

The Eight Winds

A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure. He is neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline. The heavenly gods will surely protect one who does not bend before the eight winds. However, if you bear an unreasonable grudge against your lord, heaven will never protect you, however strongly you may focus your mind.

One of the letters Nichiren Shonin wrote to Shijo Kingo is a Gosho given the special title “The Eight Winds.” Let’s consider what these eight winds are and how to deal with them.

This Gosho was written in the spring of the third year of Kenji (1277). During the previous year, the harassment of Shijo Kingo had become more intense. Under an order from his lord, Ema, he had been punished by a reduction in his fief, and he had received internal orders to move his domain to the province of Echigo. By the third year of Kenji, Shijo Kingo still had not obeyed this order, and some of his colleagues were urging their lord to confiscate Shijo Kingo’s fief. They said that as a person who did not follow his lord, he should forfeit his lands. Remember that Samurai of the day were all in competition for the favor of the master of their lands and support. Also remember that Shijo Kingo’s favor of Nichiren teachings was an irritation to lord Ema’s dedicated practice and support of current Buddhist teachers that Nichiren criticized openly.

Shijo Kingo found himself being pressed into an even more dire situation. He reported this to Nichiren Shonin at Minobu, and also told Nichiren that he intended to sue the colleagues who were causing him so much aggravation. In response, Nichiren cautioned him:

As vassals, you, your family, and your kinsmen are deeply indebted to your lord. Moreover, he showed you great clemency by taking no action against your clan when I was exiled to Sado and the entire nation hated me. Many of my disciples had their land seized by the government, and were then disowned or driven from their lords’ estates. Even if he never shows you the slightest further consideration, you should not hold a grudge against your lord. It is too much to expect another favor from him just because you are reluctant to move to another estate.

Nichiren then gave Shijo Kingo the strict guidance, “A wise person is one who is not swayed by the eight winds.”

The “eight winds” are eight influences that agitate and inflame the human heart and mind. They consist of four favorable circumstances (prosperity, honor, praise, and

pleasure) and four setbacks (decline, disgrace, censure, and suffering). Their contents are roughly as follows:

1. **Prosperity:** to obtain what one desires
2. **Decline:** to suffer loss
3. **Honor:** to be admired and praised in one's absence
4. **Disgrace:** to be criticized and defamed in one's absence (behind one's back)
5. **Praise:** to be admired and praised directly
6. **Censure:** to be criticized and defamed directly
7. **Pleasure:** to be happy in body and mind
8. **Suffering:** to suffer in body and mind

People naturally seek out the four favorable circumstances and try to avoid the four setbacks. This is why their defenses can be penetrated by these eight winds. The four favorable circumstances are viewed as rewards of the realm of Opportunity and life, and the four setbacks as repercussions of the three lower paths or realms. For the most part, life consists of repeated encounters with these eight winds, what is termed in Buddhism “transmigration of the six paths or lower realms.”

Shijo Kingo was a samurai of the warrior caste with a fair amount of education and culture. He was also a person of strong resolve, having accumulated experience of more than twenty years of resolve and practice as a disciple of Nichiren. Despite all that, in the process of sustaining hardships time and time again and bearing the crushing burden of those difficulties, though he was a person of longstanding resolve, his threshold of endurance was at the brim. Before he realized what had happened, the eight winds were able to get to him and disturb his balance. “A wise person is one who is not swayed by the eight winds.” As Nichiren teaches here, people cease to be “wise” if they allow the eight winds to disturb their equilibrium, since they can no longer exercise proper judgment over their words and actions.

At this time, Nichiren pointed out to Shijo Kingo how foolish it was for him to become so enraged over a reduction in his lands or a change in fief. It was not wise for Kingo to let that anger make him resent the lord to whom he owed so much. He might only hurt himself by pursuing such a rash course of action as filing a lawsuit against his colleagues.

After receiving this letter, Shijo Kingo took a good, hard look at himself and regained his normal, good judgment. He then received the protection of the guardian deities (*shoten zenjin*), overcame his mountains of difficulties, and “changed poison into medicine.”

When directly attacked by harsh circumstances, even a person with as formidable, sturdy resolve as Shijo Kingo will be affected by the eight winds.

Considered overall, the eight winds are the great enemies of us common mortals, since they distort our normal judgment and lead us to make mistakes that hurt ourselves. Of course, the ability to resist the eight winds depends on individual character. However, even the same person may be impervious to these factors at one time but find that they penetrate his or her defenses on a different occasion. Overall, strength of character as a human being may well be determined by the degree to which one is not disturbed by the eight winds. At the very least, it must be said that someone who is easily swayed by the eight winds is foolish.

In general, this means to not be overjoyed by gain and to not grieve over decline. To be “wise” means to neither get all worked up nor allow oneself to cave in, regardless of whether good things happen or bad things happen.

In reality, however, common mortals are the opposite. We are quick to rejoice and quick to feel despair. Some people are easily influenced by gain, while others are easily swayed by decline. People who are weak when it comes to gain will indulge in excess luxury as soon as they receive a high salary, recklessly spend money here and there, and look down on people with less money. People who are weak when it comes to decline will resent their boss if they do not advance at work as they would like, become jealous of their coworkers, lose their enthusiasm, and take their frustrations out on their families.

Those who are manipulated by flattery are people easily affected by the wind of “praise.” People who immediately become angry as soon as someone gossips about them can be defeated by the wind of “disgrace.” Those whose balance is most disturbed by the eight winds are people who strongly seek to be well thought of by others and who act in order to receive the praise of others, whether they consciously realize it or not.

Consider the nature of life for a moment. The moment-to-moment engine of life. The “eight winds” blow through each and every situation we encounter. What weak creatures we humans are when it comes to dealing with them! The eight winds easily penetrate our defenses and influence our actions. Because of this, we bring various tragedies upon ourselves and others. This is the way of this impure, *saha* world. Samsara. However, there is no reason to point fingers at other people. What is necessary is to strictly examine how this applies to each one of us. Nichiren taught Shijo Kingo:

The Engine of Life will definitely protect a person who is not affected by these eight winds. However, if you bear unreasonable rancor against your lord, the engine of life, tainted by your negative influences, will never protect you, however strongly you may entreat.

Even in the mundane realm of ordinary affairs, when something bad happens to people of good character—those who look out for others and are considerate,

trustworthy and reliable—what happens? They receive support from their surroundings, people appear to help them, and they are able to surmount their difficulties. This is the **influence** we have on our **karma** (the engine of life).

In Buddhism, this functioning of one's surroundings is viewed as one form of protection by the guardian deities (*shoten zenjin*). Or, as the positive **influence** of our **actions** to build supportive **karma** from the **potential** of the **engine of life**. The protection of the guardian deities appears even more strongly for people who honestly believe in and practice the Priori Law (*Myoho*), protecting them in many kinds of situations. In other words, we create and **manifest** our **karmic experience** from moment to moment based on our **attitude** and **intent**. This is how we influence the constant stream of karma manifesting from this moment into the next.

Nichiren strictly points out another vital lesson. If someone is so affected by the eight winds that he acts disgracefully as a person living in society, he cannot expect to be supported by his surroundings. In other words, one can forfeit one's qualification to receive the protection of the guardian deities (read as manifesting negative influence). We can all benefit by considering about this point as deeply as possible.

Basically, there is a conspicuous characteristic common to those who are affected by the eight winds, even though they have resolve in Nichiren's Buddhism. They are weak (or even lacking) in the spirit to seek the "treasures of the engine of life" before all else. The "treasures of the storehouse and body" (Earthly Desires) have become magnified out of proportion. Such people often veer away from the sacred practice of chanting the Daimoku as a Buddhist practice with the aim of attaining Buddhahood. Instead, their ***Daimoku becomes a practice of fervently focusing the mind only for the fulfillment of their personal wishes.***

We are rife with the three poisons, to a greater or lesser degree, and are easily "invaded" by the eight winds. We need to remember what can happen if we allow them to really sway our minds. We may lose our judgment, lose the trust and respect of those around us, be forsaken by the guardian deities and finally create a fiasco. We need to have strong resolve precisely so that we will not be so influenced by the eight winds.

The way to become the strongest kind of person, someone who cannot be led astray by the eight winds, is to make the "treasures of the heart" one's fundamental guideline in life and chant serious, strong Daimoku to the Mandala of Gohonzon morning and evening with a great desire to become rich in the treasures of the Engine of Life. By so doing, one will be staunchly protected. This is why the earnest desire to accumulate the treasures of the Engine of Life is the very attitude that will enable us to repel the eight winds. This is why the merit we gain from chanting the Daimoku is the way to defeat the eight winds naturally.

The eight winds are always blowing ferociously, creating confusion about life in this world. We must always be on guard, knowing that we, too, tend to be influenced by them. Then we will try to build ever stronger resolve in order to become people of indomitable character who are unmoved by the eight winds.