

Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 28

This is the twenty-eighth installment of an ongoing discussion 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 May 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

Continuing their discussion of the principle of “casting off the transient and revealing the true” found in the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, participants this time delve into the heart of the essential teaching, which explains how one can develop a state of life of eternal indestructible happiness.

28 Establish a State of Life of Eternal, Indestructible Happiness

Haruo Suda: This past April [1997], much to the delight of amateur astronomers the world over, Comet Hale-Bopp made its closest pass to the earth since its last appearance some 4,200 years ago. Reportedly the comet is on a trek around the sun that won't happen again for another two or three thousand years.

Takanori Endo: A human being, by contrast, rarely lives even a hundred years. No one alive today will live to see this comet come again.

Katsuji Saito: When we contemplate the grand workings of the universe, we find ourselves forced to ponder the ultimate nature of the self and the meaning of human existence. I wouldn't be surprised if there were a great many people who were prompted by the sight of the comet to begin thinking along these lines.

Daisaku Ikeda: As we grapple with difficult Buddhist concepts, it is also important that we have the inner richness to be able to look up at the stars or the moon and compose a poem once in a while—to actually be the romantics you each sound like. When we open our minds and fix our gaze on the universe, we fix our gaze on our own life.

Suda: Yes, I agree. But amid the press of daily life, it is often difficult to find the time in the day or the space in our lives to ponder life from such a lofty perspective. And when you add our anxiety over the most trifling matters as you try to keep up with the demands of day-to-day living, it is hard not to fall into a more mundane mind-set.

Ikeda: And that's the importance of religion.

The year before second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda passed away, the Soviet Union successfully launched the first man-made satellite (Sputnik, October 4, 1957). This became the talk of the world. When he heard what a fuss people were making over it, President Toda chided them, saying: “It's nothing to get so excited about. We just have one more tiny star in the sky. From the standpoint of

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the vastness of the universe as taught in Buddhism, it's no more than a tiny speck." President Toda talked about the universe as though it were his own backyard; it gave one a sense of the vastness of Buddhism, as well as the grand scale of President Toda's life.

When in conflict people tend to make big deals of the smallest things. So we become joyful or sorrowful because of trivial matters, bouncing forth and back. As a result they often find themselves fluctuating between feelings of joy and sorrow. Such narrow-mindedness can only produce misery.

Nichiren Daishonin says that with the passage of time, "even the large-hearted become narrow, and even those who seek the Way lapse into erroneous views" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 239). In a sense, the purpose of Buddhism and of the movement for kosen-rufu lies in opening and expanding hearts that have grown narrow. The greatest expression of broad-mindedness is the principle of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life," or *ichinen sanzen*; a principle that allows us to thoroughly grasp the truth that our mind and the universe are inseparably connected throughout all eternity. The purpose of Buddhism is to enable us to achieve this understanding.

In terms of our topic, Nichiren Daishonin says that without the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true," as it is clarified in the "Life Span" chapter, there is no true *ichinen sanzen*. Why is that? In our discussion today I hope we can delve a little further into the meaning of this fundamental principle.

Shakyamuni and the Teaching of *Ichinen Sanzen*

Thus, since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of asamkha kalpas, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction. Good men, originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed. (LS16, 227)

Endo: Okay. Last time we learned about the significance of the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true." To recap, we discussed how Shakyamuni became a Buddha by making the "eternal Law at one with the eternal Buddha" his mentor. With the teaching of casting off the transient and revealing the true, Shakyamuni urged his disciples to follow his example and make the same eternal Law their mentor as well.

The powerful message here is: "Return to Shakyamuni the human being! Acquire for yourself the same foundation that enabled Shakyamuni to become a Buddha!" When I heard this, I felt as though I had truly grasped this principle for the first time.

Saito: The eternal Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. And the eternal Buddha is the Buddha of absolute freedom who has been enlightened since time without beginning or the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One.

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Ikeda: That's right. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the Law; but at the same time it is also the life of the Buddha. The Person and the Law are one. The oneness of the Person and the Law is the important point.

While we may speak of the Law as though it were independent, if it really were separate from the Person (the Buddha) it would be no more than a theoretical construct. What the Buddha realizes is the Law. The Buddha's wisdom is the Law. The Buddha and the Law can never be separate.

The Buddha from time without beginning, or *kuon ganjo*, the Buddha existing eternally without beginning or end, is the life of the universe itself. It is the constant and ceaseless work to lead all to enlightenment, without a second's pause. In fact, that Buddha, and we ourselves, are one. Then, we ourselves have been working to lead people to happiness and for kosen-rufu since the remote past; not only in this lifetime. This awareness is the heart of the "Life Span" chapter.

When our viewpoint expands from the present to the entirety of the eternal universe, we awaken to our life's profound mission. Similarly, Shakyamuni realized that he was in fact one with the eternal Buddha, and he described this self as "undying." He said: "It is better to live a single day aware of the undying self than to live a hundred years ignorant of the undying self"; and, "Rather than living a hundred years ignorant of supreme truth, it is better to live a single day perceiving supreme truth."¹

Endo: Here, "undying self" and "supreme truth" refer to the same thing.

Ikeda: That's right. Simply put, they both refer to the doctrine of the "three thousand realms in a single moment of life." Shakyamuni gave partial explanations of the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* in various sutras, but the explanations in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings are not satisfactory. There is a well-known passage relating to this point in *The Major Writings*, "The Opening of the Eyes."

Suda: Yes. The Daishonin says:

All the other sutras such as the *Kegon*, *Hannya* and *Dainichi* not only conceal the fact that people of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, but they fail to make clear that the Buddha attained enlightenment countless kalpas in the past. These sutras have two flaws. First, because they teach that the Ten Worlds are separate from one another, they fail to move beyond the provisional doctrines and to reveal the doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life as it is expounded in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Second, because they teach that Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment for the first time in this world, referring only to his provisional aspect, they fail to reveal the fact, stressed in the essential teaching, that the Buddha attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago. (MW-2, 87 [103])²

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The sutras before the Lotus Sutra discriminate against those of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*, or Learning and Realization), by concealing the fact they can attain Buddhahood. The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings also do not reveal the fact that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment in the remote past. Therefore, no genuine equality is in these teachings.

When the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings say that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time in India, they overlook and therefore do not explain his actual attainment in the remote past. In other words, they do not address the critical principle of “casting off the transient and revealing the true.”

Endo: Regarding the principle of enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles and the principle of Shakyamuni’s actual attainment in the remote past, the Daishonin says, “These two great doctrines are the core of the Buddha’s lifetime teachings and the very heart and marrow of all the sutras” (MW-2, 87 [103]). He indicates, in other words, that these constitute the core of Shakyamuni’s lifetime teachings.

We have learned that the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles reveals the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* of the theoretical teaching, whereas Shakyamuni’s actual attainment of enlightenment in the remote past reveals *ichinen sanzen* of the essential teaching.

Saito: In this connection, the Daishonin says:

The *Hoben* [Expedient Means, second] chapter, which belongs to the theoretical teaching, expounds the doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, making clear that persons of the two vehicles can achieve Buddhahood. It thus eliminates one of the two errors found in the earlier sutras. But it nevertheless retains the provisional aspect, and fails to reveal the eternal aspect, of the Buddha’s enlightenment. Thus the true doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life remains unclear and the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles is not properly affirmed. Such teachings are like the moon seen in the water, or rootless plants that drift on the waves. (MW-2, 87–88 [103])

The difficulty here is the question of why, in order to articulate the teaching of true *ichinen sanzen*, Shakyamuni had to employ the principle of “casting off the transient and revealing the true.” Why does the Daishonin refer to these teachings as rootless plants?

Ikeda: Let’s consider this methodically. First, what is *ichinen sanzen* of the theoretical teaching? We went through this earlier in our discussion of the second or “Expedient Means” chapter, but it might help to reconfirm the main points of that chapter here.

Saito: Okay. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China established the principle of

ichinen sanzen based on the passage of the “Expedient Means” chapter, which describes the true entity of all phenomena and the ten factors.³ The teaching of the true entity of all phenomena represents a radical departure from the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings because it bridges the hitherto insurmountable gap between the world of Buddhahood and the nine worlds.

The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings not only describe the beings of each of the Ten Worlds from Hell to Buddhahood as existing separately; they go so far as to say that the Buddha and the beings of the nine worlds actually dwell in different lands. But the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra brings things into focus, explaining that the Buddha and the beings of the nine worlds are in fact all entities of life who equally exhibit the same ten factors. This eliminates the discrimination found in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

Ikeda: The ten factors are also termed the true entity of the ten factors. The substance of the true entity is none other than Myoho-enge-kyo itself. The factors of “inherent cause” and “latent effect,” along with the other eight factors, exist in one’s life at each moment. This is the simultaneity of cause and effect. This simultaneity is the marvelous Law of the lotus that we all are entities of that Law.

“All phenomena” in the phrase “the true entity of all phenomena” indicates the Ten Worlds. While the phenomena of the universe are infinite, they are all included in the beings and environment of the Ten Worlds. All phenomena of the Ten Worlds are the true entity; that is, they are all entities of the Mystic Law. That is the meaning of the true entity of all phenomena.

Endo: Regarding the principle of the true entity of all phenomena, in our discussion of the “Expedient Means” chapter, we touched on the true aspect of life as viewed from the enlightened state of Buddhahood. At that time, President Ikeda, you said:

Here, all things, all phenomena are equal, transcending distinctions and differences between subject and object, self and others, mind and body, the spiritual and the material. It is an infinitely expansive realm of eternal life without beginning or end and transcending distinctions of the Ten Worlds.

Ikeda: That’s right. The true entity accords with the dynamic life of the universe, without beginning or end. The true entity of all phenomena reveals the Law through which all beings in the Ten Worlds can equally attain Buddhahood. This is *ichinen sanzen* of the theoretical teaching.

Why Is the Theoretical Teaching Like a Rootless Plant?

Suda: From that explanation, it seems that with the theoretical teaching, or first half, of the Lotus Sutra the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* has been all but completely elucidated. Why then does the Daishonin say that it would be like a rootless plant in the absence of the one remaining principle of casting off the provisional and revealing the true?

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I believe it is because even though the theoretical teaching reveals that the nine worlds contain the world of Buddhahood through the explication of the doctrine of the enlightenment of the two vehicles, it does not teach the converse of this—that the world of Buddhahood contains the other nine worlds. As the Daishonin indicates where he says, “The doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life begins with the concept of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” (MW-2, 66 [80]), the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is the core of the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. But we do not have the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds until it is clarified both that the nine worlds contain the world of Buddhahood, and that the world of Buddhahood contains the nine worlds.

From the point of view that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time in India—that is to say, from the account of Shakyamuni as an ordinary person [representing the nine worlds], renouncing the world at the age of 19, carrying out Buddhist practice, and ultimately becoming a Buddha—we only see the aspect of the nine worlds containing the world of Buddhahood. Accordingly, it is in order to reveal the world of Buddhahood endowed with the nine worlds that Shakyamuni casts off his transient status and reveals his true identity.

Endo: That may be so. But isn't it also true that, on a theoretical level at least, the principle of the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” in some sense arises from the explanation of the true entity of all phenomena that we find in the theoretical teaching? Since it is explained that all beings in the Ten Worlds are equally entities of, and fundamentally one with, the Mystic Law, it goes without saying that beings in the nine worlds possess the world of Buddhahood. Likewise, it also follows that beings in the world of Buddhahood possess the nine worlds.

Since the principal objective is to enable beings in the nine worlds to become Buddhas, the teaching of the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles—that is, that the nine worlds contain the world of Buddhahood—naturally is given priority in the theoretical teaching. Therefore, part of the significance of casting off the transient and revealing the true lies in Shakyamuni's discussing, based on his own experience and in actual terms, the point that the world of Buddhahood contains the other nine worlds—which until that juncture had been merely “theory.”

Ikeda: This is so complicated it seems you are all at odds in your views. Indeed, I sense an uncharacteristic lack of clarity about the true purpose of the teaching of “casting off the transient and revealing the true.”

Certainly, the doctrine of the true entity of all phenomena is the key that opens up a correct view of life, according to which the nine worlds are endowed with the world of Buddhahood; and the world of Buddhahood, with the nine worlds. But a major contradiction arises between this teaching of Shakyamuni's and his apparent enlightenment within his lifetime in India.

Put another way, the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena points directly to the vast life of the Buddha who exists eternally without beginning or end—the world of the original Buddha whom Shakyamuni made his mentor. In short, the

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teaching of the “Expedient Means” chapter subtly offers the world of the eternal Mystic Law that is at one with the eternal.

Saito: In expounding this teaching, as long as Shakyamuni maintains the position that he attained enlightenment for the first time during his present lifetime, the “teaching expounded” and the “person expounding it” are not in agreement. And the only way for Shakyamuni to bring them into agreement is to reveal the realm of the Buddha from time without beginning, which the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena implies.

In conclusion, the teaching of “casting off the transient and revealing the true” is a necessary link to, and provides actual proof of, the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena.

Ikeda: That’s why when Shariputra, who was regarded as the foremost disciple in wisdom, hears Shakyamuni preach the true entity of all phenomena, he immediately realizes Shakyamuni’s “true identity,” which is implicit in this teaching. And by realizing Shakyamuni’s true identity, he at the same time recollects his own true identity.

The Daishonin calls this Buddha the “Buddha of the true entity of all phenomena” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 714). To make this even clearer, I’d like us to now return to “The Opening of the Eyes” and look at what Nichiren Daishonin says about the principle of “casting off the transient and revealing the true.”

The World of Buddhahood From Time Without Beginning and the Nine Worlds From Time Without Beginning

Endo: Yes, the Daishonin says:

When we come to the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, then the belief that Shakyamuni first obtained Buddhahood during his present lifetime is demolished, and the effects of the four teachings are likewise demolished. When the effects of the four teachings⁴ are demolished, the causes of the four teachings are likewise demolished. Thus the cause and effect of the Ten Worlds as expounded in the earlier sutras and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra are wiped out, and the cause and effect of the Ten Worlds in the essential teaching are revealed. This is the doctrine of original cause and original effect. (MW-2, 88 [103–104])

“Cause and effect of the Ten Worlds,” here, means the cause and effect of attaining Buddhahood. This can be thought of as the “path” of attaining Buddhahood whereby the world of Buddhahood (the effect) is attained through carrying out the practice of the nine worlds (the cause). But this “cause and effect of the Ten Worlds” is completely different before Shakyamuni casts off his transient status and reveals his true identity than after he does so.

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Suda: In the first place, by casting off the transient and revealing the true, Shakyamuni rejects the view that he attained enlightenment for the first time in his present existence, and in effect refutes the “effects of the four teachings.” The effects of the four teachings mean various states of Buddhahood taught in the four teachings of the Tripitaka, connecting, specific and perfect teachings—that is, in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. These explanations of the effect of Buddhahood are all premised on the view that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood for the first time in India. That view is fundamentally rejected when we come to the Lotus Sutra’s essential teaching.

Endo: Shakyamuni himself refutes the view of Buddhahood that had prevailed until then, announcing in effect: “That is not the true nature of the Buddha’s life!”

Saito: The Daishonin says that this also amounts to a refutation of the “causes of the four teachings.” The denial of the Buddhahood of the Buddhas described in these teachings amounts to a denial of the authenticity of the causes or practices said to have led to these effects.

In this way, the essential teaching entirely refutes the causality of the Ten Worlds expounded in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the theoretical teaching.

Endo: It is a momentous change of scene.

Saito: At the same time as he refutes the causes and effects that he had preached up to that point, Shakyamuni reveals the original cause and effect—the True Cause and True Effect—of his enlightenment. In “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin describes the content of this revelation as follows:

It reveals that the nine worlds are all present in the beginningless Buddhahood, and that Buddhahood is inherent in the beginningless nine worlds. This is the true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the true hundred worlds and thousand factors, the true three thousand realms in a single moment of life. (MW-2, 88 [104])

The principle of “casting off the transient and revealing the true” in the “Life Span” chapter clarifies the true entity that possesses both the “beginningless Buddhahood” and the “beginningless nine worlds.” On this basis, the Daishonin affirms that the true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the hundred realms and thousand factors, and *ichinen sanzen* are established.

Suda: “Beginningless” literally means without beginning or eternal in contrast to “with beginning,” or having a point of origin sometime in the finite past. The view of Shakyamuni as having attained Buddhahood for the first time during his present existence suggests, erroneously of course, that his enlightenment has a definite beginning.

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“Beginningless” Implies Simultaneity of Cause and Effect

Ikeda: Which passage of the “Life Span” chapter substantiates the key concepts of “beginningless Buddhahood” and “beginningless nine worlds?”

Endo: “Beginningless Buddhahood” is indicated by “it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood” (LS16, 225). Here, Shakyamuni is saying that an immeasurable period of time has passed since he attained Buddhahood; this is the revelation of his actual attainment in the remote past.

Suda: The passage “since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of *asamkhyā kalpas*, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction” (LS16, 227), has much the same meaning.

Saito: From these passages, the Daishonin states that the life of the Buddha is “beginningless.”

Endo: The term *beginningless nine worlds* comes from the passage, “originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed” (LS16, 227). This is saying that the life of the nine worlds (represented here by the world of Bodhisattva) also continues eternally.

Ikeda: The Buddha briefly speaks of the beginningless state of his life. Referring to this, the Daishonin says: “The nine worlds are all present in the beginningless Buddhahood.” In other words, the world of Buddhahood didn’t just suddenly appear; it exists inherently in life from time without beginning.

“Buddhahood is inherent in the beginningless nine worlds.” The nine worlds neither suddenly appeared, nor will they at some point simply disappear. Rather, like the world of Buddhahood, they are eternal. This is the truth of all Ten Worlds, precisely described in the “Life Span” chapter.

If the Ten Worlds were not beginningless, they would not be “inherently and eternally existing.” On the contrary, they would be “without roots and existing only in the present”—truly the image of rootless plants.

It is only with this clarification of “beginningless Buddhahood” and of the “beginningless nine worlds” that the two distinct concepts of the nine worlds and Buddhahood become one, indivisible and equal. At this point of congruence, cause (the nine worlds) and effect (world of Buddhahood) are simultaneous. This is the “true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.”

Suda: Can we rephrase this as follows? If one subscribes to the view that Shakyamuni first attained enlightenment during his present lifetime, his Buddhahood was attained as a result of having practiced for countless aeons. It is

therefore without origin, existing only in the present. In terms of cause and effect, the cause of Buddhahood (the nine worlds) comes first, and the effect of Buddhahood (the world of Buddhahood) comes later; which obviously is not the simultaneity of cause and effect.

According to that view, before achieving the effect of Buddhahood one would possess only the nine worlds; which separates the nine worlds from the world of Buddhahood. And after the effect of Buddhahood is attained, one would possess only the world of Buddhahood; separating one from the nine worlds.

Ikeda: That's right. Within that view, there is no mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. And without the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, there is no doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. That's why the Daishonin compares the doctrines of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and *ichinen sanzen* found in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra to "rootless plants," or "the moon seen in the water."

The Daishonin calls the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds expounded in the theoretical teaching "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds of initial attainment"; and he calls the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds found in the essential teaching "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds of original attainment and original endowment." He thus indicates that these two doctrines are completely different. The key difference is whether there is a recognition of the original Buddha whose life is without beginning or end.

Endo: In *The Major Writings, "Jippokai Ji"* (On the Ten *Dharma* Worlds) says the following regarding the difference between "initial attainment" and "original attainment":

The theoretical teaching expounds only the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds of initial attainment and nowhere reveals the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds of original attainment and original endowment. Therefore, the beings who receive this teaching and the perfect Buddha who expounds it are all of initial attainment. Since this is the case, how can it be free from the flaw of "without origin and existing only in the present"? (GZ, 421)

Both the multitude of beings who are taught and the Buddha who teaches are like rootless plants "without origin and existing only in the present." Neither are connected to the truth of the "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds without beginning or end."

Saito: The passage continues:

You should understand that it is a superficial view based on the theoretical teaching that the four Buddhas of the four teachings become perfect Buddhas. Consequently, in the theoretical teaching, there is no teaching of the true Buddha whose life is without beginning. Therefore, the theoretical teaching lacks the doctrine of eternity and remains incomplete. Also, it is not endowed

with the doctrine of both body and mind existing eternally without beginning. (GZ, 421)

Ikeda: Yes. This is important.

Saito: The Buddhas appearing in the four teachings (Tripitaka, connecting, specific and perfect) and the accounts of their enlightenment have validity only up to the theoretical teaching. The fact is that these are Buddhas of initial attainment. As the Daishonin says, they are “without origin and existing only in the present,” like rootless plants. These teachings explain neither the doctrine of eternity nor the true Buddha whose life is without beginning. The Daishonin, therefore, refutes these teachings for not recognizing the fact that the true Buddha exists originally and eternally in both body and mind.

Those Confused About the Original Buddha Are Like “Animals”

Ikeda: The purpose of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra is to awaken people to the true Buddha whose life is without beginning. In fact, this is the ultimate purpose of all Buddhism. Without recognizing the original Buddha, we can never recognize the mentor of all Buddhas of past, present and future, nor truly awaken to the fact that we ourselves can attain Buddhahood. We would be like children who do not know their parent, and who, as a result, do not know themselves either. It is just as the Daishonin indicates when he says, “The people of these sects who are ignorant of the teachings of the Juryo chapter are similarly like beasts....Therefore, Mialo states: ‘Among all the teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime, there is no place ... where the true longevity of the Buddha is revealed.... If a son does not even know how old his father is, he will also be in doubt as to what lands his father presides over” (MW-2, 131 [153]).

Such people do not know the origin, the source of their own life, supremely worthy of respect, and one with the great eternal universe. Unable to respect either themselves or others, they live out their lives in interminable conflict and harming others.

People like this, no matter how superior they act, are no better than “talented animals.” The Daishonin compares them to animals because they do not understand the relation of parent and child. At the beginning of “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin says, “In the age before the Three Sovereigns,⁵ people were no better than birds and beasts in that they did not even know who their own fathers were” (MW-2, 59 [71]).

Suda: It seems to me that this gets at the heart of what ails modern civilization. We have seen explosive growth in scientific technology and other spheres of human knowledge. Yet the basic conditions of people’s lives have not substantially changed. Human society is still essentially animalistic.

Endo: We can now calculate the orbit of comets with remarkable accuracy. But by comparison little progress if any has been realized in the investigation of our

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“inner universe.”

Ikeda: Elevating humanity to become truly humane is the object of the Lotus Sutra and the object of our efforts for kosen-rufu.

Saito: To confirm what has been said so far, only when we base ourselves on the perspective of life without beginning or the eternal can we genuinely understand the oneness or mutual inclusiveness of the nine worlds and the world of Buddhahood.

It occurs to me that, while ordinarily it is natural to proceed from cause to effect, that is not the case in the realm of the true Buddha from time without beginning, or the true entity of life. This is a mystic realm in which the world of Buddhahood (the effect of Buddhahood) and the nine worlds (the cause of Buddhahood) actually exist simultaneously. This simultaneity of cause and effect flies in the face of conventional causality.

Endo: The world of the simultaneity of cause and effect could not be revealed without casting off the transient and revealing the true. The view that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time in India could only point to a consecutive sequence of causality, in which cause comes first and effect later. But the truth to which Shakyamuni became enlightened is the Mystic Law of the simultaneity of cause and effect. And it was to reveal this truth that he cast off his transient status and revealed his true identity.

Ikeda: This Law of the simultaneity of cause and effect is the life of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One, the true Buddha from time without beginning.

Practicing this Law from time without beginning is the “original cause.” And the effect of Buddhahood we attain through this practice is the “original effect.” The doctrine of True Cause and True Effect points to this ultimate Law. Its purpose is to cast off the transient and reveal the true.

True Cause means the fundamental cause for becoming a Buddha, including all practices. So once we embrace this True Cause, it is not necessary that we practice for countless aeons before we can attain Buddhahood.

The Mystic Law Simultaneously Contains Both the Cause and the Effect of Buddhahood

Suda: The meaning of the well-known passage in the Major Writings, “The Entity of the Mystic Law” is now clear to me:

The supreme principle [that is the Mystic Law] was originally without a name. When the sage was observing the principle and assigning names to all things, he perceived that there is this wonderful single Law [*myoho*] which simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*renge*], and he named it Myoho-renge. This single Law that is Myoho-renge encompasses within it all

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the phenomena comprising the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms, and is lacking in none of them. Anyone who practices this Law will obtain both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood simultaneously.

The sage practiced with this Law as his teacher and attained enlightenment, and therefore he simultaneously obtained both the mystic cause and the mystic effect of Buddhahood, becoming the Thus Come One of perfect enlightenment and fully realized virtues. (MW-7, 65–66)

Ikeda: Yes. Only when we arrive at the teaching in the depths of the essential teaching do magnificent “lotus flowers” bloom in the lives of all people. It is then that the Law of the “lotus flower” embodying the simultaneity of cause and effect becomes manifest.

Since this is a key point, I’d like to try to summarize things from another angle. The essential teaching explains that the life of the Buddha is eternally endowed with both the world of Buddhahood and the nine worlds. It is neither only the world of Buddhahood, nor only the nine worlds; rather they exist together eternally. The Daishonin calls this doctrine of the essential teaching “the teaching of cause and effect existing eternally together” (GZ, 871). By contrast, he calls the provisional teachings that precede the Lotus Sutra “teachings of the distinct natures of cause and effect” (GZ, 871).

Suda: That’s right. The Buddhas appearing in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings are said to possess states of life that can only be actualized through first eradicating the nine worlds. In other words, they are “Buddhas who have distanced themselves from and extinguished the nine worlds” (GZ, 403). These Buddhas are said to have become Buddhas as a result of having practiced lifetime after lifetime over countless aeons, and having completely eliminated the delusions innate to the nine worlds. The Daishonin calls these “teachings of the distinct natures of cause and effect” because they treat the cause of Buddhahood as if it were completely separate from the effect.

Endo: The Lotus Sutra, then, through the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena in the “Expedient Means” chapter, clarifies that the world of Buddhahood and the nine worlds are both realities of the true entity endowed with the ten factors of life. The Daishonin therefore designates the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra as the “teaching of the identical nature of cause and effect” (GZ, 871).

But in the theoretical teaching, Shakyamuni’s stance is the same as in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings; namely, that he had practiced for countless aeons in the past and attained enlightenment for the first time in his present existence.

Saito: In other words, in the theoretical teaching, even though he says that the world of Buddhahood and the nine worlds have an identical nature, there is no clear indication of what the relationship between the two might be in terms of Shakyamuni’s own life.

Suda: And only when we get to the essential teaching is it revealed that Shakyamuni's true identity is that of the Buddha possessing the nine worlds.

The Buddha Originally Possessing All Ten Worlds

Saito: The Buddha revealed in the "Life Span" chapter is not a Buddha who has distanced himself from and extinguished the nine worlds, but the Buddha originally possessing the life of the Ten Worlds. The Daishonin says, "The heart of the 'Life Span' chapter is the originally existing Ten Worlds" (GZ, 834).

Ikeda: That's right. The Buddha of the "Life Span" chapter is the Buddha originally existing in all beings of the Ten Worlds (MW-2, 211 [243]).

This Buddha is originally endowed with the world of Buddhahood, the states of Bodhisattva, Learning and Realization, as well as Hell, Hunger and Animality, and so on. Shakyamuni did not at some point in time suddenly become a Buddha; nor did the nine worlds cease to exist in his life at some moment of enlightenment.

The Ten Worlds are also called the Ten Dharma Worlds. "Dharma World" indicates the universe, the entirety of phenomena. The entire universe expressed as the Ten Worlds is a great entity of life, a great Buddha whose life is without beginning or end and who continually acts with compassion. For precisely this reason, all beings, whichever of the Ten Worlds is their dominant tendency, are one with this Buddha.

When we realize that our lives are one with the great and eternal life of the universe, we are the Buddha. The purpose of Buddhism is to enable all people to come to this realization. But people suffer because of their attachment to the small self and their narrow-mindedness. The Lotus Sutra exists to help us break through this shell of delusion and cause the sun of the great life of *kuon ganjo* [time without beginning—eternity] to rise in our hearts.

Since the Buddha we are talking about is the Buddha originally possessing the Ten Worlds, the "true identity" revealed in the "Life Span" chapter is not the identity of Shakyamuni alone, but the actual identity of all beings of the Ten Worlds.

In the line, "it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood," [LS16, 225] "I" literally means Shakyamuni, but implicitly it stands for all beings of the Ten Worlds. Thus, we ourselves are unquestionably the eternal Buddha.

Suda: That's why in the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings), the Daishonin says, "'I' represents the living beings of the Dharma-realm. Each and every one in the Ten Worlds is being referred to here in the word 'I'" (GZ, 753).

The Teaching for This Lifetime Versus the Eternal Teaching

Ikeda: What is the meaning of "I"? What is the meaning of "self"? These questions are not just abstract philosophy but go to the root of our human existence.

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One view would be to think only in terms of one's present existence, identifying the self in terms of one's parents, or the particular day, month and year of one's birth. And in terms of the future, likewise, one would think of the self as encompassing the span of time until one's death.

I once accompanied President Toda on a trip to encourage members in the Sendai area. As always, even aboard the train, Mr. Toda made me study. I recall that on that trip I was reading in *The Major Writings "Hyaku Rokka Sho"* (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons). I asked President Toda about Shakyamuni having attained enlightenment for the first time in India compared to Shakyamuni having attained enlightenment in the remote past. President Toda remarked: "We might say that the view of his attaining enlightenment for the first time is an argument about the present. It considers everything only in terms of the present existence."

For example, President Toda said, we may think of marriage as a bond existing only in the present existence. Similarly, we might think about our having taken faith, our being born and dying, our relations with our parents and siblings, and so on, all only in terms of the present existence. This underlies the view that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time in India.

Thinking this way produces only unhappiness—for the individual, for society, and for the world. If everything were limited to just our present existence, people might conclude that they should merely live frivolously and only for enjoyment; and if things came to a deadlock, they would be justified in resorting to any underhanded tactic at their disposal to get ahead; and that if every attempt to get ahead failed, then there would be no point even in going on living. Many people's actions, attached only to things as they are, evince such an attitude.

On the other hand, President Toda continued, "The view of Shakyamuni as having actually attained enlightenment in the remote past is premised on an eternal perspective of life." According to this view, for example, we marry the person we marry because of a past relationship. Also, there is nothing coincidental about our having taken faith in the Daishonin's teaching. In the past we formed a relationship with the Lotus Sutra; in fact, we have been Bodhisattvas of the Earth since the remote past. That is why we have embraced the Mystic Law in this existence. And the same will be true in the future as well. We are eternal friends and comrades.

There are countless stars in the universe, billions and billions. After our present existence comes to an end, we can freely be born anywhere we wish in the universe. And we can work there to help people become happy and attain enlightenment.

The lives of all people continue eternally. When we understand this, we understand what a great crime it is to create nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

The understanding that life continues eternally prompts us to think not about fighting with one another, but about learning how to get along with, encourage and assist one another; and about how to pool our energies and construct peaceful and happy lives. When we understand that all people are Buddhas, heinous

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crimes such as murder become unthinkable. Likewise, it simply could not happen that people would pointlessly destroy the environment if they understood that all life possesses the Buddha nature. This is the spirit that the Lotus Sutra teaches.

Saito: The Lotus Sutra is itself a fundamental message of peace. And the “Life Span” chapter, in particular, holds the key to elevating the lives of all people.

Don't Lose Sight of the Big Picture

Endo: I think we can also talk about “initial attainment” and “actual attainment in the remote past” in terms of faith. Most people initially embrace faith in the Daishonin’s teaching on account of illness or worries in their families or personal lives.

Suda: I can’t imagine that many people take faith out of a sense of mission from the remote past.

Endo: As we overcome our worries, we gain confidence and advance in our practice and study. As a result, we gradually come to the realization that we have been born in this life in accord with a vow that we made in the past to work for kosen-rufu. It seems that this is similar to the point of view of actual attainment in the remote past.

Ikeda: That’s exactly right. Certainly there is a great difference between understanding something theoretically and understanding it through actual practice and experience. When hungry, knowing the right proportions of water and grain, knowing the precise cooking temperature does not satisfy. A pot of delicious, steaming rice does.

Similarly, even if we understand the Lotus Sutra theoretically, unless we take action for kosen-rufu, it won’t do us any good. Indeed, failure to take action is the very proof of not understanding!

On the other hand, eternal Buddhahood manifests in the depths of the lives of those who take action daily for kosen-rufu, for the Mystic Law and for the happiness of others—regardless of how much theory they “know.” Such action is the source of inexpressible joy and vitality, courage and wisdom. It is the origin from whence a sense of exuberance wells forth, infusing and permeating their lives. Their lives are filled with a visible brilliance, good fortune and benefit.

Those who truly embrace the Mystic Law are most noble just as they are. And it is in their lives that the world of the great and eternal life of the “Life Span” chapter appears. This is the true condition of immortality.

We should never allow ourselves to become totally consumed by our immediate circumstances. When we become completely caught up by immediate circumstances, our vision is clouded by the view of “initial attainment.” Rather, we should live with our gaze fixed on eternity and the universe, without being knocked off balance by our immediate concerns.

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It is important to view this present existence based on that fundamental awareness. Seen from the vantage point of eternity, the present existence is the most important. This life is short; from the standpoint of eternity, it is but a moment. But by maintaining a steadfast practice throughout this existence, we can firmly establish Buddhahood as the basic tendency of our lives. Then we can continue to enjoy the state of life of the Buddha eternally. That's why it's so important that we practice wholeheartedly in the present.

Revealing the State of Absolute Happiness

Suda: The "Life Span" chapter explains this transformation.

Ikeda: Yes. This could be termed a revolution in the state of life.

President Toda said:

It's only natural that we should want to make a lot of money, live in a fine house and be healthy. And it is a true religion that enables us to realize these wishes....

The difference is that in our case, even though we may desire these same things, in the future we will be able to attain a state of life of absolute happiness. We cannot truly say that we desire a state of absolute happiness. But even so, we still attain this state, no matter how badly we might want not to!

Absolute happiness is a state such that, whatever your situation, you feel an immense sense of worth and satisfaction; and wherever you are, to be alive is itself a joy.... Even when we encounter situations that make us angry, we become angry joyfully. When we establish such a state of life, our life is one of boundless joy.⁶

When we aspire only for relative happiness, we are basing ourselves on the view of "initial attainment." This view, taken alone, is like a rootless plant. It is empty and fleeting.

Absolute happiness means realizing the state of actual attainment in the remote past. To achieve that state, we need to spiritedly struggle for kosen-rufu, not lead a self-centered existence. This is what it means to practice faith in the essential teaching. By practicing with a spirit of not begrudging our lives, we can break through the darkness of the small self. And to the extent that we do so, the life of the great self wells forth in us.

Endo: "We become angry joyfully"—that's quite a state of life.

Ikeda: In reality, this is what it means for the nine worlds endowed with the world of Buddhahood. When we are angry, we are in the world of Anger. Joy is the world of Buddhahood.

Also, since the world of Buddhahood is endowed with the nine worlds,

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attaining Buddhahood does not mean the end of worries or suffering. Many difficult and unexpected things happen in the course of life. But because we embrace the Mystic Law, we can enjoy these waves of difficulty as we can joyfully “surf” these waves of difficulty. It is in fact that very variety and unpredictability that makes life truly interesting.

The important point here is awareness. Because the Ten Worlds are inherent in our lives, through believing in the Mystic Law of *kuon ganjo* we can immediately call forth the world of Buddhahood, no matter what world we happen to be in at the time. As long as we do not forget the awareness that we gain through faith, even the world of Anger becomes an enlightened land.

While enduring the extreme cold of prison, Mr. Makiguchi, our founding president, wrote in a letter to his family dated January 17, 1944, “Single-mindedly practicing faith is my occupation these days. As long as I do this, I do not have any worries. Basing my heart on faith, even in Hell I feel peace and ease.”⁷

It is definitely not a matter of length of practice. Even senior leaders or people of longtime practice will be no longer successful if they lose faith and their hearts become corrupt.

As long as our mind of faith shines, then, whether we are investigating the truth in the worlds of Learning and Realization or battling corrupt authorities in the world of Anger, all our actions ultimately accord with the wisdom of the Buddha.

On the other hand, should we lose our faith, only ugly egoism will remain. There have been any number of people who have lost their faith, succumbing to desires surrounding their immediate circumstances. What is the value for such people in their having daily read the “Life Span” chapter? It would seem that they missed the point entirely. In the future they are sure to suffer. They are truly pitiful.

Saito: Our faith, our life, should never be like a rootless plant. I think this means never forgetting the mentor-disciple relationship. Herein lies the essence of the “Life Span” chapter. That’s because, fundamentally, the “Life Span” chapter seeks to reveal Shakyamuni’s own mentor, “this wonderful single Law [*myoho*] which simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*rengé*]” (MW-7, 65–66) that is one with the Buddha of *kuon ganjo*, time without beginning.

However, this “single Law” is not explicitly stated in the sutra itself. The sutra only goes so far as to indicate Shakyamuni’s true identity as the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the extremely remote past of *gohyaku-jintengo*.

Ikeda: That’s why Shakyamuni is called the teacher of the True Effect. On a literal level, the “Life Span” chapter explains the original effect that Shakyamuni gained in the remote past through practicing the Mystic Law. But it does not clarify the original cause that enabled him to achieve this effect.

Put another way, there is no object of worship in the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra. While it certainly does present a succession of brilliant teachings, in conclusion the sutra is not at all clear about what should be made the object of worship. This has long been a point of much discussion and controversy.

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In a sense, it is natural that the sutra doesn't explain an object of worship. The people in Shakyamuni's day could all attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. They intuitively understood what the object of worship was. But those in the world after Shakyamuni's passing, and particularly those of the Latter Day of the Law, had no such understanding.

Endo: That's why the Daishonin had to expound the Buddhism of the True Cause.

The Universal Scale of the Teaching of the True Cause

Ikeda: To put it figuratively, Shakyamuni as described in the "Life Span" chapter who attained enlightenment in the remote past is like fully ripened fruit. This fruit has a wonderful appearance, but the seeds that produced it are nowhere to be found in the passages of the sutra. They are hidden. It will take the teaching in the depths of the sutra to reveal the seeds within the fruit.

I think we will have the chance later on to discuss this point from various angles. But from the standpoint of the theory of causality that we discussed earlier, the Daishonin refers to the Buddhism of the True Cause that he revealed as the "doctrine of a single moment of life which encompasses within itself both cause and effect" (GZ, 871).

Suda: This is in contrast to the "doctrine of the distinct nature of cause and effect" (of the provisional teachings), the "doctrine of the identical nature of cause and effect" (of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra), and the "doctrine of cause and effect existing eternally together" (of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra).

Ikeda: The "doctrine of cause and effect existing eternally together" is the essential teaching of Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra. The "doctrine of a single moment of life, which encompasses within itself both cause and effect," is Nichiren Daishonin's ultimate teaching. The difference between these is crucial.

From a literal standpoint, the essential teaching is saying only that Shakyamuni's life eternally possesses both Buddhahood (the effect) and the nine worlds (the cause). It does not explain the original cause that enabled him to attain Buddhahood.

That original cause is "this wonderful single Law [*myoho*] which simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*renge*]." The person who reveals this original cause directly and without distortion is the "teacher of the True Cause." Nichiren Daishonin declares, "I, Nichiren, am the teacher of this doctrine" (GZ, 863).

Endo: This is from the passage of the "Hyaku Rokka Sho" (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons) that goes, "The 'Life Span' chapter in the depths of our lives means the original cause in the depths of the 'Life Span' chapter of the Buddhism of harvest. I, Nichiren, am the teacher of this doctrine" (GZ, 863).

Ikeda: The "Mystic Law of the True Cause" is itself the "object of worship of all

Buddhas throughout time” that is concealed in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It is true *ichinen sanzen*. This “one Law” is itself at the same time both the True Cause and the True Effect. The cause and effect of Buddhahood occur simultaneously.

The only way to attain the effect of Buddhahood, that is, to become a Buddha, is by becoming a person of the strongest possible faith. Faith, the cause of Buddhahood, is itself the effect of Buddhahood. Faith itself is the embodiment of the world of Buddhahood. Our mind of faith is fully endowed with both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood.

Saito: That, in other words, is the “doctrine of a single moment of life which encompasses within itself both cause and effect.”

Ikeda: We could say that this is the meaning of the “doctrine of a single moment of life which encompasses within itself both cause and effect” as viewed from the standpoint of living beings.

Fundamentally, we have the moment of life, or *ichinen*, of the Buddha from time without beginning whose body and mind are one with the entire universe, and is endowed with the original cause and original effect of enlightenment, as well as with all phenomena in the Ten Worlds. In that sense, the teaching of *ichinen sanzen* in the depths of the sutra encompasses the entire universe.

We can say that *ichinen sanzen* of the theoretical teaching tries to indicate the three thousand realms existing in a single moment of life of unenlightened beings of the nine worlds. And that *ichinen sanzen* of the essential teaching tries to indicate the three thousand realms contained in the mind of the individual Buddha Shakyamuni. Both of these doctrines of *ichinen sanzen* thus reflect the reality of individual beings.

By contrast, the implicit and ultimate doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* views all beings in any of the Ten Worlds as expressions of a single moment of universal, eternal life. This implicit doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* is the true “actual *ichinen sanzen*” that enables all Buddhas of past, present and future to attain enlightenment.

Suda: That is on a scale that boggles the mind.

The True Cause Is the Buddhism of the Sun

Ikeda: To illustrate, if the implicit Buddhist teaching revealed by Nichiren Daishonin is compared to the sun, then the theoretical and essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra could be likened, respectively, to the planets and the moon, which reflect the light of the sun in varying degrees.

Saito: One can see from this that profound doctrinal meaning attaches to the fact that Nichiren Daishonin compares the Buddhism of the True Cause that he himself revealed to the sun, and Shakyamuni’s Buddhism to the moon.

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Ikeda: All Buddhas over the three existences without a single exception attain Buddhahood by causing this sun to rise in their hearts. Our practice is not to gaze upon the moon or the stars and think about the sun, but to directly cause the sun to rise in our hearts by continually basing our lives on the Mystic Law.

Suda: We don't have to practice for countless aeons to attain Buddhahood. We can attain Buddhahood in this very lifetime.

Ikeda: Yes. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin says repeatedly that those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo "will be able to attain Buddhahood readily" (MW-6, 201). He also states, "There can be no doubt that those who correctly practice the Mystic Law will easily become Buddhas equal to Shakyamuni" (GZ, 817); and "it is not difficult to become a Buddha" (MW-1, 259).

What a wonderful Buddhist teaching this is! How truly fortunate we are! What a wonderful jewel the Daishonin has bestowed upon humankind!

This teaching represents the true humanization of Buddhism.

(To be continued)

1. Hajime Nakamura, *Budda no Shinri no Kotoba, Kankyo no Kotoba* (The Buddha's Words of Truth, Words of Inspiration) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1988), p. 26.
2. Editor's note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the second edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
3. Ten factors: (1) appearance (*nyo ze so*): the external manifestation of life; (2) nature (*nyo ze sho*): the spiritual or mental aspects of life; (3) entity (*nyo ze tai*): the totality of life consisting of appearance and nature; (4) power (*nyo ze riki*): inherent energy; (5) influence (*nyo ze sa*): externally-directed action; (6) inherent cause (*nyo ze in*): the direct cause for things to occur; (7) relation (*nyo ze en*): the causes or conditions that activate the inherent cause; (8) latent effect (*nyo ze ka*): the result produced [in the depths of life] by inherent cause and relation; (9) manifest effect (*nyo ze ho*): the concrete, perceptible manifestation of the latent effect; (10) consistency from beginning to end (*nyo ze hommatsu kukyoto*): the perfect integration of these nine factors in every moment of life.
4. The four teachings of doctrine: A classification of the Buddhist teaching by T'ien-t'ai 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.
5. Three Sovereigns: Fu Hsi, Shen Nung and Huang Ti, legendary rulers of ancient China said to have realized model governments.
6. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, pp. 443-44.
7. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1987), vol. 10, p. 284.

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