

Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 32

This is the thirty-second 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 September 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

The teaching of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds first expounded in the Lotus Sutra is the key to the principle of human revolution. This time they begin a discussion on the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. Focusing on the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood, they investigate possible means for overcoming egoism and developing a state of absolute happiness, and creating a society pervaded with compassion.

32 The “Life Span” Chapter—Part Seven From the Six Paths to the Four Noble Worlds: The Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds <Part I>

Katsuji Saito: Our past three discussions on the doctrine of the Ten Worlds have elicited quite a response from readers.

Many informed us that reading these dialogues inspired them once again to talk with their friends about Buddhism. One person wrote, saying: “I found the discussion easy to understand and entirely convincing. I am much more confident in my understanding of the Ten Worlds now and am eager to talk with others.”

Also, a number of readers commented that they had gained renewed appreciation of the Ten Worlds as a teaching for elevating one’s capacity or state of life. One wrote: “With a deeper understanding that this doctrine is a mirror of life, I am confident that from now on I will be able to lead a more profound existence. And I will!” Another said, “In the process of reading and rereading these pieces, I feel as though my life is expanding.”

Make a Fresh Start Each Day

Daisaku Ikeda: That’s wonderful to hear.

People need to grow. Leaders, moreover, must not lull themselves into complacency, thinking, “Haven’t I done quite enough already?” Rather, they should always reflect on themselves, asking themselves such questions as “Am I truly going in the right direction?” “Is my present state of life how it should be?” “Am I sure there is no one in the community who is suffering?” We need to examine everything with clear eyes. Only when we are able to reflect seriously upon ourselves have we truly internalized the message of the Lotus Sutra, the “scripture of human revolution.”

From a certain standpoint, nothing is as vulnerable and fragile as a human being. Nor, perhaps, is there anything potentially as base or cruel. On the other hand, there is no limit to how strong or noble a person can become through cultivating the heart. The heart, the mind, has neither color, nor shape, nor

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extension; but given the proper conditioning it can expand boundlessly.

Our present state of life, while it might seem stable, is in fact a fleeting phenomenon, an expression of the truth of temporary existence.¹ This means that our lives are changing constantly, never pausing for even a moment.

Takanori Endo: The view that all things are in a state of constant flux is termed the truth of non-substantiality.

Ikeda: Precisely because our lives are “non-substantial,” there are no limitations on the extent to which we can develop. We must not become attached to whatever aspect of the self that happens to appear at any one time; there is always change. The real issue, therefore, is the way in which we change—whether for better or for worse. It can only be one or the other.

Haruo Suda: Some people complain about their inability to further develop themselves. This, however, is a thoroughly indulgent attitude, for if we are not moving forward in life, we are moving backwards.

Ikeda: Indeed, as Nichiren Daishonin says, to not advance is to retreat. In particular, there is nothing more deplorable than when the leaders of an organization stop growing. When this happens, everyone suffers.

This is precisely why human revolution is so essential. The important point is to make a fresh start—to renew oneself—each and every day.

Leaders who have stopped seeking their own development tend to behave arrogantly. They are the ones you’ll find needlessly scolding people. Such high-handed and arrogant conduct is characteristic of the worlds of Animality and Hunger. Praising others, on the other hand, is the hallmark of the world of Bodhisattva. It is important to recognize greatness in others. SGI members throughout the world are like precious gems; we must respect one another and encourage each other to lead the best possible life. That is the whole purpose of the organization.

Now is the time for leaders to revolutionize their state of life. In light of the principles of three thousand realms in a single moment of life and the inseparable relationship between oneself and one’s environment, when all members genuinely stand up in faith, a great current that cannot fail to change society will be generated.

Saito: Lack of direction and a sense of foreboding seem to pervade the world today. Against this backdrop of worsening malaise, many people are voicing concern that Japan’s future prospects, if the country stays on its present course, will be gloomy indeed; and that only through a fundamental change in the lives of the people can the path to recovery be found.

Endo: In other words, it will no longer suffice to simply treat the superficial symptoms. The deep-rooted cause for the malady has to be addressed.

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To illustrate, any attempt to effect educational reform that does not address issues of philosophy, and views of humanity and life itself—which are the very starting point of education—will devolve into little more than clever arguments over teaching technique.

Suda: Moreover, if not approached properly, all such initiatives—however well-intentioned—will simply become fodder for unscrupulous politicians.

The Buddha Is Someone Who Understands the “Mysteries of the Heart”

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin says, “If you try to treat someone’s illness without knowing what the cause of the illness is, you will only make the person sicker than before” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 193). The key to revolutionizing one’s state of life is to revolutionize one’s heart, one’s mind. That is most important.

Where is the focus of our heart? Are we striving to become healthier so that we can participate more in activities for kosen-rufu? Or are we allowing ourselves to backslide, using illness, for example, as an excuse for slackening our efforts, and consequently becoming more ill? Are we aspiring to grow more and help those around us become happy? Or are we taking advantage of the organization and our position, lording it over others?

The results one produces are completely different depending on the focus of one’s heart. Such subtle workings of the heart are the central theme of the doctrines of the Ten Worlds and their mutual possession. The Daishonin says: “Explaining the wonder of life is the prime objective of all the sutras. One who is awakened to the working of the mind is called a Thus Come One” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 564).

Saito: In other words, a Buddha is someone who thoroughly grasps the “wonder of life.”

Ikeda: That’s right. And it’s only through practice that we can attain this state.

There was a famous judo expert who related the secret of his mastery. He recounted how he was thrown repeatedly by his teacher, becoming totally exhausted in the process, until suddenly his heart became one with his technique. From that point, he began to win. Likewise, in the process of reading a difficult book, even if at first we do not understand the ideas being expressed, if we would but continue to make strenuous effort, in an unexpected moment of clarity we will be able to grasp its meaning. Such flashes of insight come only after much steadfast and patient effort.

Everything depends on the heart. It is the same in our Buddhist practice. It is only by studying and struggling to deepen our faith that we can bring forth our Buddha nature. Simply talking on and on about revolutionizing one’s state of life does not change anything. Someone who sits atop the organization and makes other people work hard while personally taking it easy is decadent. Such a person

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could never realize Buddhahood. It is those who have agonized and endured the most on account of faith who reveal their inherent Buddha nature.

Bodhisattvas Go Out of Their Way To Take On Hard Work

Saito: That is the way of the bodhisattva.

Ikeda: Indeed. A bodhisattva is someone who willingly goes out of his or her way to take on hard work; who possesses the spirit to eagerly undertake difficulties for the sake of the Law, as well as for other people and society. This is the very antithesis of being self-centered.

Suda: Those dwelling in the six paths (Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven) and the two vehicles of Learning and Realization are self-centered.

Endo: The world of Bodhisattva is a realm in which one thoroughly dedicates oneself to other people and the Law. This is the exact opposite of what we find in the worlds up through the two vehicles. Reaching this stage entails fundamentally transforming our state of life.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "A bodhisattva dwells among the common people within the six paths, acting humbly and respecting others. They draw devils to themselves and provide blessings to others" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 433). Bodhisattvas treat themselves lightly while cherishing others, he says; and they take things that are difficult and painful on themselves while imparting joy to others. This is an ideal for all human beings and an unchanging code of conduct for leaders.

Suda: It's the exact opposite of a way of life that is based solely on instinct. In society today, many people think it natural to look out only for themselves without concern for others, some even going so far as to foist difficulties on others while jealously seeking ease and relaxation for themselves.

Ikeda: That's so true. From this we can really see the necessity of the SGI. The lives of SGI members illuminate the darkness of people's hearts with the light of happiness.

Endo: Dr. Linus Pauling (1901–94) remarked, "Number nine, the world of the Bodhisattva—a state of compassion in which one seeks to save all people from suffering—this is a spirit that people would do well to accept."

[Dr. Pauling, the "Father of Modern Chemistry," received Nobel Prizes in chemistry and peace. His dialogue with the SGI president has been published under the title *A Lifelong Quest for Peace*. When Mr. Ikeda spoke at Claremont McKenna College in California, U.S.A. (in January 1993), the eminent scientist traveled from San Francisco to Los Angeles to attend the event. He praised the SGI leader's speech, characterizing it as a "number nine."]

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Changing the Underlying Current of an “Egoistic Society”

Ikeda: A self-centered heart is destined for the world of Hell. This is true for individuals and society at large.

A heart directed “for the Law” and “for the people,” on the other hand, is destined for the world of Buddhahood. In fact, in light of the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect, Buddhahood already exists in such a heart.

Kosen-rufu is a struggle to change the underlying current of society from self-centered to altruistic, from egoistic to compassionate. Through our present activities, we are making the most necessary and fundamental contribution to this change. I hope you will take pride in this; and that you will have the confidence to defend the righteousness of our actions before any and all detractors.

The world of Bodhisattva is not a special realm. The Daishonin says: “Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the Bodhisattva world within him” (MW-1, 53).

He is talking about the natural love a person has for their family, and the unabashed love parents have for their children. The world of Bodhisattva emerges in a society where such heartfelt love and concern are not confined to families but extend to all people.

Endo: I am reminded of the Monument of Prayer for World Peace in Hiroshima.² One of the six bronze figures making up the monument symbolizes the “spirit of continuity.”

Ikeda: It’s a statue of a mother holding a child.

Endo: Yes. The mother holds the child in her hands, raising it up above her. The expression on her face is striking; she seems to be saying, “I will bequeath to you a better world.”

Saito: That spirit is a part of the world of Bodhisattva.

A Better Age for Children

Suda: It is now forty years since second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda issued his famous “Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons.”³

A little earlier it was said that a self-centered existence leads to the world of Hell. I think that war and atomic weapons are a good symbol of this. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce an anecdote of a mother who heroically battled this scourge of the modern age.

Her name was Asayo Yamashita and she was a victim of the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima. Married in 1944, she was pregnant with her first child at the time of the explosion. She was only about 1.5 miles from the epicenter of the blast and narrowly managed to avoid being crushed by the buildings that collapsed around her. Running to a nearby school where she hoped to seek refuge, she was caught

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in a downpour of “black rain”⁴ and drenched from head to toe.

Those who drank water from this rain, which contained high levels of radiation, within a few days lost their hair, became diarrhetic and eventually died. Of course at the time, Mrs. Yamashita had no way of knowing just how dangerous the rain was.

Four months later her first son was born, and three years later she gave birth to a second son. Mrs. Yamashita repeatedly taught her young children about the importance of peace. At meals, while doing the laundry or mending torn bedsheets, she would tell them, “Mommy will change the world so that when you fellows become adults you won’t have to go to war.”

Around the time her eldest son was in fourth grade, Mrs. Yamashita began holding study meetings in her home with other mothers. They pursued a wide range of studies, including women’s history, home education and history. In addition to engaging in impassioned discussion once a week, they also initiated and carried out a variety of grass-roots campaigns—a movement to ban atomic and hydrogen bombs, a petition drive to make available live vaccines to prevent polio, and activities for peace, human rights and educational reform.

The study meetings steadily developed over time. Five years later, they had a regular participation of more than twenty mothers, and were holding both daytime and night sessions.

Endo: It was a true grass-roots movement.

Suda: Yes, it was. Once, when her eldest son remarked on how busy she was with her activities, Mrs. Yamashita told him: “That’s because these are activities to put an end to war. Even now the victims of the A-bomb continue to suffer. The people of Hiroshima who experienced the horror of nuclear attack are the ones who must stand up in the forefront of this movement. No matter how arduous, this is something that has to be done.”

Throughout this time, however, Mrs. Yamashita was gradually succumbing to the cancer she contracted from exposure to radiation. In the summer of 1962, she was hospitalized and underwent surgery. She was released from the hospital once, but was sent back again the following February, and underwent another operation in the summer of that year.

One day her eldest son, then a high school student, visited her in the hospital ward to find her neatly folding up some old pajamas. “What are you planning on doing with those?” he asked her. “You should just throw them away.”

“When you get married and have children, they can be used to make diapers,” she replied. Then, as if trying to gaze into the future, she said: “I wonder what the world will be like when your children are full grown. I would give anything to be able to see that.”

Jokingly her son responded, “You would doubtless be a meddling grandmother.”

“I would like to be able to tell the young people about how hard their grandmothers worked to create such a peaceful age,” she remarked.

In May of the following year, 1964, she had a third operation. The results were

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not positive. And on June 16, after thanking each of the family members and relatives who had gathered at her bedside—demonstrating concern for others to the very end—she passed away. She was 39. The cancer had spread to her lungs, liver and uterus.

Saito: That must have been caused by the black rain.

Suda: The study meetings for mothers that she had pioneered continued over the next twenty years. The activities of the members of this group in promoting peace education and opposing war and nuclear arms shines to this day as a towering achievement.

At one point, Mrs. Yamashita's son asked his mother, while helping her make a placard for use in a peace demonstration, "Why do wars happen even though everyone knows that war is bad?"

"Before they realize what is happening, people get swept up in a current leading to war. That's human nature," she replied. "That's what's frightening." She recalled the very first words in the UNESCO constitution and asked her son if he had learned them in school: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed."

"What does it mean that war is born in people's minds?" he asked.

"The tendency people have to hate one another, to think: 'As long as I'm safe, nothing else matters,' to view others' suffering with indifference—such an attitude ultimately leads to war. The only way to guard against this is by constructing the 'defenses of peace' in people's minds."

"But how can war be eliminated?" he further probed.

Sighing a little, she replied, "I'm not sure."

Saito: It seems she clearly apprehended the deep-seated negativity that is part of the karma all people share. Because she was earnestly struggling to alter the reality of society, she keenly understood how enormously difficult it is to change people's hearts.

Suda: Two years after Mrs. Yamashita's death, her eldest son, Yoshinori, encountered the Daishonin's Buddhism and took faith. Having had to squarely face and overcome his own fear of death as a result of his exposure to the atomic bomb, he became a major force behind the series of anti-war publications produced by the youth division members of Hiroshima. Presently, he is vigorously participating in activities for kosen-rufu together with other Soka Gakkai members in Hiroshima. He is a central figure in the men's division.

Ikeda: I know him well. Your account illustrates the oneness of parent and child; he is certainly connected to his mother eternally. I think his mother must be really delighted by his continuing efforts in the cause of peace.

Saito: The prayer of Mrs. Yamashita and the other mothers to "construct the

defenses of peace in people's minds," I believe, is part of the great river of the popular movement for kosen-rufu.

The Oneness of Self and Others

Ikeda: There are countless people in the world whose hearts have been wounded for some reason or other. We need to extend a healing hand to them all. Through such efforts, we in fact heal ourselves.

When something untoward happens, people tend to imagine that no one could possibly be as unhappy and miserable as they. They wallow in self-pity, and turn a blind eye to everyone and everything else. But dwelling on their own pain and stewing in feelings of discontent and hopelessness only causes their life force to wane even more.

It seems to me that it is human bonds—the desire to live for the sake of others—that can give someone the strength to live on at such times. As long as one is holed up in egoism, there is no happiness. It is when we break out and take action for others that our lives spring with vitality.

Endo: In terms of psychology, we often hear that concern for others has a stimulating effect on a person's own mental and emotional health. People laboring under stress or anxiety tend to spend their time brooding endlessly over their own suffering. One method of treatment for such a condition is to bring a group of such people together and guide them to put their energy into thinking about and coming to the assistance of one another.

Saito: Is that so they can learn to care about people who are suffering in the same way as they are?

Endo: Yes. An atmosphere is created where individuals can easily listen to one another and talk things over together. Researchers find that this kind of group therapy results in a marked rise in the strength and will to live of all involved.

Suda: When you encourage someone, you find your own spirits refreshed. This is something we often experience in our Buddhist activities.

Ikeda: The SGI is truly an oasis of rejuvenation.

When we look after and care for others—that is, help others draw forth the strength to live—our own strength to live increases. When we help people expand their state of life, our lives also expand. This is the marvel of the Bodhisattva path; actions to benefit others cannot be separated from actions to benefit oneself.

To merely talk about "benefiting others" is arrogant. To only say the words "saving people" is hypocritical. Only when we realize that our efforts on others' behalf are also for our own sake are we practicing with true humility.

One's own life and the lives of others are ultimately inseparable. The bodhisattva path, therefore, is the correct path in life.

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Endo: To put it another way, by helping others we help ourselves. A survivor of the concentration camps during the Holocaust attributed his making it through alive to his having lived based on one rule: "In our group we shared everything; and the moment one of the group ate something without sharing it, we knew it was the beginning of the end for him."⁵

Ikeda: That's a remarkable observation. This is a truth of life learnt in the most extreme circumstances.

Saito: As soon as someone lost the spirit to share with others, they began to die. This is a chilling testimony.

Ikeda: It is of course impossible for those who were not there to casually discuss the concentration camp experience; it was such an overwhelming ordeal. And for that very reason, this is a valuable lesson for humankind, as well as a stern reality.

Endo: Yes. While many survivors of the camps have labored under lifelong psychological scars, one survivor asserted that he did not suffer in the least over the experience in the years after the war. That's because, he explained, at Auschwitz he learned the true meaning of friendship. "When I was a child, strangers shielded me with their bodies from the blowing winds, for they had nothing else to offer but themselves."⁶

There were of course those who descended to the level of animals, only looking out for themselves. That's not unreasonable given the extreme hardships they faced. But there were also those who used themselves as "shields" to protect children from the harsh winds assailing them.

The Trap of a "Society of Narcissism"

Endo: The psychologist who introduces these experiences, Dr. Julius Segal, warns that the modern age is caught in a trap of narcissism. He says: "Narcissism is becoming increasingly common and accepted in our culture. Thinking of others is out of fashion now."⁷

He then quotes the Viennese psychiatrist and Nazi death camp survivor Dr. Viktor Frankl (1905–97) who observed, "You're always forced—ordered—to feel joy, be happy, and experience pleasure." Dr. Segal adds, "Self-sacrifice and thinking about others are made to seem irrelevant, even unhealthy."⁸

Ikeda: He makes a good point. The question is, have we realized a happier society as a result. I don't think so.

Endo: Indeed. Increasingly, people are becoming isolated, forgetting what it means to encourage one another. Consequently, they are losing their will to live to the full.

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Saito: Then, the desire to find something “still more fun” grows only more overwhelming. It’s a vicious circle.

Ikeda: It is the world of Bodhisattva—the way of life of “number nine,” as Dr. Pauling once called it—that cuts the dark chains of this trap.

There’s a well-known story that clearly illustrates this point. It goes like this: Someone goes to Hell and finds that everyone there is suffering because they cannot eat even though each has a sumptuous meal right in front of them. The reason they can’t eat is that their chopsticks are longer than their arms, so they cannot put the food into their mouths. The person then goes to the Buddha land. There, again, the chopsticks are longer than people’s arms. But everyone is content. Why? It’s because they take turns feeding each other.

Saito: In other words, the difference between Hell and Buddhahood is not one of environment. The difference lies solely in the hearts of those dwelling in these realms.

Suda: I think the story highlights why there is still a great deal of suffering in a time of so much abundance, as in Japan today.

Ikeda: In any event, society changes. It changes moment by moment. Politics, economics, fads—everything in the world undergoes change. The issue is whether, in the midst of so much change, one possesses an unchanging “center.” We have such a center in the Mystic Law.

The Mystic Law is the constant, unchanging core; and it is the fundamental power causing all things to go in a positive direction. People change, but the Law does not. People can be deceived, but the Law cannot. Trying to cheat the Law is of absolutely no avail. When we base ourselves on this absolute and unchanging Law, both our lives and society prosper eternally. Apart from the Law, everything else is, in a manner of speaking, an illusion.

After all is said and done, the most supreme way of life is that of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who thoroughly dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu. There is no more lofty or sublime way to live. Realizing this is a matter of faith.

A Courageous Heart of Faith Is Itself Buddhahood

Saito: It is said of bodhisattvas, “Seeking enlightenment above, saving sentient beings below.”⁹ From our standpoint, these correspond to practicing for oneself and practicing for others.

Ikeda: We become happy ourselves, and we help others do the same. This is analogous to the two motions of a planet, which rotates on its axis while revolving around the sun. It is a universal principle.

In a sense, bodhisattvas exert themselves to help people become happy, even if it means putting off their own happiness until later. This is the spirit of the Soka

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Gakkai. It is a most noble way of life.

Faith is a struggle. Life is a struggle. Buddhism is a struggle. It is by waging a courageous and high-spirited struggle against “evil” that we can draw forth the states of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood from within.

This world is dominated by the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, which exerts a powerful “force of misery” over all people. That’s why when a truly happy person appears, the Devil of the Sixth Heaven envies, hates and tries to destroy the person. Nichiren Daishonin vigorously battled this negative influence, as did Shakyamuni.

We must challenge and defeat the negativity in life, which causes people to resent and persecute one another, and seeks to keep them in a state of misery. Only when we win over the forces of evil can we achieve true happiness or Buddhahood. That’s why Nichiren Daishonin urges us to “summon up the courage of a lion” (MW-1, 241).

Suda: Faith like the “courage of a lion” must be the hallmark of the world of Buddhahood, which is also described as a state of indestructible happiness.

Ikeda: Yes. Such happiness is absolute. It’s called “absolute” because a person in this state of life is able to discern the significance of all affairs of life and society; which is in itself wisdom. Also, no matter how things may change, the person’s heart remains calm and steady; this is inner strength. Moreover, it’s “absolute” because one can freely tap this wisdom and strength from the depths of one’s life whenever necessary.

It certainly is not a state free of worry or suffering. Such a life, if it existed, would be monotonous and dull. If everything were to go smoothly—that in itself would be an illusion, a lie. Worries are an integral part of the reality of life.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches the principle “earthly desires are enlightenment.” Because we have desires and worries, we can appreciate happiness. Because we face and overcome painful difficulties, we can attain Buddhahood. The truth is that a life without any suffering is not at all happy. That is the perspective of Buddhism.

What, then, is the world of Buddhahood? From our standpoint, it is none other than faith.

President Toda said, “Attaining Buddhahood doesn’t mean simply becoming a Buddha or heading in that direction. Honestly believing in the Daishonin’s teaching that the ordinary person is most respectable and the principle of the true entity of life, we are profoundly confident that we are Buddhas just as we are, from the eternal past into the infinite future. This is what it means to become a Buddha.”¹⁰

This comes down to faith, determination. It’s a matter of our internal awareness.

The Essential Teaching Is To “Return to the Original Life”

Ikeda: The “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus

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Sutra describes the “Buddha enlightened since the remote past” or the “eternal Buddha.” Just who is this Buddha? Commenting on the passage in the Lotus Sutra that reads, “It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood” (LS16, 225),¹¹ the Daishonin explains: “‘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’” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 753).

The “eternal Buddha” of the “Life Span” chapter means all living beings. We are all “eternal Buddhas.” Ordinary people are Buddhas just as they are.

There are no grades or distinctions among people. We are all equal; we are all equally Buddhas. The only difference among people has to do with whether, or the extent to which, we realize this in our hearts. From the standpoint of Buddhism, that is the only meaningful distinction.

A Buddha is not someone displaying the thirty-two features or eighty features.¹² Our lives, originally, are the Buddha. The universe itself is originally the Buddha. The appearance of the sun is a function of compassion. The illumination of the moon is also compassion, as is the beautiful respiration of green plants and trees. The entire universe is a great living entity carrying out activities of compassion from the beginningless past through the eternal future. This vast organism of compassion is the eternal Buddha. And the life of every being in the Ten Worlds is one with this Buddha of the “Life Span” chapter. Faith in the Mystic Law is the key enabling us to “return” to this original life.

Saito: Returning to the original life—that’s the Lotus Sutra’s essential teaching.

Ikeda: Exactly. The Daishonin clearly states in the “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings), “The ‘Life Span’ chapter reveals the original life of all beings in the Ten Worlds. This chapter is called the essential teaching or *hommon* because it is the gate (Jpn *mon*) to the truth of eternity (Jpn *hon*)” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 799).

Suda: The great life of the Buddha enlightened since the remote past is the “original life” of the beings of the Ten Worlds. The essential teaching is so called because it enables us to return to this original life.

Endo: Since this original life is fundamentally a property of one’s own life, there is no limit to the extent to which we can tap the power of the original Buddha.

Ikeda: The entire universe is like our own personal bank account. The amount of fortune we can withdraw depends solely on our faith.

Faith means battling life’s negative functions. Justice means opposing evil. Buddhist practice means struggling against adversity.

At one point, the Daishonin’s follower Shijo Kingo, who was known for his spirited practice, was so overwhelmed by difficulties that he unwittingly began complaining: “I thought that those who believe in the Lotus Sutra were supposed to enjoy peace and security in this life.” When the Daishonin heard this, he

instructed him as follows: “The boughs of the long-lived pine tree become bent and twisted as it grows older. . . . The votary of the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha of eternal life; no wonder his practice is hindered, just as the pine tree’s branches are bent or broken” (MW-1, 128). Just as the pine tree stands up to wind and snow, showing proof of its eternal life, practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, through enduring difficulties, manifest their true identity as Buddhas of eternal life. The Daishonin stresses to Shijo Kingo that now is the time to reveal the supreme world of Buddhahood. At this time when you are about to receive supreme benefit, he questions, what can you possibly have to complain about?

Saito: In the same writing, the Daishonin also says, “Those who embrace this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties”; but he assures Shijo Kingo that “continuing faith will lead to Buddhahood” (MW-1, 127).

Ikeda: It’s a matter of “embracing” the Mystic Law. We need to steadfastly uphold the Mystic Law through every obstacle, confident that we truly have a mission for kosen-rufu.

We Attain Enlightenment by Defeating “Devils”

Ikeda: Shakyamuni constantly battled “devils.” It would be no exaggeration to say that to continuously fight devils is to be a Buddha.

Suda: Yes. It is clear from the sutras that Shakyamuni fought negative forces throughout his entire life. And when “devils” rose up in force against him, Shakyamuni dauntlessly put down their underhanded attempts to infiltrate his mind with illusion and lead him astray. His only “weapons” in this struggle were faith, tenacious effort and wisdom.

Ikeda: To begin with, the essence of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment lay in this battle against devilish influences. The words that Shakyamuni uttered immediately after attaining enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree are recorded in sutras.

Endo: There is a description of how, after long years of earnest practice, Shakyamuni, sitting peacefully, apprehended the Law in his life blazing like the sun in the sky, and declared, “I have defeated the devil’s army.”¹³

Ikeda: When the Mystic Law blossoms in our hearts, our lives shine like the sun with perfect calm and composure, and with infinite strength. This is the world of Buddhahood.

Manifesting the world of Buddhahood and defeating the devil’s forces are one and the same. “Devils” exist both within our lives and in our environment. But whether we defeat them or are defeated by them depends solely on our own spirit and determination.

The important thing is that we win and that we do so continually. Buddhist

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practice means never coming to a standstill. We have to cultivate a self that absolutely no negative influence can sway.

Suda: Not only at the time when he attained enlightenment, but thereafter as well, Shakyamuni continually fought against negative forces, driving back their insidious influence. The eminent Buddhologist Dr. Hajime Nakamura writes:

It is not the case that the Buddha gained enlightenment after the devils had scattered in disarray. Rather, defeating devils and gaining enlightenment are two sides of the same feat.¹⁴

His identity as the Buddha must be sought within his very actions to drive off illusion. Continuous spirited advance is itself the activity of the Buddha. It is not that Shakyamuni became a different being because he attained enlightenment.¹⁵

Ikeda: Buddhahood is a state of life of oneness with the Mystic Law. A Buddha is someone who makes the Mystic Law his or her teacher. Thoroughly and steadfastly upholding the Mystic Law is itself the world of Buddhahood.

Immediately after attaining enlightenment, Shakyamuni vowed to “live always making the Law my teacher.” He declared: “I have awakened to this Law. I will venerate and revere and base myself on this Law.”¹⁶ And that is precisely how he lived out the rest of his life.

Saito: When he was on the verge of death, Shakyamuni remarked, “I have succeeded in devoting my life to the self,”¹⁷ meaning his complete devotion to the eternal Mystic Law within.

Endo: He also left behind words urging his disciples to likewise “rely on the Law and on your life.”

Ikeda: The Rokuharamitsu Sutra¹⁸ states that “One should become the master of his mind rather than let his mind master him” (MW-5, 164). It’s not a matter of leading a self-centered existence, but of living based on the Law, based on kosen-rufu. Faith means having such a spirit.

Faith Is Proof of Buddhahood

Ikeda: Tremendous importance attaches to the Daishonin’s statement in the Gosho “The True Object of Worship”: “That common mortals born in the Latter Day of the Law can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the world of Humanity” (MW-1, 53). Our faith in the Lotus Sutra is proof that the world of Buddhahood exists in our lives.

Suda: I sense something very subtle and important in the proposition that it is possible to believe in the Lotus Sutra because we possess the world of

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Buddhahood. The usual assumption would probably be that because one believes in the Lotus Sutra, one can reach the world of Buddhahood. But the directionality of the aforementioned statement is just the opposite.

Ikeda: There are two ways of looking at it. Certainly, you can say that because we believe in the Lotus Sutra we will attain the world of Buddhahood. But it is because we ourselves are entities of the eternal Mystic Law, in other words, because the world of Buddhahood is inherent in our lives, that it is possible for us to believe in the Lotus Sutra in the first place. Whether it is the revelation of the theoretical teaching that all people can become Buddhas, or the revelation of the essential teaching that the Buddha's life is eternal, we are able to believe in the teaching because we can sense something eternal in our lives.

Saito: I think that on some level—whether conscious or unconscious—everyone senses the existence of something eternal.

Ikeda: Everyone indeed has the ability to sense the eternal. That may be the most salient characteristic of human beings. That's probably why only humans have religion.

This inherent capacity could be described as an awareness of the sanctity of life or a connection to others, or as the ability to harmonize with nature and the universe. This inner sense or capacity for goodness is itself the source of the power of faith to believe in the Lotus Sutra.

In any event, precisely because our lives are endowed with the world of Buddhahood, it is possible for us to believe in the Lotus Sutra. And when we summon forth the power of faith and believe in the Lotus Sutra, we can liberate the power of the world of Buddhahood inherent in our lives and channel it into creating value. Our continual practice then enables us to display the power of the world of Buddhahood all the more strongly.

Suda: Because we possess the world of Buddhahood, we can manifest faith; and through faith we can open up the world of Buddhahood in our lives. This seems to be the relation.

Saito: To give a simple analogy, dwelling in the nine worlds could be compared to being shut up inside a room. Dwelling in the world of Buddhahood, on the other hand, is like bathing in the clear, bright sunshine of the outdoors. The beings of the nine worlds fundamentally dwell in the great macrocosm that is the world of Buddhahood. People vaguely sense this as some kind of eternal aspect of their lives; but because they are shut up in a room surrounded by dense walls of illusion, they fail to fully comprehend their true environment. But when they break down these walls of illusion through faith, they become able to freely enjoy the fresh air of the Mystic Law pervading the universe.

Endo: When we use the "key" of faith to open up the "window" of our heart, the

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“room” of our life is flooded with fresh air and brilliant light from outside. Then, there is no difference between being in the room and being outside.

Ikeda: Why don't we continue this discussion of the relation between the nine worlds and the world of Buddhahood next time?

A Mind That Perceives the Buddha Is the Buddha

When living beings have become truly faithful,
honest and upright, gentle in intent,
single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha,
not hesitating even if it costs them their lives,
then I and the assembly of monks
appear together on Holy Eagle Peak. (LS16, 230)

Ikeda: In any event, this outpouring of inner strength is something that we actually experience through faith. When we put our all into our activities for kosen-rufu, we feel a sense of unbounded freshness and exhilaration. We must not practice passively. It is when we practice with the spirit of not begrudging our lives that true power wells forth.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches (in the “Letter to Gijo-bo”) that the world of Buddhahood appears in our heart, citing the passage, “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives” (MW-2, [2nd ed.], 205). Single-mindedly striving to bring forth one's Buddha nature without begrudging one's own life is faith. This is a seeking spirit. The power of the original Buddha manifests in the heart of someone who earnestly seeks the life-state of the original Buddha.

The Daishonin's interpretation of the line, “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha,” is much more profound than the literal meaning.

Suda: Yes. In one place he says, “‘Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha’ also means to see the Buddha in one's own mind, to concentrate one's mind on seeing the Buddha, and that to see one's own mind is to see the Buddha” (MW-2, [2nd ed.], 205).

Ikeda: Exactly. While initially we start out “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha,” he indicates that, in the end, we perceive with our own mind that we are the Buddha. Our determination in faith, our spirit to practice without begrudging our life, is itself the manifestation of the eternal world of Buddhahood. In short, faith itself is the world of Buddhahood. This is the true aspect of “the world of Buddhahood existing in the world of Humanity” (MW-1, 53).

Endo: Practicing without begrudging one's life—this is what is meant by the line: “If you exert a hundred million aeons of effort in a single moment of life, the three enlightened properties of the Buddha will appear within you at each moment.

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Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the practice of genuine and constant devotion” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 790).

Saito: This is also what Nichikan Shonin indicated when he said, “What we call a strong mind of faith in the Lotus Sutra is the world of Buddhahood.”¹⁹

Ikeda: The Daishonin and Nichikan Shonin were saying the same thing. We need to practice with the “courageous spirit of a lion” to protect Buddhism and the Buddha’s children, and to resolutely stand up to persecution. This is the secret to causing the world of Buddhahood to manifest in our life.

Saito: I can really see the importance of the SGI spirit—that is, the spirit to spread the Law and practice selflessly without begrudging one’s life, regardless of the cost.

Ikeda: Faith means carrying out a practice of dedicating one’s entire being to realizing kosen-rufu. It means to abandon egoism and uphold one’s principles no matter what.

President Makiguchi and President Toda lived entirely for the sake of kosen-rufu, for the sake of all others, for the sake of the members and for society, without giving any thought to themselves, putting everything off for later. And I have done the same.

One certainly cannot attain Buddhahood with a slovenly or lazy attitude. The Daishonin says, “[On the path of attaining Buddhahood] one is certain to meet with some great trial that will demand of him that he be willing to give his life; only then can one become a Buddha” (MW-5, 123).

The Buddha is a human being—a person who struggles continuously. The Buddha is not some kind of special being existing in another world. The Daishonin teaches that the ordinary person is the most respectable and noble being. This is the principle of the true entity of all life; the “true entity” manifests amid the reality of “all phenomena” of life and society. Therein exists the world of Buddhahood.

In the same way that people exert themselves in different fields, whether as a company employee, a teacher, a housewife, or a farmer, so too does the world of Buddhahood pulse vibrantly in all spheres of activity. This is the perspective of the Lotus Sutra.

Suda: A high priest who wants to be revered as a Buddha while failing to take action to spread the Daishonin’s teaching is trampling on the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

Endo: Such fraud and deception is inexcusable.

Ikeda: Regarding the oneness of Buddhahood and the nine worlds, putting our palms together when we pray symbolizes this. It also represents the Mystic Law.

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[In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the Daishonin says, “(In the term *pressing palms together*) *pressing* refers to *myo* or Mystic, while *palms* refers to *ho* or the Law;... *together* means ‘the world of Buddhahood’ and *palms* means the other ‘nine worlds’” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 722).]

In other words, Buddhahood lies in chanting daimoku based on faith no matter what happens. Whatever sufferings of the nine worlds we may be undergoing, through strong faith we can lead a life in which the nine worlds manifest the world of Buddhahood, and the world of Buddhahood manifests the nine worlds.

While there may be instances when our prayers are answered immediately, there will also be times when that is not the case. Even so, we should continue offering prayer, chanting daimoku and taking action. Such resolute faith is itself the world of Buddhahood; it is victory. Maintaining such faith to the very end of our lives enables us to set out on a journey over the three existences at one with the “eternal Buddha” of the “Life Span” chapter.

(To be continued)

1. Truth of temporary existence: Along with the truth of non-substantiality and the truth of the Middle Way, one of the three truths formulated by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China to clarify the essential nature of phenomena. The truth of non-substantiality is that phenomena have no absolute or fixed existence of their own; the truth of temporary existence is that while all things are non-substantial in nature, they nevertheless possess a provisional or temporary reality that is in constant flux; and the truth of the Middle Way is that all phenomena are characterized by both non-substantiality and temporary existence yet are in essence neither non-substantiality nor temporary existence.
2. The Monument of Prayer for World Peace was commissioned by the Soka Gakkai and completed in June 1997. Sculpted by French artist Louis Derbré, the six-stature bronze monument pays tribute to the atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as to all those throughout the world who have suffered at the hands of nuclear testing.
3. On September 8, 1957, at a youth festival held at the Mitsuzawa Athletic Stadium in Yokohama, President Toda proclaimed his absolute opposition to the testing of nuclear bombs, declaring, “It is my wish to attack the problem at its root, that is, to rip out the claws that are hidden in the very depth of this issue.” He further declared that anyone or anything that threatened the right of people to exist was a “devil incarnate,” a “fiend” and a “beast.”
4. Black rain: Following the atomic blast at Hiroshima, a wide area of the city and surrounding countryside was drenched in a heavy rain. The rain contained much soot caused by the destruction of the city, and was hence dubbed “black rain.”
5. Julius Segal, *Winning Life’s Toughest Battles—Roots of Human Resilience* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1986), p. 103.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

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8. Ibid., p. 105.
9. T'ien-t'ai's *Maha Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight).
10. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 175.
11. 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.
12. Thirty-two features or eighty features: Remarkable physical characteristics said to be possessed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas, symbolizing their superiority over ordinary people.
13. Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha* (Gautama Buddha), bk. 1, *Nakamura Hajime Senshu* (Selected Writings of Hajime Nakamura), vol. 11, (Tokyo: Shunshusha, 1992), p. 398.
14. Ibid., p. 401.
15. Ibid., p. 300.
16. Ibid., p. 420.
17. Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha* (Gautama Buddha), bk. 2, *Nakamura Hajime Senshu* (Selected Writings of Hajime Nakamura), vol. 12, (Tokyo: Shunshusha, 1992), p. 210.
18. *Rokuharamitsu Sutra*: "Sutra of the Six Paramitas." A sutra translated into Chinese by Prajna of the T'ang dynasty. It explains in detail the six kinds of practices or "perfections" (Skt *paramita*) that bodhisattvas must carry out in order to attain enlightenment.
19. *Sanju Hiden Sho* (The Threefold Secret Teaching).

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