

Master and disciple with the same heart and purpose

I, Nichiren, am indebted solely to my late teacher, Dozen-bo, for my having become the votary of the Lotus Sutra and my being widely talked about now, in both a good and bad sense. Nichiren is like the plant, and my teacher, the earth. The rice plant flowers and bears grain, but its spirit remains in the soil. This is the reason the stalk sprouts to flower and bears grain once again. The blessings that Nichiren obtains from propagating the Lotus Sutra will always return to Dozen-bo. How sublime! It is said that, if a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood, but if a teacher fosters a bad disciple, both will fall into hell. If teacher and disciple are of different minds, they will never accomplish anything.

Extract from the Goshō
“On Flowering and
bearing grain”
WND, Page 900

The purpose of religion is to help human beings to be happy. But even a teaching whose initial purpose was to promote human joy can start oppressing the believers. Even the Lotus Sutra can be used as an authority to justify discrimination if it is exploited maliciously. What is needed to avoid the danger of it being distorted? The bond between master and disciple; the heritage that the disciple accepts through which he embraces the resolute spirit and faith of his master to lead all people to happiness. What is the meaning of the

inseparability of master and disciple within Buddhism? Physically, of course, the master and his successor are two different entities. But both are inseparable at the level of the heart, the spirit, and in the attitude with which one and the other maintain and practice the Law. Therefore, it is important to look for a master who practices the Law correctly and to advance with the objective of sharing that same spirit of one’s master.

It is well-known that the relationship between master and disci-



ple proposed by Buddhism has nothing to do with an authoritarian relationship. A relationship not based on the Law or on the heart, a bond in which one blindly follows the orders of the other, a vertical bond from superior to subordinate where one calls himself disciple, but only formally, is not the authentic path of Buddhism.

This concept, so different from the Western one, is what allowed the survival of Buddhism, and in the Soka Gakkai has established its foundation and its development as an organization. It implies advancing together as colleagues, because master and disciples share the same ideals and the same spirit.

Disciple is one who continues the faith of his master without any deviation. The important thing is to practice a faith that is strengthe-

ned more and more without falling into arrogance.

This the Daishonin established himself through an example of faith which was more powerful and resolute each time. When he went to live on Mount Minobu, his life wasn't what we call a restful and passive retirement. While he expounded to various disciples about the Lotus Sutra and other writings, he composed a long succession of treatises and wrote letters to his followers, where he expounded very detailed guidelines of encouragement, specifically for each one.

It is said that, during those eight years and four months that he spent on Minobu, he created some 300 works. This means that, on average, he composed a writing every 10 days. And among them, there are some very long texts,

such as "The Selection of the Time" or "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude".

It is believed that, during that period, he also inscribed 120 Gohonzon, counting only those kept until today. Those were days of tremendous effort. In the most intense moments of the Atsuhara persecution (1279), the Daishonin exhorted his followers to: **"Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage"**. (On Persecutions Befalling the Sage, WND p 997.) That is the essence of faith.

In the writing "On Jambudvīpa", the Daishonin even asks his disciples to follow his example "without begrudging their lives". The passage reads: **"I pray that my followers will be like the cubs of the**

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lion king and never provoke the jeers of the howling jackals. That they will fight to expose the errors of the powerful enemies, without begrudging their lives, just as Nichiren has done since the infinite past until today. It is extremely rare to encounter a lion king such as this.”

These kind of exhortations are usual from the Daishonin.

To have the “**same sprit of Nichiren**” means to persevere in the practice as the Votary of the Lotus Sutra, as Nichiren Daishonin did. The Buddha seeks to forge genuine disciples not followers who limit themselves to praying passively in search of the compassionate protection of a superior or transcendental being. What the Buddha hopes for is disciples who fight actively at his side. Those who only hope to be protected by his master still have a lot to understand before they can call themselves genuine disciples. Actually, one fulfils the conditions of a true lion, of an authentic disciple, only when he fights in the same way as his master’s to protect his fellow beings.

A Buddhist master is one who leads people towards the Law and puts them in contact with it, shows them that the Law which they can trust exists within their own lives. The disciples exert

themselves in the Buddhist practice taking their master as an example and model. In that way then, their way of living allows them to be masters of their minds. In other words, to attain Buddhahood in this existence, it is essential to have a master who embodies the Law and is inseparable from it and teaches people the immense potential they possess.

The third president of Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, had Josei Toda as his master, the second president of Soka Gakkai. Toda was a master who practised just as the Buddha taught. He devoted his existence to widely propagating the Buddhism of the Daishonin in the modern age. Daisaku Ikeda said about his master Toda: “He made me what I am today. President Toda is always by my side, as my spiritual mentor. Even today, day after day and minute after minute, my heart doesn’t cease talking to my master. This is the spirit of inseparability between master and disciple”.

Those who unite with their spiritual mentors and exert themselves in making the spirit and intention of their master their own are people who live based upon the Law. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is a teaching built upon the inseparability of master and disciple. The three first presidents of

Soka Gakkai triumphed together, as masters and disciples, with one heart and goal. The victory of our human revolution and worldwide Kosen-rufu rests upon this relationship. Chou Tun-I, Chinese philosopher (also called Zhou Dunyi, 1017-1073) stated: “When the way of learning from one’s master is established, the quantity of people of good will increase.”

When the master shares totally with his disciples and they in turn comprehend and take on the source of the master’s desire, good people gather together naturally. That is precisely how the Soka Gakkai has grown and advanced.

When master and disciple unite and undertake a genuine battle, the battle for the peace and happiness of all people, it is possible to transform society.