

Honen's Words No. 21- Endeavor

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Some waste away long spring days staring at flowers in surroundings as splendid as those of the Golden Glen. Some while away autumn nights gazing at a moon as beautiful as the one visible from the Southern Mansion⁽¹⁾.

The years fly for others who spend time in pursuit of food on cloud-covered mountains; still others float on the ocean looking for bounties of the deep. Some live through crushing ice in the severe winter, while others toil for gainful living by the sweat of their brows. Some are encumbered by the ties of affection for family and relatives, while others are unable to rid themselves of the fire of hatred for those who have wronged them.

Thus goes the life of people, dawn to dusk, day and night, whether they are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. They exist for themselves, and their desires accumulate unwholesome karma, which will with certainty lead them to the three evil worlds of hell, starving spirits, and beasts and the Eight Difficulties⁽²⁾ in their future life. A passage describes, "Eighty hundred and forty million thoughts come and go every day in the heart of man, and each of these thoughts is karma that will condemn him to the Three Evil Worlds."

Thus, did night fall yesterday; and so, purposeless, the morning dawns today. How many more empty days and nights await us?⁽³⁾

NOTES

(1) The Golden Glen (a famous Park in Hunan Province in China) and the Southern Mansion (a castle for moon-viewing) were introduced in a Chinese Poem composed in the Wakan Roei Shu (A Collection of Chinese and Japanese Poems) by Fujiwara no Kinto (966-1041) in the Heian Period.

(2) The eight difficulties; the eight difficult conditions in which one neither sees a buddha nor hears the teachings of the Buddha. They are conditions of hell, starving spirits, beasts, the heaven of long life, being in Uttarakuru, being deficient in the sensual organs, being knowledgeable in worldly affairs, and being in the age of non-existence of Buddha Sakyamuni.

(3) This passage is based on quotations from the Honen Shonin Gyojo Ezu (An Illustrated Biography of Honen Shonin), Chapter 32.