

The Dragon Girl's Enlightenment Is a Grand Declaration of Gender Equality Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 20

This is the twentieth in a series of discussions on the Lotus Sutra between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the September 1996 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

In this installment they discuss the significance of the teaching in the "Devadatta" (twelfth) chapter of the dragon girl's enlightenment, the Buddha's spirit to equally treasure all people and battle discrimination in society, and the greatness of the Lotus Sutra to enable people to construct lives of absolute happiness and help others do the same.

Takanaori Endo: This time, let's take up the enlightenment of the young lady known as the dragon girl,¹ which is described in the latter half of the "Devadatta" (twelfth) chapter.

Haruo Suda: The dragon girl is best known for having provided all women a model of attaining Buddhahood.

Daisaku Ikeda: The enlightenment of women is one of the key themes of the Lotus Sutra. For us, a group of men, to discuss the enlightenment of women may prove quite a challenge.

Katsuji Saito: Yes. Let's do our best to treat this subject with sensitivity and earnestness and not make it one-sided. Otherwise, we'll certainly earn the ire of members of the women's and young women's divisions.

Endo: The real issue, a woman astutely pointed out to me, is not whether women can attain Buddhahood, but whether men who skip gongyo can!

Ikeda: By the looks of it, I'd say that you've been fairly overwhelmed by the strong seeking spirit of the women's division.

President Hassan Gouled Aptidon of Djibouti, Africa, whom I met in 1995 (September 7), told me that should there ever be a war between men and women, he would have no problem deciding which side to take—that of the women.

"You can count me in, too," I told him.

When I mentioned this incident to Dr. Alexander Yakovlev of Russia and his wife (on April 25, 1996), Dr. Yakovlev remarked that before it came to a war, he would raise a white flag and surrender. Against a phalanx of women, men wouldn't stand a chance, he said; humorously confiding that during fifty years of married life he had not once managed to sway his wife once she had made up her mind. They are a delightful couple who have passed the seasons of their lives together.

From one standpoint, the discussion of the dragon girl in the "Devadatta" chapter is a tale about how arrogant men are defeated by women. Even Shariputra, known as the foremost in wisdom, is no match in faith for the dragon girl. It is also a grand declaration of human rights that refutes, by means of actual proof, ideas and beliefs that discriminate

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

against women.

It seems that misunderstanding still lingers about the enlightenment of women as taught in the Lotus Sutra. Let's try to get an accurate grasp of the concept.

The Dragon Girl's Buddhahood Is Met with Disbelief

At that time Shariputra said to the dragon girl, "You suppose that in this short time you have been able to attain the unsurpassed way. But this is difficult to believe. Why? Because a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law. How could you attain the unsurpassed bodhi?"...

At that time the dragon girl had a precious jewel worth as much as the thousand-millionfold world which she presented to the Buddha. The Buddha immediately accepted it....

The girl said, "Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood. It will be even quicker than that! (*The Lotus Sutra*, ch. 12, p. 188)

Suda: First, let's consider the flow of the "Devadatta" chapter. After Shakyamuni completes his prophesy that the great villain Devadatta would attain enlightenment, one of the followers of Many Treasures Buddha (Jp. Taho), known as Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated, suggests to Many Treasures that they return home to the land of Treasure Purity. Wisdom Accumulated, judging from his name, must have been not only perceptive, but also highly intelligent. He must have thought that the teaching was finished, having just heard Shakyamuni preach the doctrine of the enlightenment of evil people and urge his followers to "make certain the Law will long endure" (LS11, 177), i.e., spread the Lotus Sutra after his passing.

Endo: But he was premature in coming to this conclusion. Shakyamuni had not yet finished his instruction.

Ikeda: That's right. There was more to the story, something even Wisdom Accumulated did not comprehend; namely, the doctrine of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form.

Suda: Yes. Thereupon, Shakyamuni Buddha says to Wisdom Accumulated, "Good man, wait a little while. There is a bodhisattva named Manjushri² here whom you should see. Debate and discuss the wonderful Law with him, and then you may return to your homeland" (LS12, 185). Manjushri, who had just arrived from the palace of the dragon king in the ocean where he had been spreading the Buddha's teachings, appears at the Ceremony in the Air accompanied by many bodhisattvas under his instruction. A discussion between Wisdom Accumulated and Manjushri ensues.

Wisdom Accumulated starts out by asking Manjushri, "When you went to the palace of the dragon king, how many living beings did you convert?" (LS12, 186) Manjushri explains that in the palace of the dragon king he had "constantly expounded the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law alone" (LS12, 186), converting countless beings, and that the 8-year-old daughter of the dragon king heard the Lotus Sutra and immediately attained *bodhi*, or enlightenment.

Wisdom Accumulated doesn't believe a word of this. Convinced that Buddhahood can only be attained by bodhisattvas after they have carried out difficult and painful

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

practices for immeasurable *kalpas*, he cannot believe that the dragon girl could have attained Buddhahood in the brief time of Manjushri's stay at the dragon king's palace.

Saito: The Daishonin says in the Goshō that Manjushri's propagation at the palace of the dragon king took place during the short interval while Shakyamuni was expounding the "Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (eleventh) chapter. He explains that the fact that Manjushri could convert many beings and that the dragon girl could attain enlightenment during that brief interlude is indicative of the power of the Lotus Sutra.

[Nichiren Daishonin writes: "And yet, contrary to all expectations, through the instruction of Monju [Manjushri], in the short space of time between the Hosshi ["Teacher of the Law" (tenth)] and Devadatta (twelfth) chapters when the Buddha was preaching the Hoto ["Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (eleventh)] chapter, in the midst of the ocean she [the dragon girl] attained Buddhahood. This was a most wonderful happening! If it had not been for the power of the Lotus Sutra, the foremost among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, how could such a thing have come about?" (MW-7, 38)]

Ikeda: Wisdom Accumulated obviously did not understand the power of the Lotus Sutra. That's why he couldn't believe it when he heard Manjushri relate that the dragon girl had attained Buddhahood in her present form.

Nichiren Daishonin says that such disbelief in the Mystic Law is a manifestation of "fundamental darkness." In this context, fundamental darkness means we have a mistaken notion about the true nature of our existence, and, ultimately, the potential of our own life. Also, the Daishonin characterizes the disbelief of Wisdom Accumulated as according with the "spirit of the specific teaching"³ (cf. *Goshō Zenshu*, p. 746). In other words, Wisdom Accumulated represents the rather limited point of view that one can only attain Buddhahood by first passing through many stages of practice, for example, the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice.

By contrast, the dragon girl represents the perfect teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The dragon girl reveals with her life "new thinking" that flies in the face of the patriarchal old way of thinking. The "Devadatta" chapter can be likened to a "philosophical drama." It presents profound ideas in the form of a dramatic narrative with deep meaning. I think that is why one never tires of hearing it.

Endo: That's true. Before Wisdom Accumulated has even finished stating his disbelief, the dragon girl herself suddenly appears.

Suda: And what a dramatic entry it is!

Endo: She greets the Buddha, vowing that "the Buddha alone can bear witness to this [the fact of my having attained Buddhahood]. / I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle [of the Lotus Sutra] / to rescue living beings from suffering" (LS12, 188).

Ikeda: "I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering"—these are notable words. It's a wonderful passage.

She says, in other words: "Everyone might ridicule me. But that does not concern

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

me in the least. The Buddha knows the truth. I will simply devote myself to helping people become happy through the power of the Mystic Law that has saved me." Attaining Buddhahood in one's present form means developing in oneself the Buddha's strong spirit to unhesitatingly lead all suffering people to happiness. It is to take action cheerfully and with composure to help those who are suffering, even though one might be subject to ridicule or discrimination. Those who carry out such a practice shine as Buddhas just as they are.

Suda: Still the men, hopelessly stubborn and missing the point, continue to express disbelief.

This time it is Shariputra who voices doubts after hearing the dragon girl's determination. There are two reasons for Shariputra's disbelief. In the first place, Shariputra, like Wisdom Accumulated, has the fixed notion that the Buddha's enlightenment can only be attained by carrying out painful practices over an extremely long period of time. The second reason relates to the "five obstacles"; the view that a woman cannot become a (Brahma) heavenly king, a King Shakra,⁴ a devil king, a wheel-turning sage king⁵ or a Buddha. Therefore, he criticizes the dragon girl, declaring it impossible that in her form as a woman she could have quickly become a Buddha.

Saito: The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China says, "Shariputra argues employing the provisional teachings of the Tripitaka."⁶ The Tripitaka, or Hinayana, are provisional teachings, in which the five obstacles are discussed.

Endo: In this "scene," Shariputra, as a proponent of the Hinayana teachings, plays the role of "bad guy."

Ikeda: That the dragon girl has attained Buddhahood in her present form is a wonderful refutation of both the view that attaining Buddhahood requires practice over an extremely long period and the doctrine of the five obstacles.

Suda: Yes. Next the dragon girl takes up a jewel that the sutra says is equal in value to the thousand-millionfold world, a metaphor for the entire universe, and offers it to Shakyamuni, who accepts it immediately. The dragon girl then declares to Shariputra, who has watched this, that her own attainment of Buddhahood will be accomplished in less time than it took for her to present the jewel to Shakyamuni and for Shakyamuni to accept it.

Ikeda: This gesture, while highly symbolic, does indeed amount to a fundamental refutation of the previous, prevailing understanding about the nature of enlightenment.

The "jewel worth as much as the thousand-millionfold world" represents the Mystic Law, which is the wellspring of the universe and of all life. We can also say that it symbolizes one's own life, which is an entity of the Mystic Law. Offering the jewel to the Buddha means offering one's own life, which is infinitely precious and irreplaceable. In other words, it is to devote one's life, in the sense of the term *namu*;⁷ it is to have faith.

The Buddha's acceptance of the jewel indicates that the lives of the dragon girl and

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

the Buddha have become one. In other words, by this action Shakyamuni provides actual proof of the dragon girl's attainment of Buddhahood.

We could also say that the jewel is the jewel of *ichinen sanzen* (or three thousand realms in a single moment of life). By making this offering to the Buddha, the dragon girl indicates she has awakened to the mystic principle of *ichinen sanzen*.

Endo: The "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) says: "At the time when the precious jewel was still in the hands of the dragon girl, it represented the attainments that were inherent in her nature. But when the Buddha accepted the precious jewel, it became representative of the attainments acquired through religious practice" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 747).

The Dragon Girl's Enlightenment Means That Men Can Become Buddhas, Too

Ikeda: Everyone, men and women alike, possesses the "attainments inherent in her nature." It is a jewel that exists in the lives of all living beings. This is the meaning of the "mutual possession of the ten worlds" and *ichinen sanzen*; this is the Lotus Sutra's fundamental revelation.

The ten worlds include the world of Animality. The dragon girl has the form of an animal, and naturally the world of Buddhahood is also inherent in the world of Animality. Her Buddhahood is invisible, however, to an eye that is colored by prejudice.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all living beings possess the world of Buddhahood. There is not even a hint of discrimination toward women. If it were true that women could not become Buddhas, then the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* would fall apart. And to deny *ichinen sanzen* is to deny the possibility of anyone's attainment of Buddhahood. Therefore, the dragon girl's enlightenment signifies not only the enlightenment of all women, but the enlightenment of all men as well.

If there are men who deny the enlightenment of women, they are denying the possibility of their own attainment of Buddhahood. This is a point that male chauvinists seldom grasp.

Saito: Earlier when we discussed the enlightenment of voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*, we noted that the bodhisattvas had thought that while they were capable of attaining Buddhahood, the people of the two vehicles⁸ were not. But once they grasped the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*, it dawned on them that if the people of the two vehicles were incapable of attaining Buddhahood, then they, too, could not attain Buddhahood. For it would mean that the worlds of Learning and Realization in their own lives did not contain, and so could not manifest, the condition of Buddhahood. This parallels the case of the enlightenment of women.

Suda: "If others fail to attain Buddhahood, then I fail to attain Buddhahood. If others attain Buddhahood, then I attain Buddhahood, too" (GZ, 401). The bodhisattvas had failed to understand this.

Ikeda: They thought that whether or not other people could become Buddhas had nothing to do with their own attainment of Buddhahood. But to discriminate against others—in any way—is to discriminate against your own life.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

Therefore, the dragon girl exhorts Shariputra and Wisdom Accumulated to: “Employ your supernatural powers and watch me attain Buddhahood” (LS12, 188). The Daishonin comments on this as follows: “Shariputra thinks she is referring only to her own attainment of Buddhahood, but this is an error. She is rebuking him, saying in effect, ‘Watch closely! This is how you attain Buddhahood’” (GZ, 747).

Endo: Shariputra and Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated take quite a drubbing.

A bodhisattva, in the original sense of the term, is someone who has vowed to attain Buddhahood only after enabling all other beings to do so. Since half the people in the world are women, if women were incapable of attaining Buddhahood, then it would naturally follow that no bodhisattva could attain Buddhahood.

Suda: But the roots of discrimination run deep. It is very difficult to let go of one’s attachments to such views merely through logic and reasoning. In that sense, I think the purpose of the metaphors and analogies found in the “Devadatta” chapter is to drive home the principle of women attaining Buddhahood with actual proof.

Ikeda: That may be so. The dragon girl next transforms into a man, thereby, concretely revealing her attainment of Buddhahood.

Suda: Yes. She tells them, “Watch me attain Buddhahood,” and then straightaway turns into a man before everyone’s eyes. She immediately carries out all the practices of a bodhisattva and then proceeds southward to a land called Spotless World. To cause everyone to understand the actual proof of her enlightenment, she manifests the Buddha’s thirty-two features and eighty characteristics,⁹ and preaches the Mystic Law to all people in that land. The beings of the *saha* world, seeing her from afar, greatly rejoice and bow with deep reverence. And they, too, attain the stage of “no regression” and receive prophecies of future enlightenment.

Confronted with such actual proof, Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated and Shariputra “silently believed and accepted these things” (LS12, 189). This brings us to the close of the “Devadatta” chapter.

The Dragon Girl’s Transformation Into a Man Is an Expedient Means

Saito: Regarding the description of how the dragon girl “in the space of an instant change[d] into a man” (LS12, 188), some have suggested that if she has to take on the form of a man in order to attain Buddhahood, then the Lotus Sutra still presents a discriminatory view of women.

Ikeda: That’s an incorrect reading of what happened. The dragon girl’s enlightenment indicates the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form. You must remember that she had already become a Buddha in her female form.

The dragon girl’s changing into a man is nothing more than an expedient means that she employs to drive home the fact of her Buddhahood to Shariputra and the others, who were convinced only men could attain Buddhahood. It does not mean that a woman can only attain Buddhahood by first turning into a man. This has been clear from the first with Bodhisattva Manjushri’s introduction of the dragon girl.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

Endo: It's a bit lengthy, but since it's an important passage I'll read Manjushri's remarks in their entirety:

"There is the daughter of the dragon king Sagara, who has just turned eight. Her wisdom has keen roots and she is good at understanding the root activities and deeds of living beings. She has mastered the dharanis, has been able to accept and embrace all the storehouse of profound secrets preached by the Buddhas, has entered deep into meditation, thoroughly grasped the doctrines, and in the space of an instant conceived the desire for bodhi and reached the level of no regression. Her eloquence knows no hindrance, and she thinks of living beings with compassion as though they were her own children. She is fully endowed with blessings, and when it comes to conceiving in mind and expounding by mouth, she is subtle, wonderful, comprehensive and great. Kind, compassionate, benevolent, yielding, she is gentle and refined in will, capable of attaining bodhi" (LS12, 187).

Ikeda: This truly describes the Buddha. I think we could say it also presents an ideal not only for women but for all human beings.

Saito: Since she has "thoroughly grasped the doctrines," "reached the level of no regression," possesses the compassion, wisdom and power to lead people to happiness, and is "capable of attaining bodhi," she has already in fact attained Buddhahood. The dragon girl herself says, "I have attained bodhi" (LS12, 188).

Endo: In terms of the ordinary view of attaining Buddhahood that we find in sutras expounded before the Lotus Sutra, the circumstances of the dragon girl would suggest that, among all the Buddha's followers, she has the dimmest prospects of attaining Buddhahood. Namely, she (1) has the form of an animal; (2) is a woman; and (3) is very young in years, being only 8 years old.

Even if it were said that this dragon girl had become a Buddha, her outward appearance alone would have definitely prevented people from understanding and believing this. And so, for the benefit of Shariputra and the others, she manifests a form that will be convincing to those who are obstinate and a bit slow to understand. That is the reason for her changing into a man.

Ikeda: Indeed.

Speaking of women changing into men, we find similar accounts in many Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra. In light of the truth of nonsubstantiality (Jp. *ku*), which is one of basic principles of Mahayana Buddhism, for one to fixate on superficial differences between men and women is pointless and unnecessary from a doctrinal standpoint.

However, Shakyamuni must have foreseen that at the time there would be great resistance to the idea that women could become Buddhas in their present form.

Endo: Indian society at the time was highly discriminatory toward women. And in Buddhism, too, in the Hinayana teachings, discrimination toward women is very much in evidence. Therefore, it may be that by explaining that women would first become men and then attain Buddhahood, Mahayana Buddhism sought to cushion the blow, as

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

it were, and make it easier for people to accept the idea of women attaining Buddhahood.

Suda: The doctrine of women transforming into men could therefore perhaps be characterized as a “product of compromise.”

Ikeda: That’s certainly one side of the story.

Fundamentally, Buddhism views all living beings as individual manifestations of a single great, golden life. This is the truth to which Shakyamuni had become enlightened. This is what is illustrated by the principles of dependent origination and nonsubstantiality. This, in essence, is the Mystic Law. From this enlightened standpoint, it would be ludicrous to assert that one sex is superior to the other.

However, in order to cause that Law to spread and take root in society, the Buddha had to consider how to explain it in terms people would accept. Under certain circumstances, Shakyamuni, while fundamentally determined to teach the Law “according with the Buddha’s own mind,” had to employ wisdom and adapt his teaching to the capacities of his listeners simply to get a hearing; he had to draw others gradually toward his own enlightened state of life.

The explanation we find in Mahayana sutras of women turning into men could, therefore, be seen as a revolutionary doctrine refuting the Hinayana notion that women could never become Buddhas.

Saito: Had Shakyamuni simply told people the truth from the outset, the resistance would have been too great. When he expounds the Lotus Sutra, he declares for the first time the teaching “according with the Buddha’s own mind” that women can attain enlightenment without changing form.

Ikeda: The problem, however, is that when explanations are tailored to the biases of society in this fashion, there is a danger that even people of sincere faith will become attached to those biases, leading to a distorted interpretation of the teaching. The effect often is that when a distorted teaching gets handed down it does nothing but exacerbate and harden the discriminatory attitudes of society. If we were to trace the historical view of women in Buddhism, we would probably find many such instances.

Endo: I think so. The five obstacles that Shariputra mentions are a good example.

This doctrine is thought to have appeared after Shakyamuni’s passing during the period when Hinayana Buddhism (the Theravada school) prospered. Monks and the Buddhist order became highly authoritarian; and, in a reflection of the bigotry of Indian society at the time, there was open discrimination against women and lay people. Many of the Buddhist monks were from Brahman families; and it may be that their inability to completely discard the discriminatory and elitist assumptions of their class was a factor in Hinayana Buddhism taking on such a discriminatory character.

Shakyamuni Fought Discrimination in Society

Suda: Discrimination against women goes directly against the spirit of Shakyamuni. Indian society in Shakyamuni’s day was disparaging toward women in the extreme. The Brahman scriptures, too, teem with abuse and vilification of women.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

In such an age, Shakyamuni did not discriminate against women in the least. After deliberating the matter, he allowed women to become nuns and carry out monastic practice. And both Mahaprajapati, who had raised him, and Yashodhara, his wife from before renouncing the world, became nuns. This is said to have been a landmark development for the time.

Endo: That's because in Brahmanism only men could take up the monastic life.

Suda: In Buddhism, however, during Shakyamuni's lifetime and the period shortly after his death, many women left secular life and were active in the *samgha*, (the Buddhist order). We get a glimpse of the situation at the time from a Pali text titled the *Therigatha*, or *Confessions of Nuns*.

In the epilogue, the renowned Japanese Buddhistologist Dr. Hajime Nakamura writes: "The appearance [in Buddhism] of an order of nuns was an astonishing development in world religious history. No such female religious order existed in Europe, North Africa, West Asia or East Asia at the time. Buddhism was the first tradition to produce one."¹⁰

The women who became nuns had a variety of different backgrounds. Dr. Nakamura explains:

Formerly, when they lived in the secular world, the nuns had been ordinary women. Living in a polluted age, they had fully experienced the pain and hardship of life in this world. Some had lost husbands, some had lost children, some had been ostracized, and some had been so destitute that they had only just managed to survive. Some had experienced bad luck with men, and been married a number of times, only to have the relationship always end in disaster. And there were women who were simply poor and ill-fated.... There were also women who had at one time determined to take their own lives on account of the overwhelming hardships they faced.¹¹

Of course, the order also included women who had been wealthy, and who had been endowed with intelligence and beauty. But even such women could not avoid the suffering of aging and the problem of death. Shakyamuni taught many such women the path to happiness.

Ikeda: People's worries are still the same.

Since Shakyamuni did not discriminate between cloistered and lay people, he also taught laywomen the path to happiness. Shakyamuni's laywomen followers included Vaidehi, the wife of King Bimbisara of Magadha and mother of Ajatashatru; and Shrimala, the queen of Ayodhya, an ancient city in central India. But Shakyamuni treated these prominent women the same way he treated women from ordinary backgrounds.

There is a famous saying: "Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brahman. By (one's) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one's) action one becomes a brahman."¹² In a fiercely discriminatory society, Shakyamuni staunchly refused to allow his actions to be colored by distinctions of class, gender and birth, or of lay and cloistered. As a result, he was seen as a dangerous person by conservative elements of society who stood by the status quo.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

Endo: At the outset, the samgha pulsed vibrantly with Shakyamuni's spirit of equality. A nun gives an account of calmly rebutting someone who had been whispering that women could not attain enlightenment. Pointing out that women are able to quiet their minds, manifest wisdom and attain awakening, she asks, "How is it possible, then, that being a woman could be an obstacle to attaining enlightenment?"¹³

Teachings of Shakyamuni that seem to back up the words of this nun have also been handed down. One text cites him as saying: "There are differences between men and women, but there is no basis for discriminating among people in terms of the essential nature of life. Just as a man can practice the Way and attain enlightenment, if a woman practices and passes through the necessary courses of the heart, she will without a doubt arrive at enlightenment."¹⁴

Ikeda: Whether male or female, being noble or base depends entirely on what a person has done. It is one's actions and sincerity that count. That is Shakyamuni's spirit.

Saito: Early Buddhist texts attribute various negative statements regarding women to Shakyamuni. But these are thought to have been intended, rather, as admonitions to help male practitioners avoid being distracted.

Endo: Certainly, some point to the fact that Shakyamuni's teachings to monks and nuns regarding women are completely different from those addressed to lay people. Even if that's true, I think it would be a mistake to conclude that the Buddha was prejudiced against women. Shakyamuni's teachings to monks and nuns were obviously intended to help them maintain a strict practice.

Suda: Monks had 250 precepts, but nuns had many more—348 or, according to some sources, five hundred. I think the fact that things were stricter for women could be related to the social conditions of the day.

Ikeda: At the least, we can say that there is some uncertainty as to how much the early Buddhist sutras represent what was truly in Shakyamuni's heart. In any event, it is a fact that Shakyamuni allowed women to take clerical vows and to carry out strict practice. The major premise of carrying out Buddhist practice naturally is that you can attain enlightenment. If that were not possible, he certainly would not have allowed women practitioners. From this alone, we get a sense of Shakyamuni's egalitarianism.

In *Confessions of Nuns*, there are many instances of nuns expressing their joy in attaining the state of inner calm and tranquillity that Shakyamuni taught: One says, "My heart was liberated."¹⁵ Another says, "I have fully understood and cast aside the roots that give rise to all sufferings."¹⁶ And a third nun says, "I have in fact awakened to peace of mind and have glimpsed the mirror of the truth."¹⁷

Suda: During the age when Hinayana Buddhism flourished, this original spirit of Shakyamuni all but disappeared. Generally speaking, Hinayana Buddhism deified Shakyamuni as a superhuman being. It asserted not only that most people could not become Buddhas, but that unless you were a monk you could not even attain the state of arhat, the highest enlightenment of voice-hearers. And it blatantly discriminated against both lay people and women.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

The doctrine of the five obstacles is thought to have appeared at that time.

Endo: The decline of monastic Buddhism was evident already during the reign of King Ashoka, just a hundred years after Shakyamuni's death.¹⁸ Hinayana Buddhism had strong authoritarian and discriminatory leanings, and had lost Shakyamuni's spirit. By contrast, a new current of Buddhism, known as Mahayana, gave rise to a "renaissance" aimed at returning to Shakyamuni's original spirit.

The Mahayana sutras explain women's attainment of Buddhahood in a variety of ways. For example, the Sukhavativyuha, which is variously translated as the "Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life" (Jp. Muryojukyo) and "Great Sutra of Amida Buddha" (Jp. Daiamidakyo), give "causing women to be reborn in the pure land" as one of Amida's vows. However, the idea was that women would be reborn in the pure land not as women but as men.

Also, the Shrimala Sutra (Jp. Shomankyo) and Vimalakirti Sutra (Jp. Yuimakyo), which emphasize the doctrine of nonsubstantiality, assert that to distinguish between men and women is itself an illusion and meaningless, and criticize the Hinayana teachings' discrimination against women.

Saito: Many other Mahayana texts similarly explain that women can attain Buddhahood after first transforming into men. These include the Hoshaku Sutra (Jp. Hoshakukyo), the Sutra of Great Assembly (Jp. Daijukukyo), and the Wisdom Sutras (Jp. Hannyakyo). On the surface, the explanation of the dragon girl turning into a man in the "Devadatta" chapter can be seen as an extension of these other Mahayana sutras.

But the Lotus Sutra teaches the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. In other words, it does not present changing into a man as a condition for women to attain Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra, therefore, fundamentally differs from these other texts.

Ikeda: The Lotus Sutra teaches that men and women are equal both in enlightenment and in practice. For example, the "Teacher of the Law" (tenth) chapter says, "These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One's room, put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this sutra" (LS10, 166). This amounts to a declaration that men and women are equally qualified to expound the Law in the Buddha's stead.

In the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, Shakyamuni bestows prophecies of future enlightenment upon a multitude of women. And the people to whom Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Jp. Fukyo) bows in reverence (acknowledging their inherent Buddha nature), saying, "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance" (LS20, 266–67), include both laymen and laywomen, priests and nuns. The premise, here, naturally is that women equally can attain Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "The attainment of Buddhahood by women is not permitted except in this sutra" (GZ, 472), in reference to the Lotus Sutra. And:

When she [the dragon girl] attained Buddhahood, this does not mean simply that one person did so. It reveals the fact that all women will attain Buddhahood. In the various Hinayana sutras that were preached before the Lotus Sutra, it is denied that women can ever attain Buddhahood. In the Mahayana sutras other

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

than the Lotus Sutra, it would appear that women can attain Buddhahood or be reborn in the pure land. But they may do so only after they have changed into some other form. It is not the kind of immediate attainment of Buddhahood that is based on the doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life [*ichinen sanzen*]. Thus it is an attainment of Buddhahood or rebirth in the pure land in name but not in reality. (MW-2, 152 [176])

Endo: The idea was that women could only become Buddhas after first changing their form, i.e., transforming into men. This notion reveals a lack of understanding of the doctrines of the mutual possession of the ten worlds and of *ichinen sanzen*. Without a correct understanding of the true entity of life, or *ichinen sanzen*, any claims of attaining Buddhahood or gaining rebirth in the pure land are just words without any substance—empty promises. That’s why the Daishonin says that this is attainment “in name but not in reality.”

Suda: In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, there is equality of the sexes through and through. In one famous passage the Daishonin says, “There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women” (MW-1, 93). He also says, “a woman who embraces this sutra not only excels all other women but also surpasses all men” (MW-5, 157).

Saito: Nichiren Daishonin gave some women the honorific titles of “sage” and “saint,” such as Nichimyo Shonin (Saint Nichimyo) and Konichi Shonin (Konichi the Sage). This is still further evidence of the Daishonin’s liberality.

Ikeda: The Daishonin’s actions in this regard stand out as very much the exception in Japanese society and the Buddhist world of his day. Probably no other Buddhist figure of the time praised and respected women as highly as did the Daishonin.

Suda: At the time, women were prohibited from entering Mount Hiei and Mount Koya,¹⁹ as well as Todai-ji and Daigo-ji, the state-supported temples of the old Buddhist schools. Unlike these traditional schools, the Nembutsu (i.e., Pure Land) and Zen schools and other so-called new Buddhist schools of the Kamakura period (1185–1333) addressed the issue of the salvation of women; but they taught that to attain Buddhahood or gain rebirth in the pure land women had to first be reborn as men.

Ikeda: By contrast, the Daishonin declared, “Are not all practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, both men and women, World-Honored Ones?” (GZ, 813) In this we see his greatness.

The First Person in Japan To Leave Secular Life Was a Woman

Saito: As a matter of fact, it was not the case that women had always been excluded from Buddhism in Japan. For example, the first person in Japan to renounce secular life and take Buddhist vows was a woman.

Ikeda: That was the nun Zenshin-ni.¹⁹

Saito: Yes. She is thought to have been the daughter of Shiba Tatsuto, who came to Japan from China (in A.D. 522). Zenshin-ni became a nun in 584. There were two others who took their vows at the same time; and it seems that they, too, were women. I think this could be taken as evidence that there was little if any discrimination against women in early Japanese Buddhism.

Endo: It seems that women on the whole enjoyed high status in Japanese society around that time (between the sixth and eighth centuries), because there was also a succession of empresses.

Saito: During the Nara period (710–794), temples for nuns were built in provinces throughout the realm. The famous Hokke-ji in Nara was one such temple. The nuns at these temples, known as “Temples of the Lotus Sutra for the Expiation of Sin,” were supposed to pray for women’s peace and security through the benefit of the Lotus Sutra. However, this institution declined after the ninth century, and the nunneries were either abandoned, turned into monasteries for monks, or became branches of major temples.

Suda: In attempting to account for this, I think we have to consider Buddhism’s development into a kind of national ideology, as well as its relation to the indigenous Shinto tradition. In any event, as in India, we see that in Japan, too, the original egalitarian spirit of Buddhism proved extremely difficult to maintain.

Ikeda: We have to make continuous and unceasing efforts to return to the prime point and to the spirit of the founder. Religion ultimately comes down to people. The character of a religion is determined by the character of its adherents.

Also, from another angle, change is continuous. The present patriarchal society will not—must not—continue indefinitely.

Saito: Looking at the broad sweep of history, before the start of the common era, we find evidence of an extremely long period, in excess of several millennia, during which human society was predominantly matriarchal. Thereafter, society became patriarchal. By comparison, the period of patriarchal society has so far been of much shorter duration.

Ikeda: In the future, rather than a situation where either one sex or the other dominates society, it will be necessary to develop a completely new civilization in which there is balance and harmony between the sexes.

Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching is thoroughly egalitarian. For instance, the Daishonin says that “all living beings possess the virtuous nature of the dragon girl” (GZ, 798). In that sense, the dragon girl represents all people. That’s why the dragon girl proclaims that her attainment of Buddhahood is also Shariputra’s attainment of Buddhahood.

First Strive to Shine as a Human Being

Endo: How, then, does Buddhism see the difference between men and women? I

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

understand the aspect of equality of the sexes—the fact that men and women alike are entities of *ichinen sanzen*. And yet, the existence of various differences between men and women is a reality.

Suda: In terms of gender differences, it has often been said that women, for example, are far more perceptive than men; which might explain why women are so much quicker than men to see through lies and deceit.

Endo: Whatever else may be said, the ability to bear children is an exclusive characteristic of female sexuality. Because women are directly involved with giving birth to life, some view women as being in some sense more closely connected to the real essence of life.

Saito: Researchers in the field of depth psychology have investigated the characteristics of men and women fairly extensively. For example, the Jungian psychologist Dr. Hayao Kawai says that the maternal principle manifests in the faculty to embrace all things equally; whereas the paternal principle is evident in the faculty to divide and analyze things in terms of dualisms like subjective and objective, and good and evil.²⁰

Ikeda: There are many different points of view. The key issue, however, is whether these differences, finally, are genetic or acquired. That is, are they universally held in common by people in all ages and all societies? Or are they acquired in life due to the culture and traditions to which people are exposed? When it comes to any particular trait, determining to which category it should be attributed is very difficult. I hope future studies will shed light on the matter.

In the meantime, an American researcher points out that while men are raised from childhood to risk danger, women are encouraged to seek safety. She writes:

If a girl seeks out danger, people think that she wants to be like a boy. Even [the Austrian psychiatrist] Alfred Adler [1870–1937] says that a girl who climbs trees wants to imitate boys. It doesn't occur to him that girls might also find it interesting to climb trees. Nor does he realize that by seeking out danger as boys do, girls can develop independence.²¹

It is a fact that the images of “masculinity” and “femininity” we have in our consciousness are deeply influenced by cultural traditions that have developed over long periods of time. And the influence of these traditions thoroughly pervades every aspect of the social ethos, including language, religion, systems of organization, education and scholarship. Therefore, it seems to me that the important thing is not that society come up with a particular model for how men and women ought to behave, but that people first and foremost make tenacious effort to live as decent human beings, and allow others to do the same.

In Buddhism, too, there are various explanations about the roles of men and women. But these naturally are colored by the views of men and women that were prevalent at the times and in the societies where these teachings were expounded. They cannot be taken as having universal application. The important thing is that both women and men become happy as human beings. Becoming happy is the objective; everything else is a means.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

Anytime someone decides the way people ought to be, no matter how correct the idea might seem, what good is it if in the implementation people become miserable? Nor is it possible that only one sex could become happy at the expense of the other.

Endo: I see. In other words, it's enough that men and women, through cultivating their humanity, come to exhibit the hues of masculinity and femininity that naturally permeate their lives.

Suda: One of the books that sparked the postwar movement for gender equality in the United States was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which was originally published in 1963.

In the first chapter, which is titled "The Problem That Has No Name," Friedan paints a picture of the suffering of many women in a climate where a woman was expected to be "concerned only about her husband, her children, her home."²² She writes:

Sometimes a woman would say "I feel empty somehow ... incomplete." Or she would say, "I feel as if I don't exist." Sometimes she blotted out the feeling with a tranquilizer." ... [She described her symptoms:] "A tired feeling ... I get so angry with the children it scares me ... I feel like crying without any reason." ... Sometimes a woman would tell me that the feeling gets so strong she runs out of the house and walks through the streets. Or she stays inside her house and cries.²³

Endo: Middle-class American women in the 1950s were associated with a lifestyle of brightness and abundance featuring such amenities as large lawns and gardens, and labor-saving electronic appliances. It seems to me that this was the stereotype that was conveyed even in Japan. But behind this facade, there were many who suffered owing to a spiritual void in their lives.

Suda: I think that reaction to the tendency to try to make women fit a particular stereotype played a major role in inspiring the movement for gender equality. The purpose must always be the genuine happiness of individuals.

Saito: Because there is also a great deal of diversity among women, there is sure to be a certain amount of difference of opinion. In Christianity, there is a school known as "feminist theology" that is the focus of considerable attention. Proponents criticize the tendency of mainstream theology to accord superior status to men, and argue that church teachings have been used by men as a tool to control women.

Endo: Identifying the concept of "God the Father" as the wellspring of discrimination against women, some assert that the deity should instead be referred to as "God our Mother and Father."

Saito: Such revisionist movements certainly have their critics, but it seems to me that the sincerity of their proponents is commendable.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

Women and Men: From Opposition to Harmony

Ikeda: From the standpoint of life's eternity, distinctions of male and female are not set in stone. Rather, we may be born as a man in one life, and as a woman in another. Moreover, all people have both male and female sides.

Suda: Physiologically, all people are born with both male and female hormones.

Ikeda: That's indeed a clear illustration. The point is that we must learn to balance these two sides. That's an important part of becoming a mature and self-actualized individual. In other words, if a man only possesses so-called "masculine" traits, he will be a boor. To be well-rounded, we need to give play to our feminine qualities as well; for example, we need to cultivate the sensitivity and openness to be able to understand another person's heart. By the same token, it's not enough for a woman to possess only so-called "feminine" traits. Otherwise she will not be able to bring her life to fruition.

In any society, certain qualities will be sought in men and in women according to the standards of that society. And the more closely people try to match those stereotypes, the more other traits within them will tend to be repressed.

That people will try to match such cultural norms might to some extent be inevitable. But wouldn't it be better if men and women both, recognizing the sort of gender-typing that is going on, instead strove to learn from each other and round-out their own character? I think that part of the significance of marriage lies in such self-completion. This is not, of course, to say that to develop character one has to be married.

Endo: A psychologist has said: "For both men and women, opposing factors of day and night, above and below, patriarchal and matriarchal consciousness fuse together; they complement each other, each gender manifesting its own productivity, and bring it to fruition together. Only then is wholeness attained."²⁴

Poets Who Sought the Feminine

Ikeda: Since my youth, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Goethe's *Faust* have continued to hold a strong attraction for me. Both of these works, which I have spoken of on numerous times in the past, portray a certain longing and admiration for the feminine.

Needless to say, in the *Divine Comedy*, Beatrice (Dante's first love) is presented as a "star" to guide the character Dante to the world of heaven; and Mary, the mother of Christ, also figures prominently. Incidentally, it has been argued that the belief in Mary answers a need of Christians for the sanctification of the feminine.

Endo: Christianity on the whole is a religion in which the masculine side is the more pronounced. It has been suggested that the cult of Mary may have arisen to supplement this dominant aspect.

Ikeda: Perhaps Dante, for the sake of his own completion as a human being, required an ideal image of the feminine; and found this in Beatrice.

The following famous lines conclude Goethe's *Faust*: "Woman, eternally, / shows

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

us the way.”²⁵ It may be that Goethe, as a man, kept seeking the “eternal feminine” in a spiritual struggle to become a complete human being.

The Buddha embodies the principle of *ichinen sanzen*, which is the culmination of “human completion.” In that sense, it seems significant that the “Devadatta” chapter explains both the enlightenment of evil people and the enlightenment of women.

Each Person Has the Nature of Both Devadatta and the Dragon Girl

Saito: Yes. As to why these are both explained here, some have argued that there is no logical connection between the chapter’s first and second halves. But it seems to me that only when we put these two sides together do we get an image of the total human being. When we say that each person has both a masculine and a feminine side, doesn’t this mean that both the “Devadatta” side and the “dragon girl” side within each person have to attain Buddhahood?

Ikeda: That’s right. Nichiren Daishonin says, “Devadatta represents the spiritual aspect of enlightenment, and the dragon king’s daughter, the physical aspect” (MW-2, 253 [301]). And, “Devadatta represents the principle that our earthly desires are enlightenment. The dragon girl represents the principle that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana” (GZ, 746). Since we have these two sides, when we attain enlightenment we do so in both body and mind.

Endo: In the case of the dragon girl, the main point is that she attains Buddhahood in her present, animal form. That’s why her Buddhahood symbolizes the physical aspect of enlightenment.

In the case of the enlightenment of evil people, the issue of good and evil pertains to the heart; that is, being good or evil does not make one physically different from anyone else. I think this is why, if we contrast it with the case of the dragon girl, the enlightenment of Devadatta symbolizes the spiritual aspect.

Suda: “Earthly desires are enlightenment” indicates attaining Buddhahood on a spiritual level; whereas “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana” is enlightenment on the level of the totality of our being, including our physical form. Putting these together, we get the enlightenment of life as an entity of oneness of body and mind. Therefore, the “Devadatta” chapter in its entirety expresses the Buddhahood of both the physical and spiritual aspects; of both masculine and feminine dimensions.

Ikeda: That’s right. But this is definitely not just a matter of theory. Attaining enlightenment comes down to the question of how deeply we can close in upon the essence of the self. While he was in exile on Sado Island, facing the greatest difficulties of his lifetime, Nichiren Daishonin turned inward to reflect upon himself as a human being. In the Gosho, “Letter from Sado,” he writes:

Nichiren, ... in this life was born poor and lowly to a chandala²⁶ family. In my heart I cherish some faith in the Lotus Sutra, but my body, while outwardly human, is fundamentally that of an animal.... Since my heart believes in the Lotus Sutra, I do not fear even Bonten or Taishaku.... (MW-1, 37)

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

The Daishonin was an exile; he had no status, wealth or power. His situation was exactly opposite that of the powerful figures of the day who were persecuting him. He lacked adequate food, clothing and shelter. All he possessed was his life. In truth, he had been stripped down to his bare humanity.

Under such circumstances, the Daishonin declares that his body is “that of an animal.” Certainly, when we get right down to it, in our physical form we belong to the animal family. In that sense, therefore, the dragon girl’s “enlightenment in animal form” represents our own enlightenment; it does not pertain only to women. At the same time, the Daishonin says that he “does not fear even Bonten or Taishaku.” With his powerful spirit, and that alone, the Daishonin pitted himself against the immense power of the Kamakura shogunate.

In conclusion, after further self-reflection, the Daishonin proclaims that, because he has thoroughly and sincerely dedicated himself body and mind to the Lotus Sutra, he will attain enlightenment in both body and mind, and is certain to become a Buddha.

Saito: He says, “Since Nichiren is making the same cause as Fukyo, he is certain to become a Buddha equal to Shakyamuni” (MW-1, 41).

Ikeda: The Daishonin here teaches that encountering and fighting to overcome great persecution is the key to actualizing the principle of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form. This is the point we have to bear in mind when we read the “Devadatta” chapter; otherwise it becomes merely abstract theory.

Women Acting in Solidarity Can Change the Tenor of the Age

Ikeda: The so-called “masculine side” has both positive and negative aspects. For example, the free exercise of power is key to construction and growth; but under certain circumstances it can manifest as thirst for power or be expressed as violence and destructiveness. This latter certainly represents the actions of an evil person, a Devadatta. On the other hand, the capacity to embrace all things, which some have suggested is a characteristically feminine trait, may sometimes manifest as avarice or profligate consumption.

Endo: The female demon Kishimojin²⁷ typifies this.

Ikeda: Attaining Buddhahood, that is to say, showing actual proof of the principles that earthly desires are enlightenment and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana, causes the positive aspects of the lives of Devadatta and the dragon girl to shine most brightly.

Further, because the dragon girl is a woman, she can more easily understand the sufferings of women and lead them to happiness. All of her sufferings as a woman fuel her ability to help others also attain enlightenment. Such is the power of the Mystic Law. Herein lies significance of the dragon girl’s attainment of Buddhahood.

The dragon girl, who was perceived as having virtually no chance of ever attaining Buddhahood because she was a woman, was very young, and had the body of an animal, was in fact the first to attain Buddhahood in her present form. This is very significant. The dragon girl’s enlightenment in an oppressively discriminatory society amounts to a ringing declaration of human rights.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

The human rights declaration of the French Revolution (“The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” 1789) is well known. Yet it defines “people” as meaning only men. A woman named Olympe de Gouges (1748–93) criticized this document and in 1791 announced a “Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizens.” However, she was branded an “anti-revolutionary” and sent to the guillotine. She was one of countless people who have lost their lives in the effort to secure rights for women.

The fundamental point of the “declaration of women’s rights” arising from the Lotus Sutra is that each person has the innate potential and the right to realize a state of life of the greatest happiness. Our realizing such happiness will ensure that this noble history of sacrifice and struggle has not been in vain. The goal is for each person, like the dragon girl, to set out on a voyage to attain absolute happiness, while helping those adrift on the sea of suffering do the same—without anyone being victimized.

“All women have the right to become happy. They have to become happy without fail.” That is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

The term *dragon girl*, in combining the word *dragon*, which stands for her father, the dragon king, and *girl*, which stands for herself, the daughter, expresses the oneness of parent and child. The child, through attaining enlightenment, leads the parent to happiness.

The land where the dragon girl attains Buddhahood and leads others to happiness is called Spotless World. This suggests that when one woman attains enlightenment, it causes her surroundings to turn into a world of purity and beauty. A solidarity of women who are awakened to the nobility of their own lives will doubtless change the tenor of the age and the very character of civilization. The SGI women’s and young women’s division members are the pioneers and nucleus for the development of such a solidarity. They are infinitely respectable. They are truly irreplaceable individuals who can answer the expectations of the people around the world.

The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) characterized modern civilization as a “civilization of power” dominated by men, and yearned for the development, through the efforts of women, of a “civilization of the spirit” based on compassion.²⁸

Saito: Certainly, whether we’re talking about the destruction of nature or the tendency of science to reduce human beings to machines, it can be argued that a masculine tendency toward control is the root cause of many of modern society’s ills.

Ikeda: In that sense, the “Devadatta” chapter contains important suggestions for transforming the very make-up of modern civilization. Simply put, it is a shift from a material civilization, to a civilization of life; and from a society of control, to a society of cooperation and compassion.

I think that Bodhisattva Manjushri’s words in praise of the dragon girl offer an important key to this transformation: “She thinks of living beings with compassion as though they were her own children” (LS12, 187). To compassionately embrace all living beings as one’s own children—this is a state of life that all people, women and men alike, should strive to attain. Herein lies the true significance, for civilization and for the age, of the dragon girl’s enlightenment. □

(To be continued)

1. Dragon king's daughter: The daughter of Sagara, one of the eight dragon kings said to dwell in a palace at the bottom of the sea.
2. Manjushri: A bodhisattva who plays an important role in the Lotus Sutra and other sutras. He is symbolic of the perfection of wisdom and is revered as chief of the bodhisattvas.
3. Specific teaching: One of the eight teachings in T'ien-t'ai's comparative classification of the Buddhist teachings. The eight teachings consist of four teachings of doctrine and four teachings of method. The four teachings of doctrine is a classification according to content and consists of the Tripitaka teaching, the connecting teaching, the specific teaching and the perfect teaching. These correspond to the Hinayana, the introductory Mahayana, the Mahayana teaching specifically for bodhisattvas, and the perfect teaching, which encompasses and unifies the other three.
4. Shakra: Originally the god of thunder in Indian mythology, he was later incorporated into Buddhism as a protective deity.
5. Wheel-turning sage king: An ideal ruler in Indian mythology. In Buddhism the wheel-turning kings are kings who rule by justice rather than force.
6. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 8.
7. *Namu*: Or *nam*, the first syllable of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, which is a transliteration of the Sanskrit term *namas*, which means devotion.
8. People of the two vehicles: People of the Worlds of Learning (voice-hearers) and Realization (*pratyekabuddhas*).
9. The Buddha's thirty-two features and eighty characteristics: Extraordinary attributes described in the provisional teachings to represent the Buddha's wisdom, ability, compassion and so on.
10. From the Japanese translation of the *Therigata: Niso no Kokuhaku* (Confessions of Nuns), trans. Hajime Nakamura (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1982), p. 120.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
12. *The Group of Discourses* (Sutta-nipata), vol. 2, trans. K. R. Norman (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 16.
13. *Ibid.*, *Niso no Kokuhaku*, p. 21.
14. Translated from Japanese: *Taishu Tagami, Bukkyo to Seisabetsu* (Buddhism and Gender Discrimination) (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 1992), p. 195.
15. *Ibid.*, *Niso no Kokuhaku*, p. 11.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
18. Two hundred years, according to some sources.
19. Mount Hiei and Mount Koya were the centers of the Tendai and Shingon schools, respectively.
20. Hayao Kawai, *Bosei Shakai Nihon no Byori* (The Pathology of Japan's Maternal Society) (Tokyo: Chuokoronsha, 1976), pp. 9–10.
21. Translated from Japanese: Grace Halsell, *Watashi ga Motometa Sozoinsei—Yume to Jiyu to Boken to* (Dreams, Freedom and Adventures: My Odyssey in Pursuit of a Creative Life), trans. Taoko Hori (Tokyo, Japan: The Simul Press, Inc., 1994), p. 73.
22. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 18.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (20)

Subject: Living Buddhism 07/97 v.1 n.7 p.32 LB9707p32

Author:

Keywords: Dialogue Equality Gender History Kosen-rufu Lotus Sutra

23. Ibid., pp. 20–21.
24. Translated from Japanese: *Josei no Shinso* (The Psychology of the Feminine), Erich Neumann, trans. Yoichi Matsushiro and Teruo Kamata (Tokyo: Kinokuniya Shoten, 1980), p. 131.
25. *Goethe's Collected Works*, vol. 2, *Faust I & II*, ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins (Cambridge, MA: Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers Boston, Inc., 1983), p. 305.
26. *chandala* (Candala): A Sanskrit term designating the lowest social class, comprising those whose profession required them to kill living creatures. The Daishonin was born to a family of fishermen.
27. Kishimojin (literally, “Mother of Devil Children”): A demon whose children are known as the ten demon daughters. Said to have fed her children the babies of others, she symbolizes the selfish nature of a mother who protects her own offspring but cares nothing for other children. In the Dharani (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, she and her daughters pledge to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.
28. Cf. Rabindranath Tagore, *Personality* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921), pp. 172, 182–83.