of Tatsunokuchi onwards, he is discarding the identity he has held up to that moment, - where he behaved as a common person - The Daishonin is indicating that in Tatsunokuchi he shed his transient

(1) The Opening of the Eyes WND p.269

(2) On the 12th of September 1271, the Daishonin was unjustly arrested by powerful government figures and was taken away in the middle of the night to a place called Tatsunokuchi on the outskirts of Kamakura, the capital, where they tried to execute him under cover of darkness.

The attempt failed, and about one month later the Daishonin was exiled to the island of Sado. In those days, this was the equivalent of the death penalty.

(3) Gosho Zenshu Pg. 843

(4) See The Lotus Sutra, Ch.13 p.194



condition and revealed his true identity. He uses the word “soul” to refer to that true identity; in other words, to the Buddha of Limitless Joy who has been enlightened since time without beginning. It is his “soul,” he says, that has reached Sado. This is a statement that is referring to the Daishonin’s life state, and to his steadfast determination to lead the widespread universal propagation of the Mystic Law from this place

of exile, with the identity of the original Buddha of the Latter Day.

The Daishonin continues by saying, “(Nichiren) in the second month of the following year, snowbound, is writing this to send to his close disciples” (5) Nichiren Daishonin began to write *The Opening of the Eyes* immediately after arriving in Tsukahara, on the island of Sado, at the beginning of November 1271, and finished writing it in February 1272.

The expression “close disciples,” refers to those for whom this work was intended, but specifically to Shijo Kingo, who accompanied him during the Tatsunokuchi persecution, and who was willing to sacrifice his life. But also, in a wider sense, it is actually addressed to all those who had followed him and had fought by his side up until then.

The true path of master and disciple – dedicated to the mission of

(5) *The Opening of the Eyes*
WND p. 269
(6) *Ibid.*

(7) *Ibid.*

achieving Kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law – consists of overcoming obstacles and fundamental darkness.

Following on, the Daishonin says: “[The description of the evil age in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter seems] terrible, but [one who cares nothing about oneself for the sake of the Law has] nothing to be frightened about. Others reading it will be terrified.”(6) The first sentence offers encouragement: he says that, although the description may seem frightening, in reality there is no cause to be alarmed.

Of course, the persecution by the three powerful enemies as predicted in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter is horrific. But when we understand the essence of the devilish forces which lie behind these persecutions, we can see that what is really frightening is the fundamental darkness contained in all human lives.

Moreover, in this work, the Daishonin shows us the vastness of his life state, having charged into battle for

Kosen-rufu at the risk of his own life, and having triumphed over all obstacles and negative forces. Because of this he says there is nothing to fear, not even the worst harassment or the most extreme adversity.

The spirit of “fighting against the powerful enemies” is the heart of the lion king. As long as we have the will and the courage to confront such negative forces, we can manifest our inherent Buddhahood, and draw out our fighting spirit, wisdom and life-force which we need in order to gain victory. For that reason alone, we have nothing to fear.

Therefore, the words “you have nothing to fear” expresses the heart of the Daishonin – the lion king – and the heart of his disciples – the lion cubs -, who fight side by side with the same altruistic spirit.

The words “others (...) will be terrified”(7) refers to the hearts of those who begrudge their lives and therefore run the risk of abandoning their faith because of their cowardice. In other words, the Daishonin is

worried that if this passage of the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter were to be read by people whose faith was weak or people who were not strong in their determination, they would be filled with fear and apprehension.

Cowardice is a state of inner defeat in the face of negative forces. This fear can be so profound that the person, in time, loses his or her vitality and wisdom, and may even end up bringing about their own downfall. The Daishonin strictly warns us about this because he does not want any of us to end up defeated in this way.

Ultimately, if we stand up with the same determination as our mentor in faith, we will never be defeated by the destructive forces. Because of this, the Daishonin urges his disciples to stand up with the same vow as himself.