The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra

In 1274, Nichiren Daishonin was pardoned and returned to Kamakura from his exile on the island of Sado; at that time, his faithful disciple and samurai, Shijo Kingo, was trying to convey the faith to his master, the feudal lord Emma, and was urging him to believe in the Lotus Sutra. This initiative was not well received. Driven by jealousy, his peers used the situation to spread false rumours and thereby discredit Kingo to his feudal lord. Thus began a series of persecutions against the Daishonin’s loyal disciple.

In the first paragraph of the letter, the Daishonin states three reasons why Shijo Kingo had emerged triumphant from the attacks against him. The first is his “prudence” – in other words, his alert, attentive attitude, his sensible precautions, his ability to be aware of what was going on around him, and the disciplined way in which he put all these principles into practice, without a moment’s carelessness. The second reason the Daishonin points to is his “courage”. Here he is referring to the courage of facing a crisis calmly and with composure, and to the wisdom that goes with this type of stance. And the third is “his firm faith in the Lotus Sutra”. That is, the determination to have an unquestioning faith in the Mystic Law, even in the most daunting of circumstances. This is the key issue to all the above, since, ultimately, the prudence and courage that we are talking about both come from faith.

Buddhism is about the struggle between enlightenment and fundamental darkness. Kosen-rufu is also a struggle between Buddhahood and the destructive forces. In all things, victory or defeat is defined by our inner posture, our “heart”. Spiritual victors can build an existence that cannot be destroyed by anyone or anything. The secret to adorning our lives with brilliant triumph is the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra”.

Of course, it is a mistake to believe that everything will fall into place and resolve itself just because we practice Buddhism. Indeed, it is precisely because we practice Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings that we have to arm ourselves with firm determination in order to avoid accidents, and we must never be careless, to ensure that the negative functions cannot take advantage.

The Daishonin writes: “An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack”, and “the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one’s faith”. It is precisely when we are advancing that we need to be particularly careful not to become complacent or negligent. Arrogance and recklessness will render us helpless against the negative functions. The Daishonin urges us to be “millions of times more careful than ever”. This is his emphatic warning.

Faith is a struggle between the Buddha and the devilish functions. If we drop our guard or incur in the smallest oversight, we risk being invaded and defeated by the functions of weakness, or “devilish functions”. Therefore, it is essential that we have a firm faith, and that we work constantly to strengthen it. The key to victory lies in behaving wisely thanks to this kind of faith.

The Daishonin states that Shijo Kingo survived that attack because he still had “good fortune and rewards”. Here, the term “good fortune” refers to luck, whilst “rewards” are the benefits that one receives as a reward for virtuous acts.

From the deep perspective of Buddhism, luck is not a matter of coincidence, nor is it a random factor, but rather, it is the result of benefits accumulated by yourself for your own life. We, alone, are responsible for improving our luck or good fortune, and for increasing our rewards or karmic benefits.

1) The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin (WND) Pg 1000.
2) WND, Pg. 952-953.
3) WND, Pg. 839.
4) WND, Pg1000.
Now, the Daishonin turns to the issue of the protection offered by the universal benevolent functions, or “Buddhist deities”, in order to clarify that the “good fortune” and “rewards” that had saved Shijo Kingo from danger were borne of his faith in the Lotus Sutra.

The protection of the universal functions works in accordance with the principle that “when the Buddha nature is activated from within, it manifests as protection from without.” In other words, when we believe in the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we reveal our innate Buddha nature, which activates the Buddha nature in all living things, which, in turn, affords us the protection of the surrounding world. This is what is meant by the protection of the universal functions or celestial deities. That’s why the Daishonin declares that those who believe in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, will, without fail, be protected by these functions.

GOSHO (frag. III)

“Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other […] The heart of strategy and swordsmanship, derives from the Mystic Law. Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered”.

“It is the heart that is important”6. This is the Daishonin’s conclusion. Happiness is not determined by an academic qualification or by the school in which you studied, nor by your position in an organization or company, nor by your age. What counts is our inner attitude, our intention. Our heart may be clouded by darkness and ignorance, or, conversely, it can shine out sublimely, as an entity of the Mystic Law, totally free of fundamental darkness.

The power of the mind or heart is truly inconceivable. A subtle change in our attitude or inner stance can change everything. The practice that allows us to draw on this power inherent in life is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for our own happiness and the happiness of others. Opening up this power in life is the key to achieving victory, not only in our personal everyday lives, but also in our eternal existence. And this is simply to use the “strategy of the Lotus Sutra”.

Traditionally, “strategy” refers to the art of directing military operations. But when considered more broadly, it can denote the means to be able to achieve better results in any area; in other words, an art to be able to live triumphantly creating value. The “strategy of the Lotus Sutra” means faith in the Gohonzon; a faith that confronts ignorance and delusion, one which reverses negative karma and triumphs, without fail, through confident prayer, and unlimited wisdom and courage which stem from that prayer.

At the end of this letter to Kingo, the Daishonin writes: “Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered.” Fear prevents us from seeing the truth, it doesn’t allow us to see things as they are; it can make a small difficulty seem like an enormous, insurmountable obstacle, and the door to a solution can seem like a thick wall before our eyes. So, it is vital to muster up courage.

For us, courage is to challenge the real, everyday issues we face, wherever we happen to be, with the conviction that we are manifestations of the Mystic Law. This is how to apply the strategy of the Lotus Sutra and construct an invincible story of glory and triumph.