

## The Lotus Sutra Enables All People To Attain Absolute Peace and Happiness Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 22

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

*All people seek a peaceful and happy life. But what is true peace or happiness? Is it simply the absence of worry and suffering? Is there such a thing as peace and happiness that can be maintained eternally?*

*In this installment, they discuss the way of life based on faith in which “encountering difficulties is peaceful”; the two methods of propagation of shoju and shakubuku; the significance of the “four peaceful ways of practice”; the wisdom for creating interfaith dialogue; and other points relating to the “Peaceful Practices” (fourteenth) chapter, which is the final chapter of the theoretical teaching, or first half, of the Lotus Sutra.*

**Katsuji Saito:** In our investigation of the Lotus Sutra, we have at last come to the threshold of the essential teaching. This time we will discuss the “Peaceful Practices” chapter, which is the last of the fourteen chapters making up the theoretical teaching.

**Haruo Suda:** “Peaceful practices” has the ring of a relaxed and effortless practice.

**Daisaku Ikeda:** If such a Buddhist practice were possible, it would be nice. But, alas, it is not to be.

Nichiren Daishonin clearly says, “When Nichiren and his followers carry out the practice of the Lotus Sutra now in the Latter Day of the Law, difficulties will arise, and these are to be looked on as ‘peaceful’ practices” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). In other words, the Daishonin is saying that struggling to overcome obstacles is the state of true peacefulness. The basic message of the “Peaceful Practices” chapter is that we can establish a state of life of such composure that we can even regard the obstacles we encounter as causes for a peaceful life.

[The word *peaceful* (Jp. *anraku*) in the chapter’s title is written with two Chinese characters.] The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China interprets the first character of peaceful (Jp. *an*) as meaning “unmoving,” and the second (Jp. *raku*) as meaning “free of worry.”<sup>1</sup> Peaceful does not mean a state of life free of toil and suffering. Rather it means living without being swayed and without worries, no matter what happens. This is a state of true peace and happiness.

In other words, through practicing the supreme Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can turn any and all circumstances into causes for “peace” and “happiness.” This is the principle that earthly desires are enlightenment, and it is the practice for attaining Buddhahood in one’s present existence.

Compared to the Buddhist teachings that hold that to attain Buddhahood one must practice for a period of countless *kalpas*, this is truly a “peaceful” practice. It

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is deceptively easy as well. We can say that embracing the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, or the Gohonzon, is itself the true “peaceful practice.”

### To Be Able To Take Action Is Good Fortune

**Takanori Endo:** The history of the Soka Gakkai certainly proves the principle that peacefulness can be found in encountering hardships. The Soka Gakkai was built by the all-out struggles of ordinary people. Every time I glimpse this history, I am filled with a profound solemnity. November (1996) will mark the sixty-sixth anniversary of the Soka Gakkai’s founding.

**Saito:** I heard the following experience from a couple who have marked their fortieth year since taking faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

When they began practicing (in 1956), they were unimaginably poor. After taking faith they were given the advice that by doing *shakubuku* they could accumulate good fortune. They enthusiastically began telling people about Buddhism, beginning with their siblings and relatives.

They initially supposed that when people heard what they had to say, they, too, would gladly begin practicing, but what actually happened was just the opposite. People completely broke off relations with them. Next, they went to people suffering from poverty or illness, as they themselves were, to talk about Buddhism. But even at the homes of such people, countless times they had salt thrown at them [a gesture meaning: “Go away!”] or bathwater dumped on them.

They were a family of five living in a storeroom that they rented in someone’s house. But when the owner found out that they were members of the Soka Gakkai, they were forced to move. On top of everything else, they suffered from night blindness; perhaps because they were practically starving themselves in order to keep their children fed.

**Endo:** Night blindness is a typical symptom of malnutrition.

**Saito:** Once, after visiting a friend to talk about Buddhism, the mother made her way home in a drizzling rain, carrying one child on her back and leading another by the hand. A kindly bus driver pulled up at the side of the road for them, even though they were not at a bus stop; but they couldn’t accept his offer for a ride because they didn’t have the fare. They had to walk in the rain more than an hour. While chanting daimoku, the mother thought, “Some day I will come home down that road in a taxi.”

**Suda:** She must have been mortified by her inability to respond to the bus driver’s kindness.

**Saito:** The couple went on to introduce more than a hundred families to the Daishonin’s teaching. A leader had told them that the greater people’s worries, the greater the benefit they would receive through faith in the Mystic Law.

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No matter how destitute they became, they always thoroughly exerted themselves in faith. As a result, they eventually became healthy. They opened a food shop with a small amount of capital they had managed to scrape together, and it began to prosper. This benefit filled them with appreciation, which enabled them to receive still greater benefit. In this way, their lives developed steadily.

Today, in addition to operating stores of their own, they have a large factory and distribute goods nationwide. They reportedly have a customer base of 3,600 households and receive new orders daily. They built a large home with the strong desire to open it up as a place for chapter meetings. It has a parking lot for up to sixty cars, and the tricolor flag of the Soka Gakkai flies from a pole in the front.

**Endo:** That's wonderful actual proof.

**Saito:** "Nothing is more joyful than Gakkai activities," they say with complete earnestness. There was a period when they weren't able to do many activities because they had been encouraged to make overcoming their economic difficulties their first priority. Of that time they say, "Nothing was more painful. To work for kosen-rufu, that has been our greatest happiness."

When conniving priests of the Nikken sect, attracted by the couples' wealth, approached them and tried to entice them to leave the Soka Gakkai, they were firmly rebuffed. "We're fine!" the priests were told in no uncertain terms. "We will continue to advance with the Soka Gakkai and President Ikeda."

**Suda:** The path of SGI activities truly is the path in which "encountering difficulties is peaceful."

**Ikeda:** I know that couple very well. I never forget those who exert themselves behind the scenes to support the Soka Gakkai. They neither stand out particularly, nor do they enjoy great status in society. Yet, while battling difficulties in their own lives, they have silently supported the Soka Gakkai and wholeheartedly exerted themselves for kosen-rufu and their fellow members. Seen from the eye of Buddhism, none are more worthy of respect than these people.

I would like to scour the earth in search of such people and give them due recognition, repay their efforts. These are my true sentiments.

I want people to be able to say, "I'm so glad I'm a member of the SGI," "I'm so glad I have struggled hard." That is the world of faith I want to create. Though we have the Buddhist principle that encountering difficulties is peaceful, unless leaders have the spirit to guide all members to attain a state of peace and happiness without fail, it is all nothing more than theory.

Since my youth, my constant prayer has been to open a path of boundless hope for the Soka Gakkai and for all fellow members.

## Spread the Law With Wisdom and With the Spirit Not To Begrudge Your Life

Anyone who reads this sutra  
will at all times be free of worry and anxiety;  
likewise he will be without illness or pain,  
his expression fresh and bright.

He will stroll about without fear  
like the lion king.  
The brilliance of his wisdom  
will be like the shining of the sun.... (LS14, 209–10)<sup>2</sup>

**Endo:** In summary, the “Peaceful Practices” chapter is mainly concerned with explaining the four peaceful ways of practice. They can also be thought of as the four “rules” of practice. They describe the action, speech, thought and vow proper for bodhisattvas. The Daishonin designates these practices as *shoju*.<sup>3</sup>

**Suda:** Yes. The practice that T’ien-t’ai established during the Middle Day of the Law,<sup>4</sup> the Daishonin explains, was based on the “Peaceful Practices” and “Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (twenty-eighth) chapters, and falls into the category of *shoju*. By contrast, the practice of the Daishonin’s Buddhism in the Latter Day of the Law is the practice of *shakubuku*, and is based on the “Encouraging Devotion” (thirteenth) and “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapters.

**Endo:** The Daishonin says that someone who carries out the four peaceful ways of practice during the Latter Day is like a rooster that crows at dusk rather than in the morning (cf. MW-1, 105). That’s because the Latter Day of the Law is the time for the practice of *shakubuku*.

**Saito:** On that basic premise, the Daishonin teaches that one should decide which method to make primary in a given situation depending on the conditions of the land and the people.

He says:

When the country is full of evil persons without wisdom, then *shoju* is the primary method to be applied, as described in the *Anrakugyo* [“Peaceful Practices”] chapter. But at a time when there are many persons of perverse views who slander the Law, then *shakubuku* should come first, as described in the *Fukyo* [“Bodhisattva Never Disparaging”] chapter....

In the Latter Day of the Law, however, both *shoju* and *shakubuku* are to be used. This is because there are two kinds of countries, the country that is passively evil,<sup>5</sup> and the kind that actively seeks to destroy the Law. (MW-2, 183–84 [208–09])<sup>6</sup>

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## It Becomes a Question of How We Interpret *Shoju* and *Shakubuku*

**Ikeda:** First, as the major premise, all efforts to teach people about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day constitute *shakubuku*. Basing ourselves on the spirit of *shakubuku* to teach others about the Mystic Law without selfish concern, at times we might strictly refute a person's mistaken views, while at other times we might explain the truth with a broad-minded spirit of tolerance for the other person's beliefs.

**Suda:** The words *shakubuku* and *shoju* are not exclusive to Buddhism. They reportedly were in common use in ancient Indian society. *Shakubuku* is the translation of the Pali term *niggaha*, meaning to reproach, and the Sanskrit term *abhibhava*, meaning to defeat through superior strength. And *shoju* is the translation of the Pali term *paggaha*, which means to extend help or shower blessings.

**Endo:** Both terms point to one's conduct and attitude.

**Ikeda:** It is important to have the wisdom to use each of them correctly. As we discussed in connection with the "Teacher of the Law" (tenth) chapter, *shakubuku* in essence means to declare the truth. All our efforts to explain Buddhism with a sincere and earnest desire to help others become happy are *shakubuku*.

**Saito:** Being coercive is not *shakubuku*.

**Ikeda:** In a situation where the other person has been poisoned by erroneous views and vilifies the Mystic Law, efforts to refute the person's mistaken beliefs should naturally come to the fore. Someone who forgets the "refutation" aspect is no disciple of Nichiren Daishonin. The spirit of the Soka Gakkai does not exist in those who have lost the spirit to refute evil.

On the other hand, the manner of explanation will naturally be quite different in the case of someone free of such bias.

**Endo:** Asserting that "Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering!" will be completely incomprehensible to someone who knows nothing about Japanese Buddhism. We should, of course, explain the Mystic Law in a manner that is easy to understand based on the culture and way of life of the particular country we are in.

**Saito:** It seems to me that the "Peaceful Practices" chapter explains a number of "cautionary points" for bodhisattvas who are novices at propagating the Lotus Sutra to ensure that they do not denigrate the Law by getting enmeshed in senseless quarrels, or become confused and deviate from the path of attaining Buddhahood.

**Ikeda:** From our standpoint, this means that even when we are spreading the

Law “without concern for our lives,” we absolutely must not do anything that would reflect badly on the Law.

Because we have the highest concern for the Law, we need to fully exercise our wisdom in propagating it. This is the heart of the “Peaceful Practices” chapter. It explains the spirit: “How can I help all people receive the benefit of the Mystic Law?” The “Peaceful Practices” chapter, therefore, finds full expression in our efforts to pray earnestly for the happiness of friends, and to use our wisdom to tell others about Buddhism.

While teaching his followers the *shakubuku* spirit of not begrudging one’s life, Nichiren Daishonin also emphasized the importance of showing people genuine courtesy and respect, and of conducting oneself with wisdom.

**Endo:** The members of the SGI have been selflessly leading people to happiness just as the Daishonin taught. Such all-encompassing wisdom, I believe, is the product of serious, determined dedication to the Law.

**Saito:** This truly amounts to a revolution in propagation. High Priest Nichijun (1898–1959) praised the Soka Gakkai highly for propagating the Daishonin’s teaching in a manner according with the times. The Soka Gakkai’s appearance, he said, marked the transition from an “age of protection [of the Mystic Law]” to an “age of transmission and widespread propagation.”<sup>7</sup>

**Ikeda:** The “Peaceful Practices” chapter says that those who practice the Mystic Law will “stroll about without fear like the lion king,” and possess wisdom brilliant as the sun (cf. LS14, 209–10).

Kosen-rufu is a religious movement to illuminate the world with great wisdom just as the sun illuminates the earth. The idea is for each person to become a light of wisdom; when there are many such lights, the entire world will be illuminated. Kosen-rufu could be described as the grand “art” of revolutionizing the inner state of one’s life. In concrete terms, it comes down to the expansion of peace, culture and education.

**Saito:** The other day (October 1, 1996), a certificate of commendation was received from the City of Douque de Caxias in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, praising you, Mr. Ikeda, as a “hero of peace.”

In explaining your nomination, the certificate states: “The SGI president is a ‘light of hope’ who is teaching people that it is possible to accomplish peace. May the Soka Gakkai continue to advance and expand. We hope that you fill Caxias, a city of the people, with light and hope.” [Along with the commendation, the Brazil SGI was officially recognized as a “philanthropic organization” of the city.]

Throughout the world people look to the development of the SGI with heartfelt expectation. They bid us to accomplish kosen-rufu. When I learned of this message, I was profoundly impressed that we have in fact entered such an age.

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## “Peaceful” Means Embracing the Fundamental Law

**Endo:** The “Peaceful Practices” chapter begins with Bodhisattva Manjushri asking Shakyamuni how the Lotus Sutra should be taught in the “evil age” to come.

In response, Shakyamuni explains the concepts of “peaceful action,” “peaceful speech,” “peaceful thought” and “peaceful vow,” which together make up the four peaceful ways of practice.

**Suda:** Simply put, “peaceful action” means to quiet the body, avoid evil influence and practice in a place of peace and tranquillity. “Peaceful speech” means to expound the Lotus Sutra calmly, without thoughtlessly disparaging or praising other persons or sutras. “Peaceful thought” means to uphold, read and expound the sutra without harboring jealousy, arrogance or a fawning attitude, and avoiding doctrinal disputes. And “peaceful vow” means to make a deeply compassionate vow for the salvation of all beings and practice accordingly.

**Endo:** T’ien-t’ai says that these four peaceful ways of practice concern “method.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, they explain the method for spreading the Lotus Sutra without allowing oneself to be troubled physically and spiritually by the various negative influences that accompany an evil age.

**Saito:** T’ien-t’ai says that while no explanation is necessary for seasoned bodhisattvas (i.e., those who have attained profound practice), novice bodhisattvas (those whose practice is still shallow), unless Shakyamuni instructed them in method, would be incapable of completing their practice either for themselves or for others. These peaceful practices, therefore, could be likened to a “lifeboat” for the practice of novices.

**Ikeda:** If the “Peaceful Practices” chapter is a discourse on method, then the immediately preceding “Encouraging Devotion” chapter is an explanation of spirit; namely, the spirit of not begrudging one’s life. It is the spirit to prize the Law more highly even than one’s life. Unless we interpret “Peaceful Practices” based on this spirit, we may be left with the impression that all we need to consider is the shallow question of “How can I carry out a peaceful practice?”

“Peaceful,” in “four peaceful ways of practice,” fundamentally means practicing the Mystic Law in thought, word and deed—the three categories of action—that is to say, with one’s entire being. By carrying out such a practice, one’s life becomes saturated with peace and happiness. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the Law of true peace and happiness.

**Saito:** For us, the important question is what specifically we must do in order to carry out these “peaceful practices” and experience such peace and happiness. The “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) says, “The entity of these peaceful practices is this [teaching of] Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that

is transmitted by Bodhisattva Superior Practices (Jp. Jogyo)" (GZ, 798). In other words, the primary component of peaceful practice is the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of the Three Great Secret Laws transmitted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the Lotus Sutra and spread by Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the Latter Day of the Law.

**Ikeda:** Here, the Daishonin is explaining this from the standpoint of the implicit teaching of the Lotus Sutra. In a lecture on the portion of the "Ongi Kuden" dealing with the "Peaceful Practices" chapter, my mentor, the second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, said:

There are four peaceful ways of practice, each of which is actually quite troublesome.... But the Daishonin broke down this form, saying in effect, "Since by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo everyone can attain peace and happiness, that alone is sufficient."

The "Peaceful Practices" chapter of Shakyamuni's Buddhism sets various conditions: we are told to think certain thoughts, say certain words, take certain actions and make certain vows. But the Daishonin's "Peaceful Practices" chapter is far simpler. It says, "If you are having troubles, then chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon." When we do so, don't we experience peace and joy? Why should we need to do anything else?

The "Ongi Kuden" says: "Since they [all things and phenomena of the world] are the true entity of all phenomena, there are none of them that are not peaceful practices" (GZ, 798). President Toda also said:

The true entity of life permeates all existences and phenomena of the world. There's no need to do something particular to get close to it. We should do what we are inclined to do. The true entity of life exists for a dog as a dog, and for a human being as a human being. Whether beings manifest their true entity depends entirely on whether they chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... When we are living honestly and true to ourselves, we are reading the "Peaceful Practices" chapter.<sup>9</sup>

Faith means living true to ourselves, as we are, and realizing a state in which we can genuinely say, "Ah, this is true satisfaction," "My life is a great victory." This is "peace and happiness."

Everyone without exception seeks happiness and peace. One person may pursue "treasures of the storehouse," while another pursues "treasures of the body" such as status or health. But true happiness lies in accumulating "treasures of the heart." And the substance of the treasures of the heart is a great state of life totally dedicated to faith.

Nichiren Daishonin says: "There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... There is no greater happiness than

having faith in the Lotus Sutra” (MW-1, 161). And he exhorts us to “regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 161).

This is not happiness that can be gained through the satisfaction of cravings or desires. It’s a matter of “experiencing the boundless joy of the Law”—of freely receiving and enjoying the happiness deriving from the Law that wells forth from our lives. Each one of us can definitely attain such a state of peace and happiness. And because this peace and happiness comes from our own lives, it is enduring.

In reference to such a state of peace and happiness, a sutra passage speaks of “peace and security in [the] present existence” (LS5, 99). Nichiren Daishonin says that the appearance of the three powerful enemies is proof of the passage “peace and security in the present existence” (GZ, 825).

**Suda:** This is all the exact opposite of the usual view of “peace and security.”

**Ikeda:** It’s not a matter of leading a timid and weak existence, seeking to avoid obstacles and difficulties. Rather, we should have the spirit: “Come what may, I will survive!” “I will climb another mountain! And the more I climb, the more I can enjoy my life, and the more people I can help become happy.”

The Daishonin’s Buddhism is the teaching for leading the ultimate “active life.”

### **The Four Peaceful Ways of Practice**

**Ikeda:** With all of this as the premise, why don’t we look at the specific content of the four peaceful ways of practice?

**Suda:** Certainly. First, “peaceful action” explains how bodhisattvas should behave, in other words, their “actions” and how they should conduct themselves with others or their “associations.” In terms of their actions, it says that a bodhisattva “takes his stand on perseverance, is gentle and compliant, never violent, and never alarmed in mind”; and that he “observes the true entity of phenomena without ... making any distinction” (LS14, 197). Each of these is important.

In terms of associations, it explains that bodhisattvas should not go any place where they might be tempted to stray from Buddhism and lose their spirit of practice; and that they should not consort with powerful people or go to places of amusement. It also says that men, in explaining the teachings of Buddhism to women, should not harbor ulterior motives or base intentions.

The basic attitude underlying these practices, it explains, is the understanding that, because all phenomena are nonsubstantial, they should be viewed neither as having any absolute or fixed nature, nor as nonexistent; and should not become objects of attachment (cf. LS14, 198).

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**Saito:** In rough terms, this teaches a certain code of conduct for people, a common sense or etiquette. It is cautioning practitioners to avoid “evil influences” and getting caught up in biases and erroneous views.

**Suda:** Next, “peaceful speech” cautions against certain types of speech. It says that practitioners, among other things, “should not delight in speaking of the faults of other people or scriptures. ... should not display contempt for other teachers of the Law ... [and] should not refer to them by name and describe their faults, or name them and praise their good points” (LS14, 201). This certainly sounds like the method of *shoju*.

**Endo:** It emphasizes that one should “employ expedient means and thereby cause all listeners to aspire to enlightenment, and gradually enter the Buddha way”; “preach the Law with a compassionate mind”; “day and night one should constantly expound the teachings of the unsurpassed way, employing causes and conditions, similes and parables to instruct living beings and cause them all to be joyful”; “reply to questions not in terms of the Lesser Vehicle, but ... solely in terms of the Great Vehicle so that people will be able to acquire all-embracing wisdom”; and “desire to enable all people to complete the Buddha way” (cf. LS14, 201–03). It seems to me that these are all relevant to the conduct of Buddhist leaders today.

**Ikeda:** A leader has to consider what to impart to others. Even just a few words may be enough: “You seem tired. Have you been very busy?” “How is your husband doing? Please dress warmly to avoid catching cold.” “Thank you for allowing us to use this wonderful room for our meeting.” You might bring a snack like a rice cracker or piece of fruit for members to enjoy on their way home.

What you choose to do is up to you, but a leader should always ponder the question, “What can I do to raise everyone’s spirits?” “How can I give people hope and peace of mind?”

**Suda:** Next is the practice of “peaceful thought.” Here, Shakyamuni teaches that in preaching the Lotus Sutra one “must set aside jealousy, hatred, arrogance, a mind that is fawning, deceitful and false.” Also, he indicates that one must not treat those desiring to learn about Buddhism with contempt, or arouse in them worries or doubts; and should revere and respect those who spread the Law (cf. LS14, 203–05).

**Saito:** This, too, is an important attitude for leaders.

**Ikeda:** I find particularly noteworthy the statement:

To all living beings preach the Law in an equitable manner. Because a person is heedful of the Law, that does not mean one should vary the amount of preaching. Even to those who show a profound love for the Law

one should not on that account preach at greater length.” (LS14, 204)

Many people are so busy with their work or raising children and looking after their families that they have a hard time attending activities. Also, some people continue practicing faith but for some reason find it difficult to connect with the organization. Broadly interpreting the above passage in modern terms, I think it means that leaders should warmly embrace such individuals, become close to them and listen to what they have to say, and try to encourage them.

**Suda:** The last rule of practice is “peaceful vow.” Here Shakyamuni says that those who embrace the Lotus Sutra should arouse a mind of great compassion toward others and think to themselves:

Though the Thus Come One as an expedient means preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, they do not listen, do not know, do not realize, do not inquire, do not believe, do not understand. Even so, when I have attained *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* [supreme enlightenment], wherever I may happen to be, I will cause them to abide in this Law. (cf. LS14, 205)

**Saito:** In other words, this is saying that no matter how obstinate people may be, we must absolutely never abandon them.

### Our Vow Is To Lead People to Happiness

**Ikeda:** Regarding this “vow,” President Toda said:

This vow [of the “Peaceful Practices” chapter] is extremely easygoing. It says that one should make the vow, “If I attain Buddhahood, then I will help others.” That’s a peaceful practice all right—it means that you don’t have to do *shakubuku* any time soon. The idea is, “If I become a Buddha, then at that time I will help those with whom I have formed a relationship.”<sup>10</sup>

To only try to help others after you become a Buddha yourself is definitely lacking in compassion.

**Endo:** The passage describing the vow states that they will help other people when they “have attained *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*,” or supreme enlightenment. This is talking specifically about helping those who neither seek nor believe in the Lotus Sutra.

**Saito:** Originally, a bodhisattva is one who maintains the ardent vow: “I will not attain Buddhahood until I have done everything I can to lead all other people to happiness.”

**Endo:** Those practicing in this way are certainly our fellow SGI members who are carrying out a great practice far surpassing the vow of the “Peaceful Practices”

chapter. During the pioneering stage of our movement, members—no matter how poor they were, and no matter how difficult their own lives—would go around earnestly teaching others about the Law.

**Saito:** Even though they would assure people that through this faith they could definitely become happy, they faced being ridiculed, mocked and driven away: “The day you become rich, I’ll give it a try!” Undeterred, they never ceased proclaiming the truth.

**Ikeda:** The nobility of such efforts is beyond words. Members, setting aside their own worries and concerns, wholeheartedly devoted themselves to helping those who were suffering. People burned with a keen sense of pride in carrying out the practice of true bodhisattvas, in embodying the spirit of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

As a result, even if they were poor, in their hearts they were wealthy. In their state of life they possessed immense riches. By fully devoting themselves to the compassionate practice of *shakubuku*, they experienced fundamental “peace and happiness” even greater than that of the people to whom they were talking.

**Saito:** The great SGI organization of today has been built by the dedicated bodhisattva practice of these members.

**Ikeda:** The French author Romain Rolland (1866–1944) declared: “Preoccupation with salvation postpones salvation. If you want to save yourself, then the best thing is to forget yourself among others. Then all things will come to you.”<sup>11</sup>

We, the fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth, are carrying out precisely this ultimate practice. Soka Gakkai members in the early days of our movement, though widely reviled as a gathering of the poor and the sick, possessed the hearts of kings and queens of humankind. The truth is that while fundamentally Buddhas, they took on this guise (of sickness and poverty) to prove the Mystic Law.

Neither social status, nor academic background nor wealth in itself counts for anything in the world of the Soka Gakkai. The world of the Soka Gakkai is a world where human greatness is pursued.

**Endo:** In the SGI it is not uncommon to find people of little formal education confidently lecturing university professors on Buddhism.

**Suda:** Most people rate others as “great” or “unimportant” on the basis of education, fame or wealth. Particularly in Japan, the tendency to rank people on the basis of such externals has in recent years become quite pronounced.

**Endo:** The same psychology would seem to be at work in Japanese politicians who make disparaging and arrogant statements about developing countries.

**Ikeda:** In the world of children, that kind of “discriminatory spirit” manifests as

bullying, which casts a dark shadow over many young people's lives.

**Suda:** The movement of the Soka Gakkai has begun to fundamentally change the entrenched hierarchical character of society.

**Saito:** One scholar cites the deep-seated irreligiosity of the Japanese as one reason for the emergence of a rigid social structure in which so much depends on educational background. He postulates that the present hierarchical society would not have developed if Japan had had a religious tradition in which all people were seen as equal before, for example, a deity.

**Endo:** That's a profound insight into the social significance of religion.

**Ikeda:** The human being is the central concern of Buddhism. Buddhism focuses on the heart and on life.

From the perspective of the Buddha and the Law, there are people who, even though they are not Buddhists, manifest the state of life of a bodhisattva. On the other hand, among Buddhists there are those who qualify as "non-Buddhists"; who on the surface appear to have faith, but whose hearts are in the world of Hunger or Animality. Buddhism does not ask "What religion does this person follow?" but "What is this person's state of life?"

Buddhism exists to enable all people to cultivate and manifest the world of Buddhahood in their lives. Human society is a realm of "discrimination" or "difference." But Buddhism transcends all superficial differences and focuses directly on life.

### **Religious Dialogue for True Peace and Happiness**

**Saito:** Shouldn't it be possible for any two religions to surmount their differences and carry on a dialogue by adhering to the prime point of a common humanity?

**Ikeda:** That's right. The nucleus of the Buddhist philosophy of peace lies in a recognition of the commonality that all people share as human beings. As long as religion does not enable people to respect one another's dignity and carry on dialogue as human beings, it will only cause people misery.

**Saito:** The SGI Charter that was enacted last year (in 1995) proclaims, "SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity." This expresses that fundamental spirit. Of course, the overarching premise is that those participating in such dialogue are not motivated by private interests or the desire for self-promotion; but that, as human beings, they are sincerely pursuing the happiness of humankind.

**Ikeda:** The founders of the various world religions were all fundamentally

individuals of towering humanity. Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) said: “The greatest men of the world have always stood alone. Take the great prophets, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammad—they all stood alone....”<sup>12</sup> All of them, including Gandhi himself, resolutely stood up for the peace and happiness of humankind. They waged a struggle of great sincerity.

President Toda remarked: “If the founders of the great religions of the world all got together and held a conference, they would very quickly move beyond any differences. Since they were all earnestly concerned with helping all people become happy, they would immediately see eye to eye.”<sup>13</sup> With this spirit, I am doing everything I can to promote inter-civilizational dialogue.

**Suda:** On that point, it is sad that religion is frequently used as a pawn in political struggles.

**Endo:** In Japan, too, certain elements, including religious figures, have branded the Soka Gakkai as self-righteous and exclusivist, and, acting in collusion with powerful politicians, are threatening people’s basic religious freedom. While preaching “tolerance,” they are lending their support to religious oppression, which is a form of supreme intolerance. This is an appalling contradiction.

**Saito:** That’s symptomatic of the extremely shallow view of religion of most Japanese. When religious figures become involved in conspiracies and acts of violence, they are committing religious suicide; such actions betray an utterly bankrupt humanity.

**Suda:** Superiority or inferiority in matters of religion, while fundamentally a question of the profundity of the teaching, ought to be reflected in the actions and character of the religion’s practitioners. The extent to which they actually prize human rights, protect life and encourage humanity will increasingly become the focus. As the Daishonin says, “even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact” (MW-6, 111).

**Ikeda:** Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the Soka Gakkai founding president, predicted that the age of military, political and economic conflict would eventually give way to an age of “humanitarian competition.”

In other words, he foresaw the arrival of a time when more importance would be placed on “power of spirit” and “power of character” than on military, political and economic power. Increasingly, conditions in the world make any alternative to such a course less and less tenable.

**Suda:** One cannot help but feel awed by President Makiguchi’s tremendous foresight.

**Ikeda:** He was our predecessor. We should take pride in having had such a person for our founder.

The names of presidents Makiguchi and Toda will doubtless come to shine with increasing brilliance; rather, it is the mission of a disciple to see to it that they do. Toward that end, we need to show splendid actual proof by producing many humanitarian and globally minded individuals.

At any rate, the key point is to transcend factionalism and ideology and work to bring all people to a state of peace and happiness. And to do this, we have at our disposal the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra.

Our efforts to achieve peace must be based on dialogue. Our advance is a great movement to fundamentally transform the destiny of humankind, which has experienced endless strife. Taking pride in this great mission, let us advance with our chests high toward the twenty-first century.

### Turning the “Wheel of the Law” of Dialogue

**Endo:** The final passage of the “Peaceful Practices” chapter explains the parable of the priceless gem in the topknot. It goes as follows: There is a wheel-turning sage king who rewards soldiers who have won distinction in battle by giving them arms, fields, houses, treasures and various other things. However, he does not give away to anyone the bright jewel that he keeps in his topknot. That’s because “this one jewel exists only on the top of the king’s head, and if he were to give it away, his followers would be certain to express great consternation and alarm” (LS14, 206). However, when the wheel-turning king sees someone who has gained truly great distinction, he is delighted and gives the person the brilliant jewel in his topknot, something he would never do recklessly.

Shakyamuni explains that the Buddha is like this wheel-turning sage king, and has long concealed the foremost teaching of the Lotus Sutra in his heart, never imparting it to anyone. “Through the long night I have guarded and protected it and have never recklessly propagated it. But today for the first time I expound it for your sake” (LS14, 207).

**Suda:** Wheel-turning sage kings are ideal rulers of Indian mythology. This parable explains just how great and rare the Lotus Sutra is. Just as the wheel-turning sage king had never before bestowed the bright jewel on anyone, Shakyamuni had never expounded the true teaching, but had all along continued to expound provisional teachings.

**Ikeda:** A wheel-turning sage king possessed a wheel made of jewels.

**Saito:** Yes. He was said to destroy evil and govern the world by turning this wheel. The “treasure wheel” was also supposed to be a weapon, like the wheels of war chariots or something one would cast into enemy forces.

**Ikeda:** Just as the king turns the “treasure wheel,” the Buddha turns the “wheel of the Law.” If the king’s treasure wheel may be likened to “hard power,” we can say that the Buddha’s wheel of the Law is “soft power” effected through

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discussion and dialogue.

**Saito:** Because the Buddha turns the wheel of the Law, his preaching is termed “turning the wheel of the Law.” Shakyamuni, in giving his first sermon, is said to have “begun turning the wheel of the Law.”

**Ikeda:** Buddhism is fundamentally a religion of vigorous and free dialogue. We have to “fight” for peace with the “weapons” of dialogue and discussion.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “The wheel-turning king can travel throughout the entirety of the four continents in an instant” (MW-7, 95). Time and again the Buddha turns the wheel of the Law and freely expands its flow from one friend to another, from here to there, from one country to the next. At the same time he bravely fights to refute evil. This is the Buddha’s struggle.

Dr. Johann Galtung, the founder of peace studies, once compared Buddhist philosophy to a “wheel.” He observed that from the beginning Buddhism has been an open religion and—like a wheel that rolls ever forward—has throughout its history generated new insights and wisdom and addressed the current problems of society.

**Endo:** This certainly describes the movement of the SGI.

**Suda:** In his dialogue with you, President Ikeda [in October 1990, in Kyoto], Dr. Galtung noted that you, like a wheel that is always turning, were always promoting diverse activities based on Buddhism. He declared that by turning the wheel of Buddhist thought, you had created a force uniting East and West.

**Ikeda:** The teaching of Buddhism is certainly not stiff and rigid. It is free of narrow dogmatism and is open to society. Dr. Galtung places great emphasis on this point.

**Suda:** Buddhism is a religion that pulses vibrantly in society.

**Ikeda:** Our fellow SGI members put this into practice daily. Turning the “wheel of the Law” of discussion, day in and day out they engage in the work of creating the value of peace in society. This is most noble.

They tirelessly go from house to house encouraging members. They talk with one friend after another about Buddhism. Such activities certainly amount to “turning the wheel of the Law.” This is the action of “wheel-turning sage kings of kosen-rufu” who are “turning” and expanding the flow of the Mystic Law throughout the world. And in the process they are accumulating eternal good fortune.

The “Ongi Kuden” says, “To go round and round unendingly in the cycle of birth and death over the three existences of past, present and future is what is called being a wheel-turning sage king” (GZ, 733). To the extent that in the present we take action, in our next lives and the next, and the ones after that, we

will be reborn as great leaders of society, as great scientists, great writers, people of wealth, great scholars, as anonymous champions of the people. Assuming all kinds of appearances, we will lead people to enlightenment based on the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin says, "With these peaceful practices, let us proceed to the Pure Land of Eagle Peak" (GZ, 798). Both while we're alive and after we die, we can make our way to the pure land of Eagle Peak filled with joy. It is a state in which being alive is itself a joy; in which life as well as death is a joy.

To realize such an existence, we must achieve a state of life to be able to enjoy chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon and telling friends about Buddhism. If doing gongyo is a painful ordeal for you, then you are not in that state of life yet. Unless we really adore and cherish the Gohonzon from the bottom of our hearts, our faith is not genuine.

**Saito:** When we possess such joy in faith, we truly experience boundless "peace and happiness."

**Endo:** The Daishonin's teaching that encountering difficulties is itself peaceful is the royal road to constructing a great state of life that will endure throughout eternity.

**Ikeda:** By fighting to overcome great difficulties, we can thoroughly polish our lives and create a towering self. Therein lies true "peace and happiness."

In the *Divine Comedy*, which describes Dante's transformation of his state of life, we find the lines:

This Mount is not like others: at the start  
it is most difficult to climb, but then,  
the more one climbs the easier it becomes;

and when the slope feels gentle to the point  
that climbing up would be as effortless  
as floating down a river in a boat—<sup>14</sup>

He is crying out: "At the crucial moment, climb! You are a hero!"

When we climb a mountain, our state of life expands. Descending into a valley might be easy, but when we reach the bottom, our lives will be full of misery.

The curtain has begun to rise on the brilliant "century of Soka." I hope all members, without exception, will follow the unsurpassed path in life and scale the mountain of kosen-rufu, attaining the brilliant "throne" of a state of life of unshakable "peace and happiness." This is my ardent prayer.

*(To be continued)*

1. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 8.
2. Editor's note: All quotations from the *Lotus Sutra* are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
3. *Shoju*: Propagating Buddhism by gradually leading a person to the supreme Buddhist teaching without refuting his or her attachment to lower or erroneous teachings. *Shoju* was generally employed during the Former and Middle Days of the Law.
4. Middle Day of the Law: The second thousand-year period following Shakyamuni's death.
5. This indicates a country populated with people who conceive no desire to seek the Buddhist way.
6. Editor's note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
7. *Nichijun Shonin Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichijun Shonin) (Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu Bussho Kankokai, 1960), part 2, p. 1620.
8. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 8.
9. *Daibyakurenge*, November 1957, pp. 18–19.
10. *Ibid.*, *Daibyakurenge*, p. 18.
11. Romain Rolland, *Le Voyage Intérieur* (Voyage Within) (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1959), p. 366.
12. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: The Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1970), vol. 41 (June–October 1929), p. 465.
13. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 289.
14. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), vol. 2, p. 43.