

## EDITORIAL: A Revolution of Understanding

Buddhism is a revolution. Not violent, never destructive, it aims to overturn the unhealthy order of things in which ordinary people often feel powerless. In a world that values wealth, popularity, power and prestige above all, Buddhism sheds light on what is truly lasting and fulfilling.

Buddhism began as an effort to educate those who weren't supposed to be educated. India at the time was dominated by an elite priestly class known as the Brahmins. They wielded almost absolute power and authority and were considered the ultimate experts on life and spirituality. Ordinary people labored under a system of mandatory homage to them.

From where did the Brahmins derive their power? Historian Will Durant explains: "The power of the Brahmins was based upon a monopoly of knowledge. They were the custodians and remakers of tradition, the educators of children, the composers or editors of literature, the experts versed in the inspired and infallible *Vedas*. If a Shudra [member of a lower caste] listened to the reading of the scriptures his ears (according to Brahmanical law books) were to be filled with molten lead.... Brahmanism thus became an exclusive cult, carefully hedged around against all vulgar participation" (*The Story of Civilization: I, Our Oriental Heritage*, p. 485).

In the midst of such spiritual and intellectual exclusivism, Shakyamuni strove to inspire "vulgar participation" — involvement by ordinary people — in a most sublime form of education. Through lectures, sermons and dialogues with individuals, he led people to discover the invaluable treasure of Buddhahood that they all inherently possessed. He directly challenged the arrogance of the Brahmins, yet compassionately invited those from that class into his circle of disciples.

Centuries later, Nichiren Daishonin began his revolutionary struggle with years of intensive study; he then dedicated the entirety of his life to educating ordinary people. Opposed and attacked by a priestly class who wanted a monopoly on the "secrets" of Buddhism, he was even disdained by some of his own elitist priest-disciples for having "condescended" to writing about Buddhism in the language of the common people.

The Soka Gakkai has its roots in this tradition of Buddhist education. Josei Toda, imprisoned with his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, for refusing to pay homage to Japan's Imperial Shinto deity during World War II, studied seriously in his prison cell.

Toda read the sutra and chanted and grappled with the question "What is the Buddha?" as he agonized alone in the dank prison. While his mentor lay dying in another cell, a profound determination crystallized in the depths of his life, a determination that propelled Toda, through all obstacles, to build the foundation of our movement.

How did he begin to lay that foundation? By encouraging understanding of the Daishonin's Buddhism through lectures and discussion meetings. He was convinced that his fellow Soka Gakkai leaders who had buckled and renounced their faith under the threat of persecution during the war did so because they lacked a deep understanding and conviction rooted in study.

SGI President Ikeda recently said at the 3rd youth leaders meeting in Japan: "The strong faith with which we read the Goshō allows us to truly 'observe our mind,' that is, to do human revolution. From today, I hope the members of the youth division will challenge themselves to read and study the Goshō, if only one or two lines at a time."

We practice Buddhism to gain the wisdom and strength to handle any sort of challenge or difficulty that life deals us. One reason we study is to orient us solidly on that path, so as to never waver, no matter how strongly or in what direction the wind may blow or who may tell us we are not qualified.

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