

# LIVING BUDDHISM

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Living Buddhism is the monthly journal of the SGI-USA, an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

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# LIVING BUDDHISM

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## FROM OUR READERS

Due to the volume of letters we receive, not all can be printed, and all letters are subject to condensation. Letters printed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the SGI-USA or *Living Buddhism*. Please include signature, mailing address and telephone number with all correspondence. Mail to: Letters, *Living Buddhism*, 525 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail: LivingB1@aol.com

### MODERN BUDDHIST HEALING

I ENJOYED the article by Charles Atkins (in the May 1997 *Living Buddhism*). I, too, grew up in this Buddhist practice where in the pioneer days there were a lot of myths about "how to" practice — can't do this, don't do that. Through the years I came to see that great people like Gandhi studied Eastern philosophy and understood the power of prayer, along with current New Age philosophers Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer and Shakti Gawain.

The more I study Buddhism, the less I fear the thought of death. And, with the passing of my father recently and of my mother thirteen years ago, I have realized that death is a part of the cycle of the universe. In "Dialogue on Life" by Daisaku Ikeda, he says, "When a human being is old, ill and weary of his experience on earth, it is necessary that the life force within him be rejuvenated through death." So when Nichiren Daishonin states, "Suffer what there is to suffer and enjoy what there is to enjoy," he doesn't mean that we should enjoy our suffering but as President Ikeda says: "It is impossible to experience indestructible and inexhaustible joy until we accept suffering as it is and undauntedly challenge it. This will open up the path to enlightenment."

SHIRLEY ZAGOREC  
Orlando, Fla.

### GREETINGS FROM MALAYSIA

MY heartiest congratulations to you for giving *Living Buddhism* such a beautiful metamorphosis.

The obvious facelift apart, the most welcome change is in the new spirit it now projects. How encouraging indeed to see good quality journalistic techniques at work! As a practitioner, your fine magazine has always been a great source of strength, inspiration and encouragement to me. It shall be so all the more from now on.

Over the past decade, in Malaysia, the kosen-rufu movement has made good progress. We have earned not only public acclaim but also official trust and recognition. In 1989, when our country hosted the Fifteenth Sea Games (nine Southeast Asian nations participated), in our capital city of Kuala Lumpur, we were given the privilege and honor to present two truly awesome displays — one gymnastics and one human graphics — for the opening ceremony. We stole the show.

In September, we will be performing again for the Sixteenth Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur. We will undertake a gigantic human graphics (17,000 strong) for both the opening and the closing ceremonies.

STEVE CHONG YON FAH  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Living Buddhism** is the monthly journal of the SGI-USA, an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Buddhism. In association with the SGI, the SGI-USA works in tandem with members around the world. On an international scale, the SGI centers its activities on the human potentialities for individual happiness and global peace and prosperity. Rooted in the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren, SGI members share a profound commitment to the values of peace, culture and education.

These values are expressed in the SGI Charter, which embodies core beliefs in the ideal of world citizenship, the spirit of tolerance and the safeguarding of fundamental human rights.

The SGI-USA applies Buddhist principles through a nationwide network of grass-roots activities centering primarily on neighborhood discussion groups. Learn more about the SGI-USA, or find a discussion group in your area by calling our national office in Santa Monica, California: (310) 451-8811. Check out our Web page at: <http://www.sgi-usa.org>

## COLLECTIVE KARMA

IN response to the various opinions offered in the last few months to Jeffrey L. Towery's letter published in the April 1997 issue, I would like to add a few more points. In all of these opinions, it strikes me that it would be easy for those offended to assign blame and for others to take a position of horror and guilt. Neither of these has anything to do with Buddhism. All Americans have the collective karma to be living in a country where many people were treated unjustly. Guess what, people still are treated unjustly in our country!

We ALL own this karma whether our skins are black, white or brown. The Civil War was nearly 150 years ago, and no one who lived then is still alive. For all we know, some of us whose skins are black in this life could have been slaveholders in a life of that period. Inversely, some of us who honor our Confederate ancestors may have been their slaves then. We truly don't know what our role has been in the past, or the more distant past karma which dictated the role we played then. We only know that this karma belongs to us all because we are all here now with its effects. The difference is that we now have the change to change it.

If there is one thing that Buddhism has taught me, it is to own my past: bad, good or in between. The Confederate flag is, after all, only cloth and dye. It didn't make people treat other people badly. They were doing that already. When I see the Confederate flag, it reminds me not only of how far we have come, but of how far we have to go. Let's use the sadnesses and negativity of the past as a springboard to strive for peace, justice and great happiness in society.

Let's get on with kosen-rufu so that this kind of thing doesn't happen again anytime, anywhere.

CAROLYN MUNFORD  
Corvallis, Ore.

## Glossary

**Bodhisattvas of the Earth:** Those who chant and propagate Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. *Earth* indicates the enlightened nature of all people, and *bodhisattva* is one who dedicates his or her life to helping others.

**Buddha:** One who perceives the true nature of all life and leads others to attain the same enlightenment. The Buddha nature exists in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion and life force.

**daimoku:** Literally, *title*, it refers to the invocation or chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

**Gohonzon:** It is the embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and the life of Nichiren Daishonin in the form of a scroll, which SGI members enshrine in their homes. *Go* means *worthy of honor* and *honzon* means *object of fundamental respect*.

**gongyo:** Literally, it means *assiduous practice*. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, gongyo consists of reciting excerpts from the second and sixteenth chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

**karma:** Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny each individual

creates through thoughts, words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

**kosen-rufu:** Literally, it means to *widely declare and spread* (Buddhism); to secure lasting peace and happiness for all humankind through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

**Lotus Sutra:** The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members' daily Buddhist practice.

**Nam-myoho-enge-kyo:** The fundamental component of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it expresses the true entity of life that allows people to directly tap their enlightened nature. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is revealed only through its practice, the literal meaning is: *Nam* (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; *myoho* (Mystic Law), the entity of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; *reng* (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; *kyo* (Buddha's teaching), all phenomena.

**Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82):** The founder of the Buddhism upon which the SGI bases its activities. He inscribed the true object of worship, the Gohonzon, for the observation of one's mind and established the invocation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as the universal practice to attain enlightenment. *Daishonin* is an honorific title that means *great sage*.

**Shakyamuni:** Also known as Siddhartha Gautama. Born in India (present day southern Nepal) about three thousand years ago, he is the first recorded Buddha and founder of Buddhism. For fifty years, he expounded various sutras (teachings) culminating in the Lotus Sutra, which he declared his ultimate teaching.

**Soka Gakkai International (SGI):** The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association with membership in 128 countries and territories. In the service of its members and of society at large, SGI centers its activities on human potentialities for individual happiness and for global peace and prosperity. The breadth and focus of its mission derive from the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Buddhism. Soka Gakkai means *value-creation society*. The SGI-USA is a member-organization of the SGI.

## Frequently Cited Sources

For purposes of convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:

- *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:* MW, followed by the volume and page number.
- *Gosho Zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese): GZ, followed by the page number.
- *The Lotus Sutra:* LS, followed by the chapter and page number.

# OPENING THE DOOR TO YOUR LIFE

**T**HIS issue of *Living Buddhism* focuses on the theme of creativity. And though the articles and experiences explore its subject within a context of poetry, painting and the performing arts, I can imagine so many other expressions of creativity. Even though I am not an artist, nor can I hold a tune, creativity plays a decisive role in my life. As I face the challenge of living purposefully and with fulfillment, like so many others I start each day with a great determination.

Driving to the office, I carefully go over the details of my day. I know exactly what needs to be done and I have every confidence that it will all be accomplished. But soon after I arrive at my desk, something that wasn't on my agenda will invariably throw me off track: an unexpected telephone call; an impromptu meeting that wasn't on my schedule; a conversation that took longer than I had realized. Before I know it, the day is drawing to a close. Naturally I carry what I hadn't completed over to the next day; but my experience is an indication that the next day will be as unpredictable. And before I know it, a week has gone by with things getting pushed back.

My hope of course is that someday things will calm down enough for me to catch up once and for all and stay ahead. But as one management guru wrote, managing in today's world of unexpected twists and turns is like white water rafting. Management under such chaotic conditions is the norm rather than the exception. It is a reality we face regardless of our occupation.

I decided that I must become even more dis-

ciplined if I'm to make headway. I started by examining how I approached the day. The first thing I had to overcome was my tendency to let "just five more minutes" after the alarm goes off in the morning turn into twenty minutes. The next thing I saw was that after I had showered, shaved and selected what tie to wear, I hadn't much time left for gongyo.

It didn't take long for me to realize that my morning struggle was reflected in my daily struggle. That led to my making an important adjustment. Now I arise immediately, and begin gongyo earlier. What a difference! Because I am only human, I still fall behind. But I have found so many creative ways to still reach my goals — just like an airplane that leaves the gate late. Somehow, the pilot manages to make up the time and on occasion reach his destination ahead of schedule, all without troubling the passengers.

At the Central Executive Conference that convened at the Florida Nature and Culture Center last month, I went over the goals we had set at the beginning of the year. As I spoke I was mindful that the year is already more than half over. I reiterated the determination we made last January to promote the publications; to strengthen the trust in our communities with our geographic reorganization as a foundation in order to earn the support of our neighbors and respect in society; and to share this Buddhism with our friends through dialogue.

I believe that by living the remainder of this year and the years to come with creativity and vision, we will all reach our goals.

CREATIVITY is going to be vital to solving the problems facing the world as we approach the next century. SGI President Ikeda began this year's peace proposal by observing that "The dawn of a new millennium and the beginning of the twenty-first century is now less than 1,500 days away." He then recalls a conversation he had in January 1987 with the late Michel Baroin, president of the Commission for Commemoration of the Bicentennial of the French Revolution and Declaration of the Rights of Man, in which they shared their thoughts about the future of humankind from the perspective of "the thirtieth century," one millennium from now. Reflecting on the monumental changes that have occurred since 1987, President Ikeda writes:

It is precisely because of this deadlock, I believe, that a thorough reappraisal of the history of humankind, viewed from a very broad perspective, is indispensable. We need to review the whole history of modern civilization as it has unfolded over the past few centuries, and take a bold new look, one millennium at a time, through a macroscopic, bird's-eye view of human history.<sup>1</sup>

Our tendency is to think we have lots of time to do what we need to do in life. Our challenge is to use that time as creatively as possible.

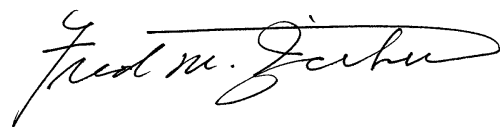
In an address on the creative life made to Soka University students, President Ikeda said:

The creative life, in short, is achieved by a constant effort to improve one's thoughts and

actions. Creativeness means to push open the heavy, groaning doorway to life. This is not an easy struggle. Indeed, it may be the most difficult task in the world. For opening the door to your own life is in the end more difficult than opening the door to the mysteries of the universe....

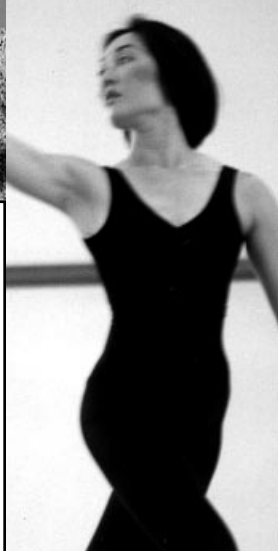
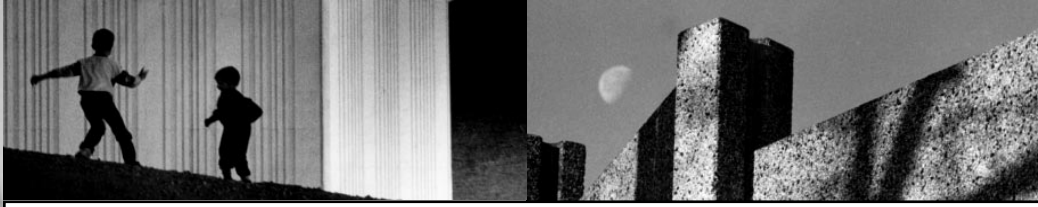
As you challenge evil and polish that jewel that is life, you will learn to walk that supreme pathway of true humanity. Of this, I am confident, and I am confident, too, that those who lead creative lives from the present into the future will stand in the vanguard of history. I myself think of this flowering of the creative life as a human revolution. This human revolution is your mission now as it will be throughout your lives.<sup>2</sup>

Through the power of our faith and practice, let's develop our creativity to achieve a victory today, tomorrow and for the rest of the year.



Fred M. Zaitso  
SGI-USA General Director

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1. "New Horizons of a Global Civilization," April 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 7.
  2. *The Tide Toward the 21st Century*, Soka University Addresses by founder Daisaku Ikeda, "The Flowering of Creative Life Force," pp. 71-72.



# CREATIVITY

*The following is an excerpt from an address titled "The Flowering of Creative Life Force," by SGI President Ikeda. It was reprinted in The Tide Toward the 21st Century, Soka University Addresses by founder Daisaku Ikeda, pp. 71-73.*



**T**HE times when I feel most deeply that I have done something creative are the times when I have thrown myself wholeheartedly into a task and fought it through unstintingly to its conclusion. At such times, I feel that I have won out in the struggle to enlarge myself.

It is a matter of sweat and tears. The creative life, in short, is achieved by a constant effort to improve one's thoughts and actions, or perhaps we could say it is the dynamism involved in this effort. You will pass through storms and heavy rains, and at times you may suffer defeat. The essence of the creative life, however, is not to give up in the face of defeat, but to follow the rainbow that exists within your heart. Indulgence and indolence are not creative. Complaints and evasions are cowardly, and they corrupt life's natural tendency toward creation. The person who gives up the fight for creativeness is headed ultimately for the hell that destroys all life.



You must not for one instant give up your effort to build for yourselves new lives. Creativeness means to push open the heavy, groaning doorway to life. This is not an easy struggle. Indeed, it may be the most difficult task in the world. For opening the door to your own life is in the end more difficult than opening the door to the mysteries of the universe.



To be human in the full sense of the word is to lead a creative life. The fight to create a new life is a truly wonderful thing. In it you find for the first time a wisdom that causes your intelligence to shine, the light of intuition that leads to an understanding of the universe, the strong will and determination that challenge all attacking evils, the compassion that enables you to take upon yourself the sorrows of others, the sense of fusion with that energy of compassion that gushes forth from the cosmic source of life and creates an ecstatic rhythm in the lives of all people.



# A FEW THOUGHTS ON THEORETICAL DILEMMAS, VALUE CREATION AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AS WE APPROACH A NEW CENTURY

BY LINDA EILENE SANCHEZ, DENVER

*"We fight, we sacrifice, ourselves and others, because of abstractions that are crystallized, isolated, and impossible to place in relation to each other or to concrete things. Our so-called technological age knows only how to beat at windmills."— Simone Weil<sup>1</sup>*

SEVERAL years ago, a chance reading of an article in *The New Yorker* profoundly affected my perception of value creation in artistic expression.<sup>2</sup> The author, Amitav Ghosh, describes the separatist violence of 1984 India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Ghosh's account differs fundamentally from most stories of violent confrontation, because he describes the unseen and often undramatic efforts of human beings to protect the lives of their fellows. He emphasizes the inner strength required of human beings to oppose the chaos of an environment perme-



TERESA CASILLAS

ated by the brutality of separatism.

In one incident, the pacifist group that Ghosh was with found itself facing a crowd whose members were intent on confrontation and who advanced with steel rods and knives. Indeed, the scene portended terrible violence and tragedy; however, Ghosh recounts something quite different:

And then something happened that I have never completely understood. Nothing was said; there was no signal, nor was there any break in the rhythm of our

chanting. But suddenly all the women in our group—and the women made up more than half of the group numbers—stepped out and surrounded the men; their saris and *kameezes* became a thin, fluttering barrier, a wall around us. They turned to face the approaching men, challenging them to attack. The thugs took a few more steps toward us and then faltered, confused. A moment later, they were gone.<sup>3</sup>

In this description, it was the inner integrity of the women and

their unspoken, yet simultaneous, interdependent and courageous action that resulted in the dissipation of the violence. The invisible positive qualities in the lives of the women defeated the brutish inhumanity of the aggressors. In most forms of depiction currently popular in our culture, the visible drama of violence takes precedence. Very seldom is the effort made to articulate the often hidden struggle behind the visible appearance. However, it can be said that the unseen positive qualities of human character also constitute the true nature of an event.

In Ghosh's account, he quotes an extraordinary author, Dzevad Karahasan from Sarajevo, who escaped his native country at the risk of his life in order to publish a collection of personal essays. In one of them, entitled "Literature and War," Karahasan states:

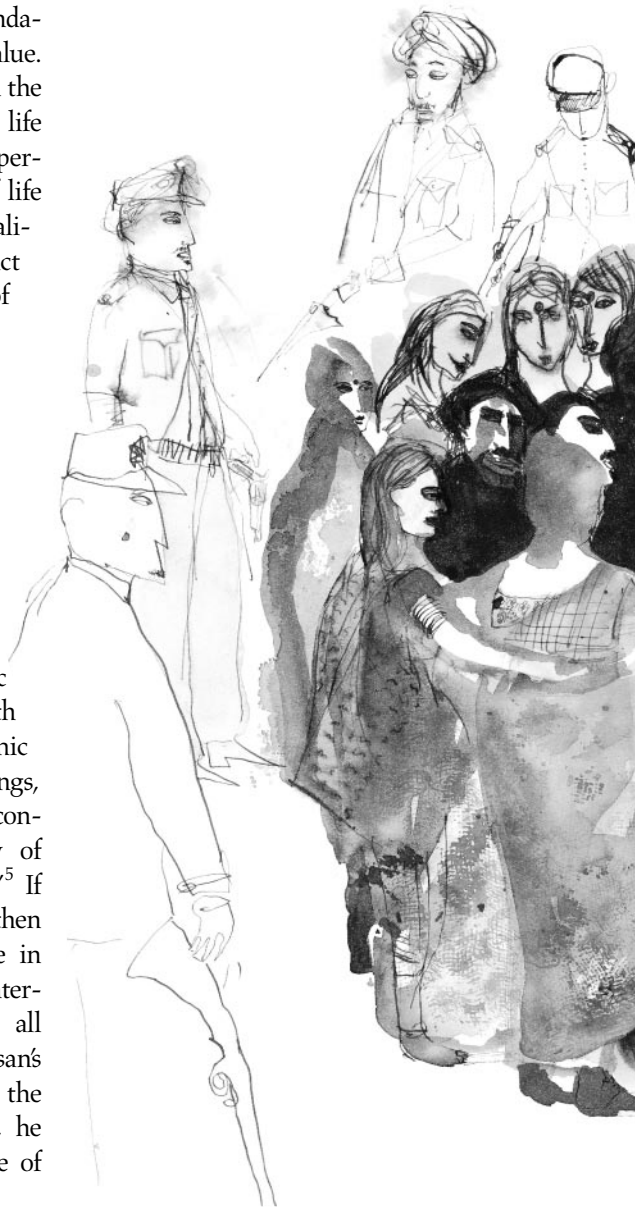
The decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon—completely sidestepping questions about goodness and the truth—is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world.<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis added.)

My purpose in recounting Karahasan's amazing conclusion is to argue the philosophical merit of his statement in the light of historical evidence. That artistic depictions, both textual and visual, may be responsible for the destruction and violence endemic to our time is not an easy matter to face up to. Yet, my point is exactly facing up to this responsibility. The modern tradition of art for art's sake that dominates our Western thinking is a destruc-

tive tendency that completely overlooks the reality of good and evil, truth and falsehood, and the fundamental ability of life to create value. It is a fact that aesthetic theory in the twentieth century has separated life and art because of a mistaken perception that the inner aspects of life are separate from the outer realities. It is also an irrefutable fact that this century has been one of unprecedented violence.

**B**UDDHISM espouses that life is never divorced from reality—and that there is an interdependence of all phenomena that make up our universe. As stated by Daisaku Ikeda in *Life: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel*: "The life of a human being is a form of cosmic life action and is connected with the innermost source of cosmic being. In the lives of human beings, as in the life of the cosmos, life consists of the inseparable entity of physical and spiritual elements."<sup>5</sup> If what Buddhism expounds is so, then our actions in this century are in serious disharmony with this interdependent web that comprises all universal phenomena. In Karahasan's extraordinary book regarding the events of Sarajevo in 1991–93, he outlines several conclusions, one of which I state here:

We persistently avoid those questions [issues of good and evil and value], acting like Sleeping Beauties who dream about pure form, the beauty of the beyond and similar esoteric inventions, believing that we will never be awakened by a prince red with children's blood. Those are the questions I have to answer before I am able to continue the work I have to do. What is my responsi-



bility in all this?<sup>6</sup>

I ask myself the same question. What is my responsibility as an interpreter of our cultural and artistic heritage amid this proliferating violence of depiction, where the value of life is a matter of indifference? Ghosh also questions previously written descriptions of the conflagration in 1984 India, and poses the same questions as Karahasan did in Sarajevo:



Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form—or a style or a voice or a plot—that could accommodate both violence and the civilized, willed response to it.<sup>7</sup>

THESE questions are not easy, and the answers lie within the hidden reality of the depths of life itself. Both written and visual representations are the result of the inner

life force of the people who create them. It is imperative that we summon forth both the inner resources and the strength of character needed to avoid the “aesthetic of indifference,” which is the central theme in the essays of both Karahasan and Ghosh. I believe this struggle against the aesthetic of indifference constitutes a central problem as we approach the end of this century. In a dialogue entitled “Culture Is a Spiritual Struggle,” Daisaku Ikeda states:

If people are spiritually empty, culture is nothing more than an embellishment, an empty entertainment. Think of Auschwitz, the death camp built by the Nazis. The military personnel at Auschwitz committed terrible atrocities daily, yet they were said to be fond of Bach and Mozart and read Goethe. The image of pressing the button on the gas chambers and listening to Mozart—surely this nightmare scenario is a symbol of how sick this century is.... The decline of a culture means the decline of a society and the individual in it. Likewise, when culture flourishes, individuals and societies flourish.<sup>8</sup>

To take responsibility for our current cultural situation is not to fall prey to political movements motivated by ideologies that are fundamentally empty at their core because they do not make human life the central focus. Rather, our responsibility is one of deep questioning and inner struggle and has to do with issues of true self and eternity, and the correct perception of the valuable entity we call life. Instead of ideology or formalist doctrines based on theory, the fun-

damental question should be the valuable resources of life itself. As responsible thinking human beings, what are the means, the tools, the theories, the strategies, the depictions or the forms that we can call forth from within to protect and treasure the value of life? As we summon all of our inner resources and grapple responsibly with the realities that confront us, only then can the outer depictions, whether written or visual, be the sources of regeneration toward a century of life and retain their eternal values based on fundamental truths. When the treasure and the interdependence of life that comprise the reality of all phenomena are instituted as the basic values for art, literature and every other cultural endeavor, only then can we hope to usher in a more hopeful century. □

*Illustration by Blair Thornley*

*(Linda Eilene Sanchez has an M.A. in art history and works as an independent scholar in cultural studies. She also teaches art appreciation part time at Metropolitan State College in Denver.)*

1. Nevin, Thomas R., *Simone Weil: Portrait of a Self-Exiled Jew* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 115.
2. Ghosh, Amitav, “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi,” July 17, 1995, *The New Yorker*, pp. 35–41.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
4. Karahasan, Dzevad, “Literature and War,” *Sarajevo: Exodus of a City* (Kodansha International, 1994), p. 77.
5. Ikeda, Daisaku, *Life: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel* (Kodansha International, 1982), p. 26.
6. Karahasan, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
7. Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
8. Ikeda, Daisaku, “Culture Is a Spiritual Struggle,” March 10, 1995, *World Tribune*, p. 3, p. 5.

# PURSuing DIALOGUE THROUGH INTERACTIVE THEATER

LARRY PELLEGRINI, LOS ANGELES

By BARBARA FORD, KANSAS CITY, MO.



JOHNNY ROSZA

**D**URING the running of *Aunt Chooch's Birthday*, the cast and playwright met with invited guests and family members of the company, 4th Wall Productions. *Aunt Chooch's Birthday* is an interactive play, the brainchild of Larry Pellegrini, playwright and producer from Los Angeles, whose busy schedule keeps him traveling throughout the country and worldwide. Larry generates energy as he explains that he writes plays for people, plays that strive to create dialogue between the actors and audience, plays that completely close the gap so that the audience is the actor and the actor is the audience. The exchange depends upon the "invited guests" and the actors who pull playgoers into the story and make friends with them.

Larry speaks to the alienation found in today's society as having profoundly affected the arts, particularly theater. "In today's world," he says, "people don't support the theater. People don't go out and seek theater. They can stay home and watch something on television. But interactive theater allows for full participation in drama, more like 'live TV.'"

*Aunt Chooch's Birthday* involves a cast of characters of a family: Aunt Chooch, the matriarchal Italian grandmother and icon of family stability as well as owner of the family's restaurant, The Villa Pompeii; her two daughters and her five grandchildren. This family is not unlike Larry's own; there is a feeling of familiarity as the family squabbles and problems surface throughout the evening. The audience participates in the birthday party and its goings on. Characters sit beside you, tell you their stories, the family gossip, ask you to dance,



The cast of *Aunt Chooch's Birthday*: (seated, left to right) Kathleen Bergman as "Giovanna," Elaine Flicker as "Chooch," Janice Wilt as "Lina"; (standing, left to right) Cynthia Ewen as "Celeste," Ron Megee as "Harold," Philip Hooser as "Francis," Michael Saia as "Benny," Patrick Hill as "Marco," Carolyn Cox as "Margo," and David Reyes as "Leo."

make you sing on stage, stand staring at the bickering between lovers, take sides for or against Aunt Chooch's daughter and her younger Jewish boyfriend, and even play a game of bingo with you.

Before you realize it, you are having fun, laughing and getting along with "the family." All at once you are a confidante to one of the characters, or feel sorry for another one who everyone has chosen to pick on. Even Larry participates along with the producer, Wendy Cashen. Sometimes they dance with other cast members or guests, and other times you can observe them sitting at one of the long party tables observing and laughing.

When I asked Larry what inspired him to pursue "interactive" theater, he told me that President Ikeda inspired him through his emphasis on dialogue. Particularly, he was moved by

President Ikeda's words at the SGI's fourteenth anniversary meeting held on January 29, 1989:

Why do I emphasize the importance of dialogue? Because I believe that dialogue and discussion are the main proof of one's humanity. In other words, only when we are immersed in the ocean of language do we become human.

In *Phaedo*, Plato astutely associates hatred of language with hatred of man. To abandon dialogue is in fact to abandon being human.

"In my own life," Larry says, "dialogue is what has helped me grow as a Buddhist so there was no better way for me to create my art than through using what has made me grow, which is dialogue. Art is an extension of my own personal

# “MY CAREER IS A WORK IN PROGRESS”

ERNESTINE ANDERSON  
SEATTLE



*Jazz legend Ernestine Anderson has expressed her creativity through song all her life. Here is what she has to say about creativity to Living Buddhism correspondent Curt Young.*

**Living Buddhism:** Thank you for spending this time with us. When did you know you had this talent?  
**Ernestine Anderson:** As far back as I can remember, I've been singing. My folks tell stories about when I

was 3 years old singing in the church with my grandmother. I think I've always wanted to sing. My father sang with a gospel quartet, so he was my first influence. And I wanted to be like my father,

I wanted to sing, too, you know.

**LB:** You make your home in Seattle. Is that where your career began?

**Anderson:** I was born in Houston. I got my first job as a pro there when

I was 12. But when my school grades started to go down, my father thought it would be a good idea to move. He wanted to take me away from the music scene, thinking it would help me focus more on my education. So he wrote to a friend who lived in Seattle explaining the situation. This friend wrote back and said Seattle was the best place for us to come because there was no night life to speak of. What this man, who was a Baptist minister, didn't know was that Seattle was just loaded with after-hours clubs. My family moved there when I was 15. I wasn't in Seattle two weeks before I was approached about singing in a band. My father said it would be okay as long as I kept my grades up. He warned me that the minute my grades slipped, I'd have to give up singing. So I kept my grades up.

**LB:** What was the next turn in your career?

**Anderson:** When I was 18, I went on the road with Johnny Otis. After that, a couple of years later, I went on the road with Lionel Hampton. In those days working with big bands was how you got your music education. I worked with each band for a year at a time. After I left the Lionel Hampton band, I went off on my own and have been on my own ever since.

**LB:** As you look back, who were your greatest musical influences?

**Anderson:** Well, I call them the masters. Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Dinah Washington, Billy Eckstein and a whole host of instrumentalists. Miles Davis—I worked opposite him. He used to come to Seattle a lot and work this one club and whenever I went in he'd call me up to the stage to sing with the band. And of course you don't say no to Miles. I also worked with him, at his

request, at Birdland (the noted New York jazz club).

**LB:** You must have had things you wanted to accomplish musically. Have you done so?

**Anderson:** Some things. But, I'm still learning. President Ikeda once told me to have confidence in what I was doing for singing was indeed my mission, as he put it, for world peace. He said that artists have the fortune to touch hundreds and thousands of lives through their performances. He also suggested that I learn as much as possible about my craft, to learn something every day. I asked him, "How can I tell the difference between confidence and arrogance?" He said that when you're satisfied with your station in life, that's arrogance. But when you continue to grow and to learn and develop and keep seeking knowledge about your craft—this is confidence.

**LB:** How has your practice of Buddhism affected you as a performer?

**Anderson:** My career had been developing slowly before I embraced Buddhism. Up to that point I was a very unhappy person. I didn't enjoy the success I had. In fact, my success had the opposite effect on me. I was afraid of it, if you will. When I started chanting, my whole life and my whole identity with people changed. I started to see people in a different light. And I began to enjoy what I was doing. I could enjoy working and not be uptight about it. It became an exchange from me to the audience, the audience to me. With that enjoyment, my career started to grow much faster; it's still growing. I spent so many years in a world of hell before that. But they weren't wasted, because I feel I had to go through all that to get here.

**LB:** It sounds like you're communicating joy.

**Anderson:** Exactly. You know, I feel as a performer that it's my responsibility to make people feel good. When they come in to hear me sing, they can be feeling as low as the ground. I feel it's my responsibility to have lifted their spirits by the time they leave. I chant to be able to show people that kind of life-condition.

**LB:** What were the circumstances around your deciding to practice Buddhism?

**Anderson:** I was in a state of depression, suicidal. I was living in L.A. at the time—1969. As a matter of fact, I have since passed the building many times where I tried to commit suicide and where I started practicing. As I said, I was suicidal and very, very unhappy. My life was at its lowest. Very shortly after I started running into Buddhists wherever I went; even if I went to someone's house, there would be a Buddhist there. Pretty soon it started to sink in that there was something going on here; someone was trying to tell me something. I made up my mind that I would find out whatever I could about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism from the next person to tell me about it. Well, sure enough, some friends of mine who lived in the same building had joined (SGI-USA). I happened to go up to their apartment a couple of weeks later and saw the Gohonzon and asked them about it. At the time I hadn't connected the chanting people had been telling me about with the Gohonzon.

But anyway, they shared how things had been changing for them since they started. One was an actor and the other person was a songwriter. They just went on and on about how they were suddenly receiving residual checks they hadn't expected, things like that. They

knew I hadn't worked for a long time because we used to all get together and compare notes. The actor who hadn't worked was now getting called for auditions. Commercials that had been canceled began playing again, so that's how he started receiving well-needed residual checks. I asked them how I could get the Gohonzon. So they put me in touch with the lady that introduced them and it started from there. After attending my first meeting, I realized my first benefit was that all the anxiety I had just left, and I was happy inside for the first time in my life, you know, just a real good happy feeling from inside. Something I'd never ever known before. I knew then I was on to something good, something real.

**LB:** Were you able to keep up the practice all these years?

**Anderson:** I stopped for about three years. That was after my first three years. I started slowing down. Little by little, before you knew it, I wasn't practicing. I moved to Seattle from L.A. and it took a while to start practicing again. But there wasn't a day I didn't live with the knowledge of Nam-myohorenge-kyo in my heart. I knew I had to get back to an active practice, but it wasn't easy. So I started chanting to be able to get back into it. And just like when I first started, I began to run into people who helped me get back on track.

In 1993, I found myself focusing on a new release with Quincy Jones' label, Qwest. It took us a year and a half to do the album. I had chanted to be able to work with Quincy, a goal that I had almost given up on. But then it happened. That showed me something I had always known—never give up. Never. If you want something and don't com-

promise, just hang in there and continue to chant about it, and it will happen. Maybe not when you want it, but it will happen. I'm not with Quincy Jones anymore. I've moved on, in fact, some music I recorded ten years ago with the Metropole Orchestra, a sixty-two piece orchestra in Holland, will be released in September on an independent label.

**LB:** So you've been able to use your practice to move your career the way you wanted it to go?

**Anderson:** It's not there yet. My career is a work in progress. Just like President Ikeda told me, not to improve is arrogant.

**LB:** Obstacles?

**Anderson:** Oh yes! Many, many. Mucho! Mucho! In all aspects of my life. From raising a family with the help of my parents. They looked after my children so I could pursue a career, but after they became teenagers, we lived together full-time. We had to get to know one another because I had been in and out of their lives for their entire lives.

**LB:** How many children do you have?

**Anderson:** Three children. Thirteen grandchildren. Two great-grandchildren.

**LB:** How would you classify your music? Is it jazz or blues?

**Anderson:** It's hard to categorize what I do that way. My roots are gospel and I noticed over the years more and more gospel in my style. I started out singing in the church. As I said before, I didn't realize I was a jazz singer until my godmother entered me in a contest in Houston. At the time I only knew two pop songs and the piano player asked me what key did I do those songs in, and I told him "C," which turned out to be the wrong key. So in order to save face, I improvised

on the melody and when I finished, one of the musicians told me I was a jazz singer, and that was my introduction to jazz.

**LB:** What was the first label to sign you?

**Anderson:** A label called Black and White. It's older than I am. Later I was on Mercury Records with Dinah Washington.

**LB:** She, too, was a legend. Were you friends?

**Anderson:** Oh, Dinah was just wonderful to me. She took me under her wing. The first time I was going into the Apollo (in New York's Harlem), she bought me a complete wardrobe. You know, I don't remember how many gowns, gowns with shoes to match. She even bought me some jewelry to go with those gowns and stuff. I don't remember who introduced me to Dinah, but she and I hit it off from the start. Dinah had an incredible sense of humor. She loved doing pranks and putting people on, and making people think just the opposite of what she really was.

**LB:** You were also friends with Sarah Vaughn, weren't you?

**Anderson:** Yes. I was very fortunate, you know. Whenever our paths crossed and we had time, we'd hang together. She once wrote me a four-page letter that she left in a club we were working, telling me that she knew I would enjoy working at the club because everyone was great there and would take care of me and she knew I would like the room. You know, just on and on and on. Over the years we became really good friends. She knew I admired her work. Also, there was a point in my career when I tried to sing like her. I said, "If I'm going to sing, I'm going to sing like Sarah." Some musicians came through Seattle and told me

Ernestine Anderson performing at the Bellevue Jazz Festival held on the campus of Bellevue Community College.



DIXON HANBURY

that I sounded like Sarah Vaughn, some even said we looked alike. Of course I was thrilled when they'd say something like that to me. Then somebody said to me, "You know, you're a good singer but if you expect to make it in this business, you must find your own identity because there can be only one Sarah Vaughn." At first I was upset. How dare he say this to me, I thought. I was hurt. But when I thought about it later, I knew he was absolutely right. And it was then that I started to think about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. I stopped listening to other vocalists altogether and only listened to instrumentals. In that way I developed my own identity.

**LB:** So now there's only one Ernestine Anderson.

**Anderson:** Well, I guess so. My dad told me once that when he was driving with some friends of his and one of my songs came on the radio, he said, "That's my daughter." He came home and said to me, "Well, I guess you found your identity, because I could tell it was you."

**LB:** You seem to really enjoy your life.

**Anderson:** I do. Due to my Buddhist practice, I'm now able to enjoy all aspects of my life. I've also experienced great protection. For example, I was on the Bay Bridge during the big earthquake in 1994. I missed the freeway collapse by four minutes. We were about four or five car lengths behind where the bridge broke and where the car

that you saw on television was hanging over the edge. That same year I was in a plane crash on the runway in Denver. When its landing gear collapsed, the plane turned on its side and skidded down the runway to within a hundred feet of the end of the runway. The wing broke off and everything. We had to evacuate down the chutes. The plane didn't catch fire, but there was a lot of smoke. And I walked away from that. That was, I think, a tremendous benefit. Around that time both my parents were sick and I was able to take care of them and continue to work. I grew closer and closer to them in those years—they were happy and I know it's because of my practice. It was my goal to make their final years the happiest, and they were. That was my big benefit.

**LB:** You seem to have very strong relationships with people.

**Anderson:** I think so. I have friends all over the world; as I was saying, my Buddhist family all over the world and friends who are not Buddhist. I'm very fortunate to have so many beautiful friends and friendships.

**LB:** It's as if you're an ambassador with a portfolio of song. What is the one thing you'd like to leave our readers with?

**Anderson:** If you don't know what it is you want, chant to find out what it is, chant to find out what your mission is. And seek the wisdom of others. I also think it's very important to stay connected with people. Otherwise, it's like a CD without a player. One's no good without the other.

**LB:** Thank you so much. □



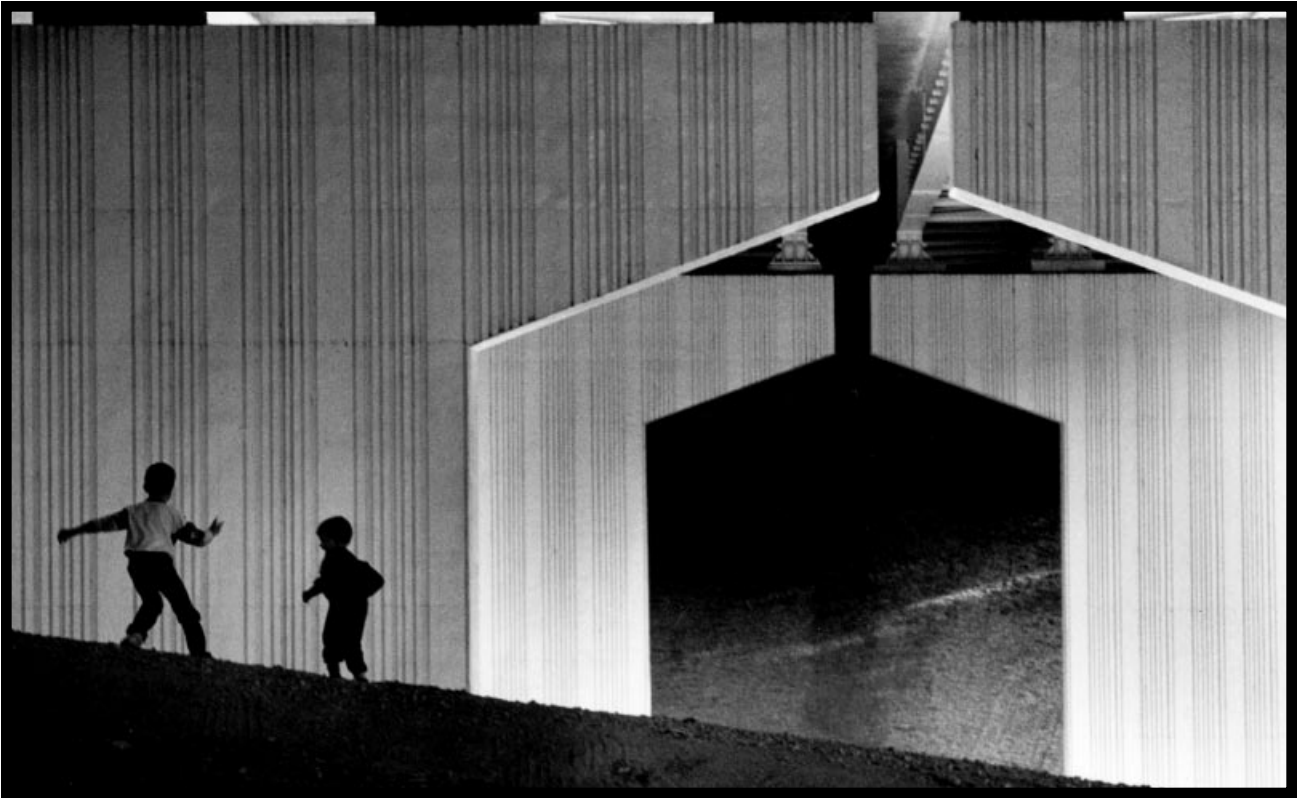
# PHOTOJOURNALIST SECURES HIS ARTISTIC "VOICE"

BY JONATHAN WILSON, PHILADELPHIA

I STILL marvel at the irony. How it all began with a picture hanging on a wall in a modest row home in the Oak Lane section of Philadelphia during the late

spring of 1969. I was a sophomore at Tyler School of Art majoring in painting. My career as an artist was off to an inauspicious start. Even after two years at what was

by all accounts a highly respected art school, I was unable to reconcile my values with those of the faculty. My professors seemed more in tune with the New York art scene



and less into the human being and matters of the heart. I had grown up in a family that had stood up to McCarthy in the '50s and actively supported the civil rights movement of the '60s. What I was really looking for at the time was someone who could show me a way of connecting my social values with my artistic ones.

What impressed me about the picture hanging on the wall was the demeanor of the person in the photograph. He appeared regal but not authoritarian; serene but not spaced out; compassionate, but he didn't appear to be the bleeding heart type. After scrutinizing the picture for about thirty seconds, I can still remember saying to myself, "I think this is someone I can trust." In the midst of my contemplation, John Whitlock, a Soka Gakkai member who had recently moved to the Philadelphia area from Japan, came

over and proudly explained to me, "This is President Ikeda. He is the president of our organization." While this encounter after a Buddhist discussion meeting seemed so unremarkable in the myriad moments of one's lifetime, it ultimately proved to be the seminal moment—the moment that would lead me to a lifetime of practicing Buddhism as an SGI member, to the woman I would eventually marry, to the decision to become a photojournalist, and to the answer to the question that had been gnawing at me: "How can I reconcile my social values and my artistic sensibilities?"

**I**PRACTICED Buddhism at a fever pitch my junior and senior years of college. I was the pride of my district chief and the darling of the local organization, whose mostly Japanese members were amazed to see an American show up at meetings

wearing whites, able to sit on his knees without pause and could speak English laced with Japanese Buddhist terminology so seamlessly that it appeared he had been born at a discussion meeting. Despite a wholehearted effort in the Buddhist practice, artistically I was going nowhere. No matter what I did I could not get my heart onto the canvas. The fact that I graduated at all was indeed remarkable.

After graduating I came to realize photography was the medium that would best enable me to express my ideals. Yet in spite of pounding the pavement and being told I had a respectable portfolio, I was unable to find any work as a photographer for months. Instead I worked as a security guard, bank teller, silk screen printer, dishwasher and in a number of low-level technical photo jobs over the course of five years. By this time I had major youth division



responsibility in the organization. In 1976, I was retouching pimples on teenagers at a studio that specialized in yearbook photography. The president of the company, apparently impressed at the fervor with which I could eradicate a zit from a teenage face, offered to train me as a photographer if I would continue my retouching duties during the slower times of the year. After seven years of practicing Buddhism, this was a major breakthrough. My career in yearbook photography consisted of traveling to high schools throughout the mid-Atlantic states, taking senior portraits during the day and then photographing sporting events until

five or six in the evening. The five-year effort to become a photographer paid off. I was well liked by the schools where I worked and by the owners of the business as well.

**A**FTER about three years, I began to feel a sense of dissatisfaction again. I came to realize that I wanted to work for a newspaper. Unfortunately, newspaper photojournalism was and still is highly competitive. As I began talking to people in the profession, I found out that jobs at a paper large enough to pay a salary one could raise a family on were rare. It was at this time I began chanting 3 million daimoku.

In 1981, after completing my daimoku campaign, I approached the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, one of the city's four newspapers, only to receive a form letter stating there were no positions at the paper, there were none anticipated in the future and have a nice life. Remarkably I was not discouraged but determined to increase my daimoku target to 10 million. Employment prospects soon worsened. The *Philadelphia Bulletin* and the *Philadelphia Journal* folded, filling an already competitive job market with about twenty additional photographers, all with better experience and credentials than I had. In addition, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*,



where I wanted to work, was rapidly becoming one of the most respected newspapers in the country. Between 1975 and 1985, it had won a dozen Pulitzer Prizes (two for photography). Naturally this meant that the competition for photo positions was

increasing dramatically. If I was to get a position at the *Inquirer*, I would not only be competing with the glut of local photojournalists but with the top people from all over the country, since it was now the “hot” paper to work for.

The situation seemed as bleak as ever. I had been working for the yearbook company for nearly ten years, had never had a photo published in a daily newspaper and with my SGI responsibilities really did not seriously have the time to pur-



sue any work outside of my immediate job. After receiving guidance about my dilemma, I was determined to continue in my 10 million daimoku campaign, become the top person in the region in my position as a yearbook photographer and continue to participate as much as I could in youth division activities.

In April of 1987, I completed chanting 10 million daimoku. I had recently graduated from the youth division. Also, competing yearbook photographers were offering to double my salary if I would come to work for them. Discussing my situation with a senior in faith, we concluded I should quit my position working for the yearbook photographer and pursue my career in photojournalism on a full-time basis. A friend of mine had been hired by the *Inquirer* as an assignment editor so

this time I was easily able to get an interview with the director of photography. As I prepared for the interview, the question remained how would I be able to convince the head of what was now the top newspaper photo department in America that I could produce pictures at their level despite never having had a picture published in a daily newspaper.

Larry Price, the *Inquirer's* director of photography, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner himself, went through my portfolio, not saying much. He called in another editor to look at my work and then another. Explaining that the paper was in the midst of a major shift in news coverage and that they would be expanding their suburban coverage, especially in the area of suburban sports, he said they wanted me to begin doing high school sports assignments for them

in the fall. During the twelve years I had worked for the yearbook photographer, I had come to be on a first-name basis with scores of athletic directors and coaches in the Philadelphia suburbs. Consequently I was able to gain access to athletes in locker rooms, weight rooms and training rooms. Furthermore, I had developed a style that the *Inquirer* wanted for the type of sports coverage that was being planned.

ONCE I began working for the *Inquirer*, my status quickly changed from sports assignments to general assignments and to doing the centerpiece photography for various sections of the paper. After eighteen months, I went from a freelance status to a long-term contract. I have been working as a staff and contract photographer ever since. After about

People at the Alfred Lowenherz Gallery in New York admire Jonathan Wilson's photographs at a showing September 11, 1996. Jonathan (center) was among a team of finalists at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* who were nominated for the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for spot news coverage.



CAROL BANISTER/AD

two years at the paper, the deep sense of dissatisfaction with my photography began creeping into my life again, just as it had when I was in art school. As I chanted and continued to study SGI President Ikeda's guidance, I felt a need to be able to create photographs that didn't simply illustrate the subject at hand but resonated on a deeper level.

In his 1987 speech to the Arts Division, President Ikeda discusses the importance of distinguishing truth from falsehood. This meant to me bucking the trends of contemporary photojournalism and pursuing a more transcendent image. I also noticed in his guidance how he often prefaced his speech by stating that his remarks were for the people of the twenty-first century. For me it was still 1989. I realized that my goals and determinations for my photography had been much too short-sighted and shallow. I began chanting to inspire not just current readers but to have the ability to move the hearts of people in the twenty-first, twenty-second and twenty-third centuries.

As I struggled to do this, I began developing a definite style that my editors began to use, which led to my first photo essay for the *Inquirer's* Sunday magazine on the construction of the Blue Route, a suburban Philadelphia interstate.

Writers often talk about the need to find their "voice." I think artists also grapple with this process perhaps in different ways. Over the twenty years since I had been in art school, I had really been in search of my artistic voice. Many times I felt isolated because there was never an artist or photographer who could tell me how to find it, or that it even existed. Yet, from the journey that began with a picture on a wall in a Philadelphia row home, the answer eventually came.

President Ikeda concludes his guidance to the Arts Division by expressing his hope that we can live lives of victory, showing tremendous actual proof, whether we appear in the spotlight or not. It is certainly the secret wish of every photojournalist in his or her

lifetime to take one image that defines an era, be it a solitary figure in front of a row of tanks near Tiannamen Square or a young woman crying out over the body of a fallen student on the Kent State campus. On a personal level, what matters most for me is not the recognition my work receives in my lifetime. At the core of my existence, however, there is an immovable determination that in the twenty-second or twenty-third century, when the turbulent era in which we live is understood and the efforts of the SGI pioneers are fully appreciated, historians will undoubtedly write the chapter on Daisaku Ikeda and the rise of his disciples. My sole wish is that in that chapter, be it a sentence or even a footnote, it will be noted in the closing years of the twentieth century that there was a photographer from Philadelphia named Wilson who understood President Ikeda's heart, captured his spirit and put it on pieces of 35mm film. □

# REACHING BEYOND HER LIMITS

MINAKO NAKAJIMA,  
HAWAII

BY JOANNE TACHIBANA,  
HONOLULU



CARL HENNER

**T**O dance! To choreograph! To teach! This is the life that Minako Nakajima always dreamed of having. Growing up in Takarazuka City, Japan, world renowned for its Takarazuka Female Dance Troupe, one would naturally be influenced by the city's culture and arts. But imagine pulsating with such creative energy and being denied the opportunity to express it.

Minako's parents — her father a pharmacist and mother a homemaker — demanded a no-nonsense approach to life. Therefore, Minako could not share her dreams with her parents in such a strict and repressive setting where pursuing art was frowned upon and thought of as frivolous. Only when her parents were out of the house did she set free her innate desire to dance.

Minako recalls that from an early age, whenever she heard music she would imagine dance movements in her mind. She continued dreaming of being a dancer and a choreographer even as she disciplined herself in her studies at Catholic junior and senior high schools. Later when she was admitted to a prestigious college in Kyoto, she majored in oriental history and took a few dance classes as well.

Minako was awarded her second Hawaii State Dance Council Choreographer's award for her 1989 piece, "Air of Prayer."

Minako floundered for six months after graduating college in 1981. She tried studying under a master etcher, then moved on to apprentice with a pastry chef. She was searching for a career, all the while attempting to ignore her love for dance. Finally, she gave in to her dream, and made a decision to pursue a career in dance. She began taking dance classes in the neighboring cities of Osaka and Kobe. Immediately her talent was recognized and she was asked to assist with teaching and choreography.

One of her first major accomplishments was to choreograph a twenty-minute piece for a forty-student performance. Minako was elated with its success. However, after taking classes for two years, she was anxious to learn more. Coincidentally, a friend returned from Hawaii after a year of dance instruction under Betty Jones, who specializes in the Limon technique. This friend taught Minako what she had learned, which fueled Minako's desire to study with Betty Jones, also. So she applied to the Jones-Ludin Dance Center and was accepted on its exchange-visitor program.

Minako became part of Betty Jones' dance company, Dances We Dance, Inc., in the fall of 1983. Although she believed that the Limon technique brings out an individual's potential, it was not easy to learn; also, her teacher was very strict. Minako suffered many injuries to her ankles and knees and felt unable to progress.

At this time she met several SGI members in a beauty salon who



CARL HERNER

befriended her and persistently invited her to discussion meetings. After two months of giving excuses, Minako finally agreed to participate. Meanwhile, she was heavily involved in rehearsals for her first major recital, The Spring Passages Choreographers Concert. She knew she had great potential, but was having a difficult time bringing out her best. She really wanted to be a great modern dance artist.

At her first SGI meeting, a leader shared that this Buddhist practice helps individuals overcome limitations. Without hesitation, Minako latched on to this encouragement. With the recital only a week away, she began to chant with determination. Immediately, she said: "I noticed that I began enjoying my dance and strong emotions were coming out of my life. I even felt like smiling, and my body felt free and open."

The concert was a great success. Minako said, "I even received my first praise from my teacher who told me, 'Good job.'"

Two weeks later, she performed in another event, The Spring Passages Young Choreographers

Concert. A local newspaper called that concert "stimulating," complimenting Minako on her "craft of composition and strong dancing." These she places among her first benefits due to her Buddhist practice.

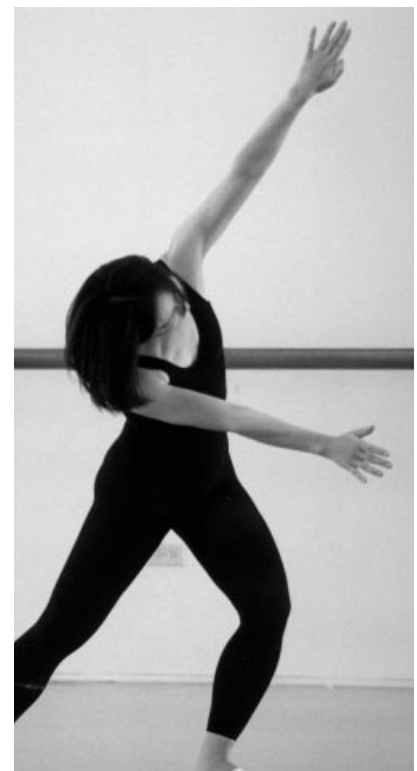
Minako continued struggling during her first three years with the dance company, constantly challenging herself to master techniques and to open up her potential. The long hours of rehearsal drained her and more and more injuries plagued her, often making her walk home difficult. As soon as she arrived at her apartment, she would immediately chant to the Gohonzon for her well-being, pointing at her foot. Once, she had an ankle injury, but she continued to chant and was able to dance.

Her growth as a dancer and choreographer kept evolving. In the spring of 1986, Minako received her first Hawaii State Dance Council award for choreography for her creation, "Yume" (Dream). That summer she received a scholarship to the American Dance Festival (ADF) at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. The ADF is described as the cutting

edge of dance. The *New York Times* calls it “one of the nation’s most important institutions,” and the *Durham Morning Herald* describes it as the mecca of modern dance, the number one festival in the dance world. Minako joined her teacher, Betty Jones, in North Carolina, and was also her assistant and translator for the ADF when it traveled to Japan.

piece: “Minako has astounding grace and fluidity of motion.” She was awarded her second Hawaii State Dance Council choreographer’s award for her 1989 piece, “Air of Prayer.” Minako’s original plan was to study with Betty Jones for only one year and return to Japan to teach dance. However, as she continued diligently in her Buddhist practice, her dreams grew

the Philippines, Korea, Hawaii and Okinawa, which now greatly influences her choreography. Although Hawaii seems far removed from major dance movements, Minako has gained wide experience through the many scholarships awarded her, which gave her opportunities to work on large-scale productions and learn from nationally renowned choreographers.



Together with the dance company, Minako also traveled throughout Hawaii to participate in the Artists in School program.

Minako’s performances received lavish comments from the local Hawaiian press. Her “fluidity of movement is an absolute joy to behold,” said *Ka Leo O Hawai’i*. The *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* praised her, saying she “dances with splendid grace and power, her ‘Dreamscape’ is superb musicality”; and for her “Same Steps”

bigger and bigger—she stayed in Hawaii and polished her skills as a choreographer, dancer and teacher for ten years, along the way receiving numerous scholarships and accolades.

In 1993, Minako resigned from the dance company to pursue her master’s degree in dance at the University of Hawaii. She wanted to further her education and enhance her dance skills. At the university she was introduced to a variety of ethnic dances including those from

The Hawaii State Dance Council awarded Minako her third award for choreography for “Sonata” in 1994. A project director described “Sonata” as “beautiful in its simplicity and passion.” Furthermore, she complimented Minako: “Your performance is strong, refined and elegant. And it was a pleasure to watch your performance.”

As SGI Culture Department Arts Division vice chief, Minako has worked on two public performances held at the SGI-USA

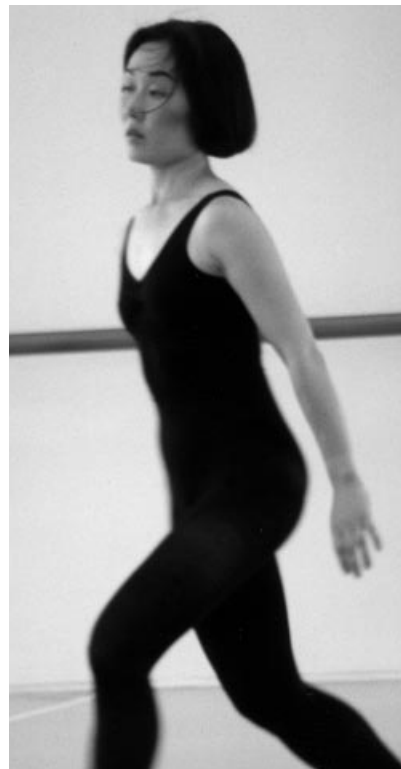
Hawaii Culture Center. The first event, which took place in 1994, was titled "Humanism in the Arts." It examined the relationship between humanism and the arts and society by focusing on Victor Hugo and the period in which he lived. For this occasion Minako choreographed and performed a piece to Chopin's music. Two years later the theme, "The Creative



Spirit," was depicted through music, song, dance, poetry and artwork. Minako choreographed and performed "Lotus," which was accompanied by a Chinese koto, and "Moonlight," accompanied by a soprano and pianist. For her contributions to the culture and arts, she received an award from the Min-On Association.

Minako's growth in her Buddhist practice and in her responsibilities as an SGI-USA young women's vice joint territory leader has been

reflected not only in her dance/choreography but also in her family revolution. She recalls that when she first joined she wanted a happy family with strong unity. At that time when she had returned home and informed her parents that she had joined the Soka Gakkai, they reacted in shock and dismay and did not speak to her for a week. Also, her brother, who lived away from



PHOTOS BY WILL FINNEMAN

home and was struggling through medical school, never communicated with the family. Today, her parents are very supportive of her practice, and her brother is a medical doctor and lives close to their parents. Even Minako's decision to pursue a dance career has met with their approval. After her first two years of study in Hawaii, she recalls she had returned to Japan and joined her friend in a joint public recital at the Osaka Theater. She danced while her friend sang and played the

piano. Minako's parents had helped finance this endeavor.

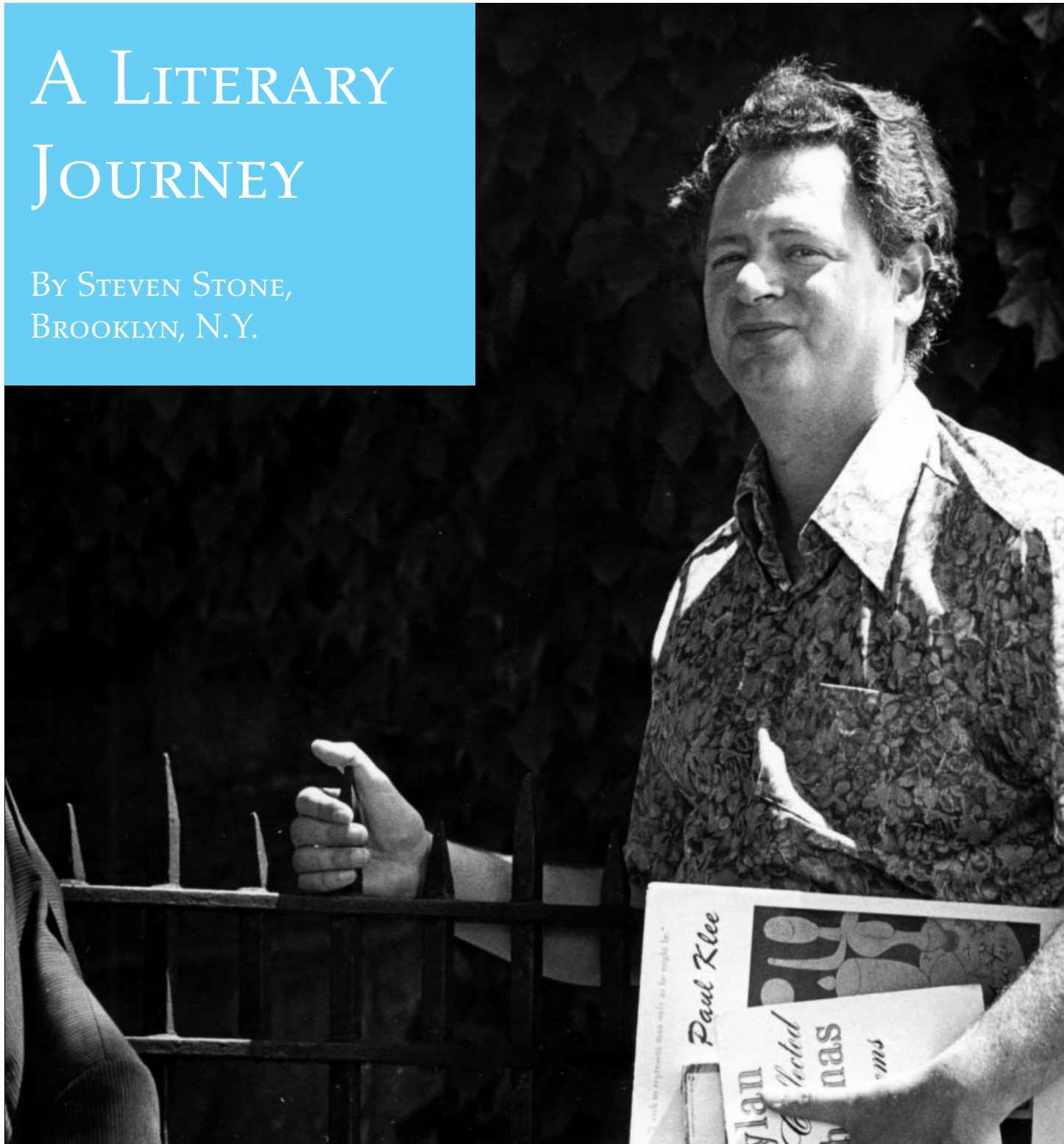
In 1992, eight years after beginning her practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, Minako was praised by her mother. Her mother commented that she had seen Minako change and grow, and credited the Gakkai for the encouragement and training her daughter received. Minako recalls a leader sharing guidance that daimoku permeates the farthest corners of the universe. She witnessed the benefit of her practice extending to her family, especially during the great earthquake in Kobe in 1995, when her parents escaped injury despite half of their home being destroyed; not only that, the money her father had been saving for his membership fee to a very expensive golf club was used to renovate the house. Her mother is pleased because today, their home is more modern and comfortable than before.

Today, Minako is truly pursuing the "creative life" that SGI President Ikeda describes as "one that is devoted entirely to transcending the individual self by continually reaching beyond the limits of space and time in pursuit of the universal self" (*A New Humanism*, p. 8).

Minako will complete her master's degree in the spring of 1998. She looks forward to her parents attending her graduation ceremonies. Her master's thesis will be a performance using poetry with non-violent themes. After graduation she will continue her efforts in dance/choreography and teaching career and open her own dance studio. She also will continue doing community service with the Artists in Schools program to encourage children in their creative endeavors. □

# A LITERARY JOURNEY

BY STEVEN STONE,  
BROOKLYN, N.Y.



**M**Y experiences with literature, beginning in the seventh grade, were

a bit frustrating. We began and ended with Shakespeare, and it seemed like everyone in the class

understood what Shakespeare was saying except for me. For the most part, I concentrated on the sciences,



CAROL BARNSTEIN

a field that seemed to suit me from my earliest years. I began at The Bronx High School of Science in

1965, but oddly enough, my interest in the sciences began to wane. The class I remember most from that school was my creative writing class in 1966–67. From that time on, I felt highly motivated to write poetry, short stories, and later in college, newspaper articles for the Queens College Phoenix. I took poetry courses in college, and tried to improve. It nagged me that I wasn't as good as I would have liked to be, so I continued on. I was determined to prove, both to myself and the world, that given enough time, I could become a really outstanding poet.

My early efforts in writing were both thrilling and disappointing. Thrilling because I was embarking on uncharted waters and liked the possibilities; disappointing because my teacher had no idea how great I was, and graded me accordingly. There always seemed to be someone better, someone else getting the teacher's "apple award" for the week. I yearned to write well, and I promised myself never to give up, no matter what anyone said.

I was intrigued by this new interest of mine, and wrote intensively. I couldn't say that poetry was my favorite form of writing, but as the years went by, it became so.

WHEN I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1970, my priority was overcoming my severe depression. I had no idea how my practice was going to impact my creative efforts. As I continued to practice, my depression lifted, my work took on a happier tone, and I was enjoying the results without seeking approval from others. Still, I concentrated mainly on developing emotional and spiritual stability. My creative work did not assume

true significance until the late 1970s. By that time I was working in the real estate appraisal business supporting myself as an administrative assistant and appraisal coordinator. My writing assumed greater importance, as an oasis from the world of work, and a growing desire to truly excel and recapture the freshness of my earlier years and expand upon them emerged.

I was influenced by poets such as Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound and e.e. cummings. Later on I gasped in admiration of Ann Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Gerard Manley Hopkins, W. B. Yeats, Shelley and Longfellow. There were so many outstanding poets, a bottomless supply of timeless verse. It was a little intimidating. I wondered if the really great poets ever had their doubts. I sent some of my poems to a poetry professor. We corresponded for a couple of years. He was unusually critical of my poems. It took a long time to swallow my pride and realize that at least some of the things he said about my poems were correct. I persevered on, through the good poems and the bad, the great and the mediocre. My greatest fear was not that I didn't have talent, but that I would fall short of greatness. I placed a heavy expectation on myself, but that was the way I was. I had to be great, and if I could not be great, it wasn't worth the effort.

There were lean years when I would write virtually nothing, and there were years when the flow seemed never to stop. I wrote all kinds of poems in all kinds of forms. I was pleased with my versatility. Although I couldn't avoid being influenced by the poets I read, I tried to heed the advice of Ralph Waldo Emerson that "envy

## HYACINTHS

Here, I give you  
Hyacinths  
A symbol of our  
Love together  
Gentle soil, so generous  
in its deep dark wealth  
Listen as the rain  
Trickles toward the roots  
They satisfy themselves  
every tuber  
every vein  
till the season of the  
Hyacinths comes  
Their seeds  
erupting slowly  
Ounce by ounce  
the fertile ground  
Responds, the yielding  
earth complies;  
every petal  
Rooted in the soil  
Of delight  
takes form; every leaf  
re-forms  
Every shade

of  
green  
(When we were young,  
I promised you  
Hyacinths some day  
Since then  
Our maturity  
Has warped us,  
Has twisted our resolve;  
Still, there is a memory left  
to remind us  
what may still be  
As I lay the  
hyacinths  
by the river,  
And pause to wait  
And then depart,  
  
Hoping you will come by  
and lift the  
still moist petals  
Without scattering  
a single  
  
one)

is ignorance" and "imitation is suicide." I began to write more experimental verse, and found that a lot of this verse was pretty good work and could stand by itself. I was determined to make myself as good as I could be.

I kept an open mind. Sometimes I was inspired by reading other poets' work; at other times, a rare moment of relaxation in body and mind could set off a little "volcano" of creativity. I began to appreciate these little "volcanoes" that occurred every so often. Moments of poetic ambition

and inspiration were rare jewels that I grasped with great pleasure and appreciation.

My literary odyssey was also a journey into my own life. I gradually realized that I didn't have to be great, or famous, or unusually talented in order to be creative, but just to do the best I could, to be honest with myself and my work, to write naturally, yet inventively. The greatness was all in the effort to create; fame didn't much matter; I stopped worrying about talent, and did the best I could with the

ability I felt I had. My new positive, humane attitudes toward myself and my writing were bearing fruit. I was moving into a higher realm of expression; at the same time, a new "down-to-earthness" added immediacy and dimension to my work, and enabled me to find new audiences, people who could appreciate my work because I had finally begun to appreciate myself. No one is better or worse than I, nor am I better or worse than anybody else. We all have our equally precious lives to explore the essence of

## ENRAPTURED

Enraptured by the sun day light  
 Rushing toward full fill ment

The stars and sky cleave to  
 each other

Like a sealed bowl  
 of earth's salad;

Sardineskin silver  
 Clouds  
 Against the

draw string  
 sun;  
 millions and millions  
 of tales  
 that thirst  
 to be told  
 under the  
 night sky  
 sweet violet  
 the stars  
 Like glistening grains

of salt white  
 against  
 the  
 deepening  
 dark  
 Chopped radish  
 sky pushing  
 out a morning  
 yellow of  
 scrambled egg  
 promise.

things, and my poems are an attempt in that direction.

I often wonder if many of the greatest poets might have gladly traded their fame and talent for the happiness they so often could not attain, and how seeking enlightenment through the worlds of Learning and Realization, and nothing higher left many a creative soul unsatisfied and ultimately unhappy. I am indeed grateful that I was able to win the struggle within myself by basing my life and efforts on chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to strengthen the core of my life, and at the same time develop my writing in a way most natural to me. I was practicing the highest philosophy of all, and had nothing to fear.

The poem "Hyacinths" is an attempt to get down to the bare bones of emotions that unfold in the course of the work. I chose this poem for presentation because it is relatively easy to read and disarmingly simple. It teaches no lesson, advances no theories, proposes no philosophies. Emotion sweeps through the delicate branches of the poem, infusing it with humanity. It is a form I have worked with from time to time to train myself. I try to convey my thoughts and feelings with great economy here, connecting each line with its predecessor and its descendant, a naturalistic fervor throughout.

I hope to eventually compile all my poems in a book of collected works, an idea inspired by Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, and similarly comprehensive volumes of poetic work. I intend to improve further, combining poetic skill with a personal touch and great emotion throughout, poems that anyone can grasp and be inspired by. It's a great challenge, and I look forward to working on it.

My advice to poets, especially those just beginning, is to be honest with your thoughts and feelings, write what is in your heart. Techniques can always be worked on, styles can be developed anytime. Begin with what you know and what you feel. Go from there, and have confidence in your journey. It's a fascinating voyage of self-discovery, which is what all great literature should be. □

# PARABLE OF THE GEM IN THE ROBE

ILLUSTRATION BY AKIO MATSUYOSHI

A POOR man came to visit a wealthy friend. Late into the night, the two friends ate, drank and talked. When the poor man went to bed, he fell into a deep sleep.

In the middle of the night, a messenger came to inform the rich man that he must go immediately to a distant land far away. Before he left, he wanted to do something for his poor friend to show how much he cared for him. But he did not want to wake his friend from such a deep sleep.

So the wealthy friend sewed a beautiful colored gem inside the hem of his poor friend's robe. This jewel had the power to satisfy all of one's desires.

The next morning, the poor man awoke to find himself alone in his wealthy friend's house. Totally unaware of anything that had taken place while he was sleeping, he wandered off

street.

Seeing the man's impoverished condition, the wealthy friend asked him:

"Why have you allowed yourself to become so poor? You could have used the jewel that I gave you to live your life in comfort. You must still have it, yet you are living so miserably. Why don't you use the gem to get what you need? You can have anything you want!"

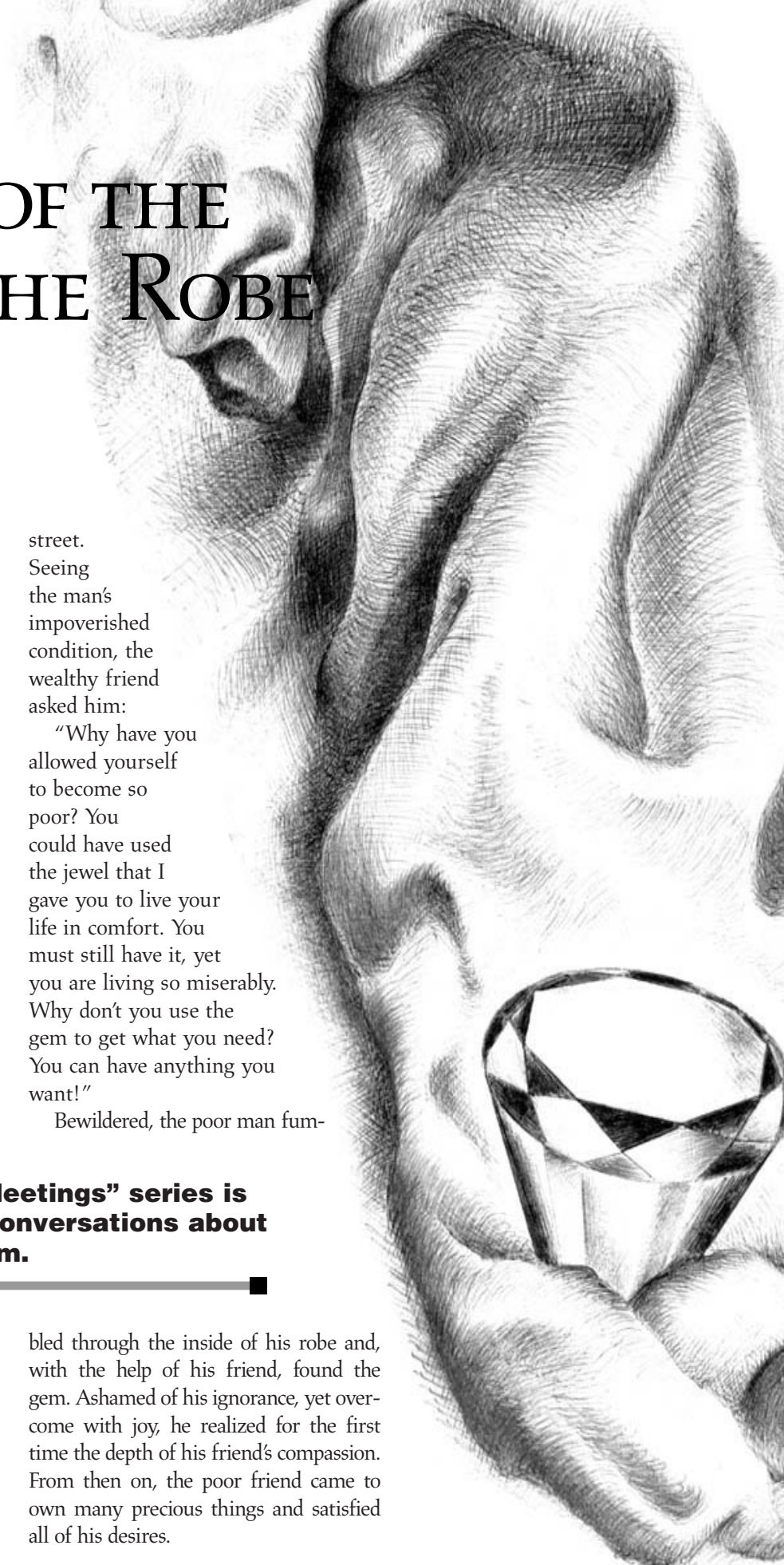
Bewildered, the poor man fum-

**This "Topics for Discussion Meetings" series is intended to stimulate lively conversations about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.**

The poor man traveled from place to place, looking for work. All the while, he was completely unaware that he possessed a priceless gem in the hem of his robe.

A long time had passed until one day, by chance, his wealthy friend came upon him as he wandered destitute in the

bled through the inside of his robe and, with the help of his friend, found the gem. Ashamed of his ignorance, yet overcome with joy, he realized for the first time the depth of his friend's compassion. From then on, the poor friend came to own many precious things and satisfied all of his desires.



# THE GEM

BY CRISPIN REEDY, DALLAS

The rags that hang about me — how foolish now!  
 These tatty sandals, big toe a-poke, this dusty hovel — how silly I have been.  
 Feel now along the margin of my robe. There, in the hem, that lump.  
 Heft the weight, draw it forth. Wrapped in a scrap  
     of faded yellow cloth. Unroll it.  
 There it lies, winking and glimmering in my work-hardened brown palm.  
 Blue sparks, fire shining in its depths.  
 Heart's desire, glittery blossom. So close, these many years,  
 and I so blind. I smile. See what great treasure has always been mine?

## COMMENTARY ON THE GEM

BY JOHN GALLAGHER, DALLAS

THE “Parable of the Gem in the Robe” describes the condition of ignorance that all humans originally have of the inherent worth of their lives, as well as the lives of others. Although possessing the means to end his suffering, the man in the parable is unaware of the valuable gem his friend has sewn into his robe for the purpose of ending the man’s poverty.

In the story, the poor man is unaware of this hidden gem because he was asleep when his wealthy friend sewed it into his robe, and was never told of its presence since the wealthy man left his guest before he awoke.

Shakyamuni used this parable to describe his own disciples’

forgetting their former lives when they were taught the Law. Nichiren Daishonin uses the parable to refer to the fundamental darkness that prevents people from realizing their identity as Buddhas. One might wonder why it is that human beings must continually relearn of their inherent Buddha nature lifetime after lifetime.

Looking at Shakyamuni’s life, we see that although he had attained enlightenment many lifetimes before, he still went through many hardships to become a Buddha in India under the bodhi tree. Even the Daishonin had to leave his home as a boy and single-mindedly pursue the answer to life’s mystery. From them we can see that the experience of the poor man in the parable is, in a sense,

repeated by all of us since we are not immediately aware of our Buddha nature. We must learn to live correctly, to overcome suffering and be compassionate. Our lack of expertise in these endeavors is often quite alarming.

In our quest, we are aided by teachers or mentors in life. And so we see that this is the way Buddhahood emerges from life — a gradual transformation of fundamental darkness into the Buddhahood of absolute freedom — through personal effort and the guidance of dedicated teachers. For each individual, this process is unique and unfolds in unpredictable ways, full of pitfalls and opposition. Those who persevere discover the hidden jewel; those who don’t, continue to live in darkness just as the poor man in the parable. □

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

*In this installment they talk about the three powerful enemies described in the twenty-line verse section of the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Also, they discuss the mission of votaries of the Lotus Sutra, and the view of religion of the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee.*

**Daisaku Ikeda:** How to live the very best life; how to be truly human, these are thoughts that are constantly on my mind. In this connection I would like to talk a bit about the great Renaissance artist Michelangelo.

Michelangelo's works from his later years include the huge fresco *The Last Judgment* (which measures 48 feet in height by 43 feet in width). A copper plate print of a portion of the fresco was on display as part of the Michelangelo Exhibition.

[The exhibition—jointly sponsored by the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum and Casa Buonarroti (the Michelangelo family)—was held in Tokyo and Kyoto for six months through September 1996.]

The painting includes a self-portrait of Michelangelo. The manner in which he depicts himself is quite horrid; the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew, which hangs limply in another's grasp, carries the tragic mask of Michelangelo. As the vehicle for his self-portrait, he chose the

# DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA



“raw flesh” of a saint who in his martyrdom had been skinned alive.

Why does he depict himself—and only himself alone—in this fashion? There are many possible interpretations, but it seems to me that this is the image of someone who has truly lived his life for all it was worth. All the other figures in the fresco are drawn to perfection, their lifelike appearances “given” to them by Michelangelo. He gave and gave, giving everything of himself to others, until at death he was reduced to a shapeless mass of

THE WISDOM OF THE LOTUS SUTRA—  
A DISCUSSION ON RELIGION IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



discarded flesh and cast-off skin.

This is the way of life of a bodhisattva. Seeing this painting, I sensed the ardent spirit of someone who, to paraphrase the Lotus Sutra, “does not begrudge his own life” (cf. LS13, 194–95).<sup>1</sup>

**Takanori Endo:** As a matter of fact, biographical accounts describe Michelangelo as “very muscular,” and as “having a powerful and large frame.” But in this painting he reduces himself to nothing more than a mass of skin. I sense

profound meaning in this.

**Ikeda:** Michelangelo was truly human. And he achieved excellence as an ordinary human being. Therein lay his greatness.

On another level, the essence of Buddhism lies in living out one’s life as a “great common mortal.” To completely dedicate one’s life to others; to thoroughly exert oneself for the Law and for society; and to die having fully expended oneself—that is the way of life of a bodhisattva and a Buddha. It’s a

matter of “laying down” one’s life; of fearlessly speaking out on behalf of justice; of exhausting one’s energy to bring people true happiness. Where this spirit is lacking, Buddhism does not exist.

The Lotus Sutra describes this spirit of selfless dedication with the words, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives / but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way” (LS13, 194–95). This is the spirit of the “Encouraging Devotion” (thirteenth) chapter, which we are discussing this time. This is also the essence of the spirit of the Soka movement. Fundamentally, the Soka movement exists only where people manifest the spirit to dedicate their lives to spreading the Law.

**Katsuji Saito:** The purpose of Buddhist study, too, lies in thoroughly internalizing this essential spirit. In the “Emergence of the Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter that we discussed before, Shakyamuni indicates just how difficult it will be to expound the Lotus Sutra after his death, admonishing his listeners (in the “three pronouncements”) to determine firmly to spread the sutra. In the subsequent “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter, the great power of the Lotus Sutra is revealed through the enlightenment of evil people and women (i.e., the “two admonitions”).

The bodhisattvas, having heard these teachings, vow to expound the Lotus Sutra steadfastly, no matter how they are persecuted and attacked. It is here, in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter, that they make this vow.

**Haruo Suda:** We could say that the vows of disciples constitute the theme of this chapter.

**Saito:** From their vows, we get a clarification of the specific pattern of persecution.

**Suda:** Namely, they describe the “three powerful enemies,” a theme we have often discussed.

**Ikeda:** Because the three powerful enemies is such a familiar motif, let’s try to get to the heart of what they represent. Why don’t we make the three powerful enemies our focus in discussing the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter?

### Struggle for the Law Where You Are Now

In a muddied kalpa, in an evil  
age  
there will be many things to  
fear.  
Evil demons will take  
possession of others  
and through them curse, revile  
and heap shame on us.  
But we, reverently trusting in  
the Buddha,  
will put on the armor of  
perseverance.  
In order to preach this sutra  
we will bear these difficult  
things.  
We care nothing for our bodies  
or lives  
but are anxious only for the  
unsurpassed way. (LS13,  
194–95)

**Endo:** I’d like to begin by looking at the outline of the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter.

In “Treasure Tower,” Shakyamuni turns to his disciples and asks who among them will expound the Lotus Sutra in the strife-ridden *saha* world after his death. He tells them, in other words, that he is not long for this world and that he

wishes to pass the “baton” by entrusting someone else with the Lotus Sutra. He explains that after he has entered extinction it will be very difficult for people to uphold this sutra; but those who do will “win the admiration of the Buddhas,” and “quickly attain the unsurpassed Buddha way.” If anyone can uphold this sutra after the Buddha’s death, he says, “Now in the presence of the Buddha / let him come forward and speak his vow!” (LS11, 180–81)

In response to the Buddha’s entreaty, first Bodhisattva Medicine King, along with Bodhisattva Great Joy of Preaching and others make this vow:

We beg the World-Honored One to have no further worry. After the Buddha has entered extinction we will honor, embrace, read, recite and preach this sutra. Living beings in the evil age to come will have fewer and fewer good roots. Many will be overbearingly arrogant and greedy for offerings and other forms of gain, increasing the roots that are not good and moving farther away than ever from emancipation. But although it will be difficult to teach and convert them, we will summon up the power of great patience and will read and recite this sutra, embrace, preach and copy it, offering it many kinds of alms and never begrudging our bodies or lives. (LS13, 190–91)

**Ikeda:** “We will never begrudge our bodies or lives,” they say, vowing to propagate the Lotus Sutra in the *saha* world despite the many difficulties this will entail.

**Endo:** Next, vows are recited by a succession of other disciples who

had earlier received assurances that in the future they would become Buddhas.

**Ikeda:** Their vows, however, are decidedly different from the vows of Bodhisattva Medicine King and the disciples in the first group.

**Endo:** Yes. The first group of bodhisattvas determine to spread the sutra in this world. But the next group of disciples say that, “Because in this *saha* world the people are given to corruption and evil,” they will broadly preach the sutra “in other lands.” The reason they give is that the people of the *saha* world are ridden with faults; they are described as “beset by overbearing arrogance, shallow in blessings, irascible ... and their hearts are not sincere” (LS13, 191).

**Ikeda:** That’s quite a laundry list! Sadly, however, this is indeed the true state of people’s lives.

**Endo:** This second group of disciples, the voice hearers,<sup>2</sup> had received prophecies of future enlightenment from Shakyamuni. By this point they had already entered the path of the Bodhisattva. But since they are still “novice bodhisattvas,” they think they cannot endure the difficulty of spreading the teaching in the *saha* world, so replete with corruption and evil. This is the interpretation of the Great Teacher T’ient’ai of China.<sup>3</sup>

**Ikeda:** Their saying that they will go to “other lands” might express a universal tendency among people to want to shy away from difficult circumstances and go somewhere peaceful instead. But the spirit of the Lotus Sutra is to live with blazing vigor and joy right where we are,

Their saying that they will go to “other lands” might express a universal tendency among people to want to shy away from difficult circumstances and go somewhere peaceful instead. But the spirit of the Lotus Sutra is to live with blazing vigor and joy right where we are....



basking in the brilliance of the world of Buddhahood “inherently possessed and eternally existing” in our lives. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “It is not the case that he [a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra] leaves his present place and goes to some other place” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 781).

**Saito:** In his preaching, Shakyamuni had urged them to spread the Lotus Sutra in the *saha* world. And while all the disciples were overjoyed to be able to attain enlightenment, only those in the first group replied to the Buddha’s true intent.

**Suda:** No doubt Shakyamuni was disappointed with those who didn’t.

**Ikeda:** Nichiren Daishonin says: “How exasperated he must have been! Thereupon the Buddha turned aside and instead looked earnestly to the eighty myriad of

millions of nayutas of bodhisattvas” (MW-6, 313). He is referring to the scene where women who had received prophecies of enlightenment vow that they, too, will spread this sutra in “lands in other regions” (LS13, 192).

**Suda:** Shakyamuni had just given prophecies of enlightenment to the nuns Mahaprajapati, his aunt, and Yashodhara, his wife from before renouncing the world, and their followers.

**Saito:** It appears that, even after the dragon girl attained enlightenment, these women still had worries about whether they, too, could become Buddhas. Immediately sensing their anxiety, Shakyamuni announces to them that if they practice the bodhisattva way they can definitely attain enlightenment.

**Ikeda:** Nichiren Daishonin says, “When she [the dragon girl] attained Buddhahood, this does not mean simply that one person did so. It reveals the fact that all women will attain Buddhahood” (MW-2, 152 [176]).<sup>4</sup> In other words, the dragon girl’s enlightenment in the “Devadatta” chapter indicates the enlightenment of all women—not just the dragon girl. The dragon girl represents and symbolizes all women.

But while some, upon hearing such a general pronouncement, will immediately understand that the same applies to them; others will not make this connection. That’s why it is important to offer specific encouragement to each person. This is the relationship between general discussion and specific remarks.

If only large meetings were held, it would be difficult for all members

The importance of giving detailed consideration to the situation of each person through one-on-one dialogue cannot be emphasized too strongly. The SGI has developed to the extent it has because we have steadfastly adhered to this principle.



to gain heartfelt understanding and make a deep determination in faith. The importance of giving detailed consideration to the situation of each person through one-on-one dialogue cannot be emphasized too strongly; giving individual encouragement should be our primary concern. The SGI has developed to the extent it has because we have steadfastly adhered to this principle.

**Saito:** Mahaprajapati and Yashodhara were related to Shakyamuni. It seems to me significant that the Buddha makes prophecies of enlightenment for the members of his family only after he has already predicted Buddhahood for many others. Similarly, among his ten major disciples,<sup>5</sup> Rahula,<sup>6</sup> Shakyamuni's son, and Ananda,<sup>7</sup> his cousin, are the last to receive predictions of enlightenment (in the "Prophecies Conferred on Learners

and Adepts" [ninth] chapter).

**Ikeda:** Perhaps this is a sign of just how difficult it is to teach the members of one's own family about Buddhism. From Shakyamuni's perspective, of course, all people were equal. He would never give people special or deferential treatment because they were his relatives. Consequently, the existence of this bond, rather than facilitating their receptivity to Shakyamuni's teaching, may have actually made it that much more difficult. All the same, in the end, they each successfully entered the path of Buddhahood.

We can interpret the fact that they were the last to receive prophecies as indicative of this principle. There is no need to be impatient, therefore, if your parents or your spouse is reluctant to begin practicing, or if your chil-

dren hesitate to embrace faith. Nichiren Daishonin says, "Be firmly convinced that the benefits from this offering will extend to your parents, your grandparents and a countless number of other people..." (MW-4, 136).

The important thing is that we ourselves are strong in faith; for we are thereby opening a path for everyone around us. Therefore, you can put your worries to rest. Once the sun rises in our lives, we can illuminate everything. That is why we should strive to become the sun of our homes and our families.

**Saito:** After the prophecy of enlightenment for women has been concluded, countless other bodhisattvas approach Shakyamuni and, pressing their palms together, think, "If the World-Honored One should order us to embrace and preach this sutra, we

To “initiate” is to take positive action. This is entirely different from doing something because someone has told you to; such a passive practice has nothing to do with “the lion’s roar.”

would do as the Buddha instructed and broadly propagate this Law” (LS13, 192–93). But the Buddha says nothing. “The Buddha now is silent and gives us no such order,” they think. “What shall we do?” (LS13, 193).

**Suda:** At this point the Bodhisattvas harden their resolve. “We will reply to the Buddha’s spirit!” “We will devote our lives to our own true wish!” And then they make a vow: “After the Thus Come One has entered extinction we will travel here and there, back and forth through the worlds in the ten directions [to spread this sutra]” (LS13, 193).

**Ikeda:** In this passage, propagating the Lotus Sutra is termed “travel[ing] here and there, back and forth through the worlds in the ten directions” (LS13, 193). They are filled with the determination to travel anywhere in order to spread the Law.

Global kosen-rufu can only advance in reality if people take action “traveling around the world time and again.” It is with just this kind of determination that I have resolutely worked to open a path of worldwide kosen-rufu where none existed before. What remains is the question of how those who follow will further expand and develop that path.

**Suda:** I have had the opportunity to travel abroad a number of times. Whenever I see how the SGI is developing in different parts of the

world, I deeply sense the rising tide of world kosen-rufu. And I am overwhelmed by the thought of how difficult it must have been to develop things to this point.

**Endo:** The earnestness and vigor of the disciples’ vow are expressed by the famous line, “to roar the lion’s roar” (LS13, 193). Nichiren Daishonin explains the original meaning of the Chinese characters for “lion” (Jp. *shishi*): “The first *shi* represents the Mystic Law as it is passed on by the mentor. The second *shi* indicates the Mystic Law as it is received by the disciples. The ‘roar’ [of the lion] is the sound of mentor and disciples chanting [daimoku] in unison” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 748).

**Ikeda:** This is the united action of mentor and disciple.

**Endo:** The Daishonin further clarifies that the verb *roar*, here, means to initiate or put forth. He says, “Roaring the lion’s roar’ refers to the initiating of Nam-myohorenge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law” (cf. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 748).

**Ikeda:** To “initiate” is to take positive action. This is entirely different from doing something because someone has told you to; such a passive practice has nothing to do with “the lion’s roar.” That’s why Shakyamuni quietly watched to see what his disciples would do. The mentor “roars”; but then it is up to the disciples to “roar” in response.

Shakyamuni patiently waited and observed them.

**Saito:** In the Sanskrit text of the sutra, the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter is titled, “Inexhaustible Effort,” expressing the vow of the disciples.

**Suda:** The entire chapter truly is a recitation of vows.

### The Three Powerful Enemies

**Suda:** Next, I’d like to look closely at the so-called “twenty-line verse” that describes the three powerful enemies. This extended verse passage also expresses in its entirety the vow spoken by the bodhisattvas.

**Saito:** It could be said that the “twenty-line verse” explains the concrete form that the “six difficult acts,” of the six difficult and nine easy acts expounded in the earlier “Treasure Tower” chapter, will take.

**Suda:** Though known as the “twenty-line verse,” the passage in fact consists of twenty four-line stanzas.

**Endo:** Toward the beginning of this section, we come upon the following description of the first of the three powerful enemies:

There will be many ignorant  
people  
who will curse and speak ill of  
us

and will attack us with swords  
and staves,  
but we will endure all these  
things. (LS13, 193)

As the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China indicates, this passage reveals the powerful enemy of ignorant lay people (Jp. *zokushu zojoman*).

**Suda:** It explains that laymen and laywomen who are ignorant of Buddhism will verbally harass and commit physical violence against the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

**Ikeda:** One or two instances of “verbal harassment” or of people “cursing and speaking ill” of you is easy to endure. But to be ceaselessly cursed and vilified by many people is a hardship defying description.

The French philosopher Alain<sup>8</sup> says: “Without a doubt there is not even one person who could stand fast against a universal and constant barrage of curses and insults. The person being cursed races toward his ruin.”<sup>9</sup>

I think he’s entirely correct. Unless you have directly experienced such abuse, you cannot understand it. But a true bodhisattva is someone who, despite this mistreatment, continues calmly advancing and shielding others.

**Endo:** Ignorant lay people are those who do not understand the important distinctions between superior and inferior, and profound and shallow when it comes to Buddhist teachings. That they nonetheless persist in persecuting the Lotus Sutra’s votaries indicates that they are in part spurred to action by the second and third powerful enemies — arrogant and cunning

priests who slander the votaries (Jp. *domon zojoman*), and priests revered by the general public who, fearful of losing fame or profit, induce the authorities to persecute the votaries (Jp. *sensho zojoman*).

**Saito:** Probably the most distinguishing characteristic of “ignorant lay people” is that by relying on authorities, they turn hostile to the true teaching. Such people never bother to try to discover the truth for themselves.

**Ikeda:** They blindly follow authority because they lack the ability to judge true and false on their own; they place their trust in authorities and do their bidding. This underlines how important it is that the people become wise.

**Endo:** The next passage (the third stanza) concerns arrogant and cunning priests, the second powerful enemy:

In that evil age there will be  
monks  
with perverse wisdom and  
hearts that are fawning and  
crooked  
who will suppose they have  
attained what they have not  
attained,  
being proud and boastful in  
heart. (LS13, 193)

**Suda:** These are people who have renounced secular life. They are characterized by “perverse wisdom” and “hearts that are fawning and crooked.”

**Saito:** Although these people have studied Buddhism, the wisdom they have succeeded in acquiring can only be called “perverse.” That their hearts are “fawning and

crooked” means that they grovel before, and seek to ingratiate themselves with, the powerful. Their tendency, on the other hand, is to behave arrogantly toward those whom they perceive as weak.

**Suda:** They have a minuscule understanding of Buddhism. But their scant knowledge, rather than inspiring them to improve themselves, only makes them ill-natured and vicious. Not only do they conceal the truth from others, but they think nothing of twisting and distorting the teachings of the Buddha to suit themselves and their circumstances.

**Ikeda:** Consequently, if they are told there is a teaching superior to the one to which they ascribe — a discovery which, by rights, ought to be a cause for joy — they react with anger. They cannot honestly respect any teaching as superior or any person as having achieved insight and wisdom superior to their own. In a word, they are dominated by conceit.

### Saintly Figures Who “Despise and Look Down on All Humankind”

**Saito:** Next, we come (in the fourth stanza) to the passage describing false saints, the third powerful enemy:

Or there will be forest-dwelling  
monks  
wearing clothing of patched  
rags and living in  
retirement,  
who will claim they are  
practicing the true way,  
despising and looking down on  
all humankind. (LS13, 193)

**Ikeda:** It says that they “despise

One or two instances of “verbal harassment” or of people “cursing and speaking ill” of you is easy to endure. But to be ceaselessly cursed and vilified by many people is a hardship defying description.



and look down on all humankind.” This is the main characteristic of false saints — their condescending attitude toward others. Such an attitude goes directly against the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, which teaches that all living beings are infinitely respectable. Therefore, such people will inevitably become enemies of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

**Suda:** The traitorous Devadatta was one such person. This is how a modern novel describes him: “Devadatta despised and detested people. Because his life was steeped in everything that is ugly and hateful in human nature, even people appeared to him to be foul and contemptible.”<sup>10</sup>

**Saito:** The description of such people as “despising and looking down on all humankind” is right on the mark.

**Endo:** The next stanza (the fifth) further exposes that side of false saints:

Greedy for profit and support,  
they will preach the Law to  
white-robed laymen  
and will be respected and  
revered by the world  
as though they were arhats who  
possess the six  
transcendental powers.  
(LS13, 193–94)

**Ikeda:** Yes. False saints are people who use Buddhism to realize profit for themselves. Even so, they are revered by the world as though they were sages. They haven’t the spirit to help suffering people or to dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu. They are hypocrites who use religion.

Nichiren Daishonin calls people who preach Buddhism in order to

gain fame and wealth “Law-devouring hungry spirits” (MW-4, 93). Spiritually depraved, they devise cunning schemes to gain popularity and win adulation and applause in the world of Buddhism.

**Suda:** “Law-devouring hungry spirits” is certainly a fitting description of the Nikken sect and those of their ilk who, using the Daishonin’s Buddhism as a “means,” wallow in decadence and prey upon lay followers.

**Saito:** The sixth stanza reads:

These men [false saints] with  
evil in their hearts,  
constantly thinking of worldly  
affairs,  
will borrow the name of forest-  
dwelling monks  
and take delight in proclaiming  
our faults.... (LS13, 194)



These are people who pass themselves off as sages.... But because of the depth of their arrogance, they cannot directly face and recognize the ugliness that is the true reality of their lives. So they constantly suppress their true nature.

In other words, when a votary of the Lotus Sutra opposes them, they fabricate charges of wrongdoing and denounce the person.

**Ikeda:** What hypocrites most fear is that the truth about them will be revealed. Therefore, a votary of the Lotus Sutra who proclaims the truth represents a definite threat.

**Endo:** That's why they use lies to try to do away with such people.

**Suda:** Lies, after all, are the tools of their trade.

#### Using Fabrications To Persecute the Lotus Sutra's Votaries

**Ikeda:** The Lotus Sutra clarifies their modus operandi in detail.

**Saito:** Yes. The seventh and eighth

stanzas explain that false saints criticize the votaries of the Lotus Sutra saying:

"These monks are greedy for profit and support and therefore they preach non-Buddhist doctrines and fabricate their own scriptures to delude the people of the world. Because they hope to gain fame and renown thereby they make distinctions when preaching this sutra." (LS13, 194)

**Endo:** I am reminded of how the priesthood labeled us as "non-Buddhist," among other things.

**Saito:** They certainly have demonstrated a readiness to resort to calumny and fabrication.

**Suda:** Moreover, the contents of their charges are nothing more than a description of themselves. The members of the priesthood have indeed shown themselves to be "greedy for profit and support" and to "preach non-Buddhist doctrines."

**Ikeda:** That's right. Using sleight of hand, false saints accuse the votaries of the Lotus Sutra of the very things of which they themselves are guilty. It's as though they're vilifying and denouncing the ugliness of their own reflection.

**Endo:** I think that in giving the third powerful enemy the name *false saints* (Jp. *sensho zojoman*), Miao-lo really put his finger on their true nature. These are people who pass themselves off as sages. They are only looked to by others as sages; they are not the genuine

article. Their true nature is just the opposite.

Somewhere in their hearts they realize that, when all is said and done, they are not sages; that they are merely living out a charade. But because of the depth of their arrogance, they cannot directly face and recognize the ugliness that is the true reality of their lives. So they constantly suppress their true nature.

But when a votary of the Lotus Sutra, a genuine Buddhist, appears before them, they are compelled to gaze upon their own mean and petty nature; it is as though their lives are suddenly illuminated in the bright light of the sun. For a person of towering arrogance, this is unbearable. So they make up their minds that everything will be all right if they can just get rid of the votary.

**Saito:** It's a matter of jealousy.

**Suda:** They behave like people who are so miserable that they have contorted their faces into the most horrible expressions, but rather than accepting their ugliness, they get angry at the clear mirror that reflects them.

### Conniving With Powerful People Behind the Scenes

**Endo:** In the ninth and tenth stanzas, we get a clarification of the ties that develop between false saints and secular authorities:

Because in the midst of the great  
assembly  
they constantly try to defame us  
[the votaries of the Lotus  
Sutra],  
they will address the rulers, high  
ministers,  
Brahmans and householders,  
as well as the other monks,

slandering and speaking evil of us,  
saying, "These are men of  
perverted views  
who preach non-Buddhist  
doctrines!" (LS13, 194)

**Ikeda:** They don't confront the votaries of the Lotus Sutra directly, rather they always try to manipulate things behind the scenes. This is the tendency of false saints — so deeply ingrained in their lives is the habit of living behind a facade. They are in fact cowards.

And so they turn instead to society. Addressing themselves to people in positions of power and authority, they repeatedly slander and impugn the integrity of the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

**Suda:** They use lay people who are ignorant of Buddhism as their minions. From this alone it is clear just how unscrupulous and base they are.

**Saito:** Similarly, it appears that during the infamous heresy trials that plagued Europe, members of the clergy did not become directly involved in the executions. Using information provided by secret informants and through torture, they arbitrarily condemned people to death. But instead of carrying out the sentences themselves, they merely handed their hapless victims over to the secular authorities.

**Endo:** They didn't want to dirty their hands. Hypocrites are hypocrites through and through.

**Ikeda:** Moreover, when they handed a victim over to the authorities, it is said that they would give the person a written pronouncement, stating something to the effect of, "We mercifully hope that your life

may be saved. However, we have no choice but to hand you over to the secular courts." They turned people over, in other words, on the precondition that they be executed. This is the height of hypocrisy.

It is the nature of "evil people" to collude with one another, to form a united front. In order to get their share of the spoils, they make a show of unity. In the meantime, "good people," because they are unconcerned with profit, tend to become isolated. This tragic state of affairs has to be changed. Those on the side of good have to stand together.

**Suda:** Next, the eleventh stanza says that the three powerful enemies will ridicule the votaries of the Lotus Sutra: "they treat us with contempt, saying, / 'You are all no doubt Buddhas!' " (LS13, 194) "What a bunch of characters," they sneer. "They think they're all Buddhas." These are words of slander that arise from contempt.

**Ikeda:** To tell people, as did Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Jp. Fukyo), "You are all no doubt Buddhas!" (LS13, 194), is an expression of the highest respect. The three powerful enemies employ even these words to express derision and contempt. This vividly expresses the depravity of those who only know about looking down on others.

**Endo:** The twelfth and thirteenth stanzas explain how their lives are pervaded with negativity:

In a muddied kalpa, in an evil age  
there will be many things to fear.  
Evil demons will take  
possession of others  
and through them curse, revile

The Lotus Sutra, which explains that all people can attain Buddhahood and that all people are Buddhas, embodies a spirit of supreme respect for human beings. By contrast, those teachings and ideas that seek to turn people into “things” to be exploited embody ultimate disrespect for human beings.

and heap shame on us.  
(LS13, 194)

It further explains that the votaries put on the “armor of perseverance” (LS13, 194, thirteenth stanza) and teach people the Lotus Sutra. Their spirit in doing so is described by the lines (in stanza fourteen), “We care nothing for our bodies or lives / but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way” (LS13, 194–95).

**Ikeda:** Nichiren Daishonin says, “The ‘unsurpassed way’ is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Now Nichiren and his followers are even more anxious with regard to Nam-myoho-enge-kyo than they are with regard to their own lives” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 749). The ultimate meaning of faith is to treasure Nam-myoho-enge-kyo even more highly than our own lives. It is to devote ourselves entirely to achieving the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

Concretely speaking, this means advancing together with the SGI, thoroughly protecting the SGI, and practicing together with the SGI, in both times of hardship and times of joy. Apart from the SGI, there is no kosen-rufu of the Mystic Law. This is the meaning of the statement by Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, “The Soka Gakkai organization is more precious than my life.”

**Saito:** The sixteenth and seven-

teenth stanzas explain:

The evil monks of that muddied age,  
failing to understand the Buddha’s expedient means,  
how he preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate,  
will confront us with foul language and angry frowns;  
again and again we will be banished  
to a place far removed from towers and temples. (LS13, 195)

**Ikeda:** “Again and again we will be banished.” Regarding this passage, Nichiren Daishonin declares:

If Nichiren had not been banished time and again for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, what would these words “again and again” have meant? Even T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo were not able to fulfill this prediction represented by the words “again and again,” much less was anyone else. (MW-2, 101 [119])

Apart from Nichiren Daishonin, no one has ever read this passage with their life. The “twenty-line verse” is, therefore, documentary proof that Nichiren Daishonin is the true “votary of the Lotus Sutra.”

**Saito:** In recent times, no one has been as severely persecuted by the

three powerful enemies as have the members of the SGI. This is actual proof that we are truly carrying out the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

### The Struggle With the Three Powerful Enemies Is a Genuine Struggle for Human Rights

**Ikeda:** When we look at things in this light, we find a clear contrast between the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and the three powerful enemies, particularly, false saints. On one hand, there is an attitude of respect for human beings; on the other, an attitude of outright contempt. This translates into the difference between a religion that exists for the people, and one that exists to perpetuate its own authority; between a religion that struggles against corrupt power and one that acts in league with corrupt figures of power and authority. It is also the difference between a true person of religion who is persecuted and attacked, and a religious charlatan who persecutes others.

The Lotus Sutra, which explains that all people can attain Buddhahood and that all people are Buddhas, embodies a spirit of supreme respect for human beings. By contrast, those teachings and ideas that seek to turn people into “things” to be exploited embody ultimate disrespect for human beings. At root, such disrespect is an expression of fundamental darkness.

On the level of the individual,



Kant says that reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* had caused him to reflect on his own condescending attitude toward people. (He), who was in the habit of taking a walk at precisely the same time each day, became so absorbed in *Emile* that one day he even forgot to take his walk.

practicing the Lotus Sutra means confronting the fundamental darkness in one's own life. In terms of society, it means confronting corrupt power and authority. Practicing the Lotus Sutra, therefore, necessarily entails challenging great difficulties. Someone who does not confront great hardship is not a true votary of the Lotus Sutra.

**Saito:** Your mention of the human tendency to despise others reminds me of an episode from the life of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant says that reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* had caused him to reflect on his own condescending attitude toward people.

**Suda:** That's a well-known episode. Kant, who was in the habit of taking a walk at precisely the same

time each day, became so absorbed in *Emile* that one day he even forgot to take his walk.

**Saito:** That's right. Kant says, "I had disparaged those who were not learned. Rousseau has straightened me out. Eliminating this blinding sense of special privilege from my heart, I will learn to respect humanity."<sup>11</sup>

**Endo:** In a speech, President Ikeda, you once introduced Rousseau's *Emile*, and cited these words from the text: "Man is the same in all stations. If that is so, the stations having the most members merit the most respect."<sup>12</sup> You argued that the people must become the sovereigns of society.

**Ikeda:** "I will learn to respect humanity"—these are really won-

derful words, aren't they? It is the extent to which we can respect others that determines the true value of our own lives. Respect for other people is the point of departure for human rights. One must not look down on anyone; this is Buddhist humanism.

**Saito:** The establishment of human rights is the most important issue. In that connection I cannot forget the words of the late Austregésilo de Athayde, president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Mr. Athayde, a true crusader for human rights, said to you, "Unless we see that the divine exists in all people, the idea of respect for human beings will remain empty and rootless." In that sense, I am confident that the Lotus Sutra offers the most fundamental philosophy of human rights.



There are a great many people in society today who strike a pose as fighters for human rights and peace. For precisely this reason, we need to have a discerning eye toward a person's true nature so as not to be deceived by their words or the false images they project.

**Endo:** The struggle against the three powerful enemies is a struggle for human rights that is pervaded with respect for the dignity of all.

**Ikeda:** The problem is that false saints always try to pass themselves off as being allies of human rights and champions of the people. As a result, it is no easy matter to discern their true nature.

**Endo:** The Great Teacher Miao-lo says:

“Of these three types of arrogance, the first [ignorant lay people] can be endured. The second [arrogant and cunning priest] is more formidable than the first, and the third [false saints] is the most formidable of all. This is because the second is harder to recognize for what it really is, and the third is even

harder to recognize.” (MW-2, 155 [179])

**Suda:** There are a great many people in society today who strike a pose as fighters for human rights and peace. For precisely this reason, we need to have a discerning eye toward a person's true nature so as not to be deceived by their words or the false images they project.

**Saito:** In “The Opening of the Eyes,” Nichiren Daishonin says, “Those without eyes, those with only one eye, and those with distorted vision cannot see these three types of enemies of the Lotus Sutra who have appeared at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law”; whereas the votaries of the Lotus Sutra “have attained a portion of the Buddha eye” to discern the three powerful enemies (MW-2, 168 [192]).

**Ikeda:** Only people of action, people who struggle, can recognize evil for what it is. A youth once asked Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, how one could develop the ability to judge good and evil. President Makiguchi replied: “If you have the tenacity and courage to practice the world's foremost religion, you will come to understand.”

**Suda:** Even though they know better, they nonetheless claim that they “are practicing the true way” (LS13, 193). In that way, false saints flatter themselves that they are better than everyone else and look down on others. That is their nature. What kind of psychology do you suppose is fundamentally at work here?

**Saito:** Generally speaking, a highly conceited person is someone who

has extremely strong narcissistic tendencies.

**Suda:** Such people are intoxicated with themselves. If they could just content themselves with gazing at themselves in the mirror with rapt absorption, they wouldn't cause anyone any trouble. But in fact, they are revered by society as though they were the greatest of beings, and they conduct themselves in the belief that this is indeed the case.

**Endo:** The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900–80) offers an analysis of the narcissism of powerful people who are, as he puts it, “on the borderline between sanity and insanity.” He says that such people flatter themselves that there is no limit to their desires and to their power, and they try to acquire everything for themselves. In other words, he says, they “try to become gods.” Fromm writes:

The more he tries to be god, the more he isolates himself from the human race; this isolation makes him more frightened, everybody becomes his enemy, and in order to stand the resulting fright he has to increase his power, his ruthlessness and his narcissism.<sup>13</sup>

**Saito:** To believe that one is a god—this is certainly an extreme form of self-love.

**Suda:** It's terrible if it comes to that. Such a person is constantly smitten with anxiety at the thought that everyone else doubts and rejects his or her authority; and as a result is reduced to a writhing mass of hostility and suspicion. And this only aggravates the person's

“insanity.” It's exhausting to just talk with such an individual.

**Ikeda:** That's one perspective on the “psychology of evil.” As the French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62) put it, “Man is neither angel nor beast, and it is a misfortune that whoever tries to play the angel ends by playing the beast.”<sup>14</sup> Human beings, finally, cannot become anything more than human beings. The correct path, therefore, is to live out one's life as a human being, not as a “big shot” but as an ordinary person.

**Saito:** To make themselves appear superior, false saints require a degree of distance to insulate themselves from others. The statement that they “dwell in forests” (cf. LS13, 193) is very interesting in that regard.

For precisely that reason, they cannot stand the egalitarian thought of the Lotus Sutra, which teaches that all people are Buddhas. For their purposes, Buddhahood has to be a state that cannot be easily attained. The more the Buddha is seen as somehow beyond the reach of human beings, the more their own authority as intermediaries between the people and the Buddha increases. It could be said that false saints try to establish a “monopoly” on the Buddha.

**Suda:** The Nikken sect is a case in point. It has tried to increase the distance between people and the Daishonin by telling them that they cannot attain enlightenment unless they have a special “secret transmission.”

**Endo:** They are like an unscrupulous broker who arbitrarily raises prices to maximize profits. Funda-

mentally, the Daishonin's Buddhism teaches direct fusion between the self and the Gohonzon according to the principles of “embracing the Gohonzon is observing one's own mind (and perceiving the ten worlds within it)” and “quickly attaining true perception” (i.e., attaining Buddhahood in one's present form). But the priesthood has twisted this and tried to interpose itself between people and the Gohonzon.

**Ikeda:** The important thing is to have faith, and a connection with someone who teaches the correct way of practice. In the world of the Daishonin's Buddhism, there is no need—not now and not ever—for priests who neither have faith nor carry out Buddhist practice, but who merely brandish authority.

Hypocrites use all kinds of means to try to make themselves appear superior and dignified. This was certainly the case with Devadatta. In an attempt to make himself appear more noble-minded than Shakyamuni, he advocated extreme monastic rules.

**Endo:** Devadatta at one point pressed Shakyamuni to establish five severe precepts. These were as follows: (1) for as long as they live, monks should not take salt with their meals; (2) for as long as they live, monks should not drink curdled milk; (3) for as long as they live, monks should not eat the flesh of animals or fish; (4) for as long as they live, monks should carry out the practice of begging for alms, and should not accept invitations to dine in people's homes; and (5) monks should dwell outside during the eight months of spring and summer, and may dwell in thatched huts only during the four

It could be said that the human revolution is a great struggle with the self.  
By undergoing difficulties and struggling to overcome them, we can  
eradicate the fundamental darkness in our lives.

winter months; and they should not accept offerings of lodging.

He schemed to elevate his standing in the *sangha*, or Buddhist order, by criticizing the teaching of his mentor as being too mild. In this way, he aimed to make himself appear more spiritually accomplished than he actually was. Devadatta tried to establish himself as a “new Buddha” to replace his teacher Shakyamuni.

**Ikeda:** It is enough that we are simply true to ourselves—that we remain ordinary people, unadorned and unaffected. It is enough that we attain enlightenment by revealing our intrinsic nature, just as we are, as “common mortals of time without beginning (Jp. *kuon ganjo*).” Our enlightenment, in other words, is not something that could ever have been “improved upon, but exists [in our lives] just as it always has” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 759). A true Buddha does not don any embellishment or ornamentation. He or she does not manifest the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

To put on airs out of vanity is the action of a false saint. The Buddha revealed in the depths of the Lotus Sutra is a common mortal. While his true identity is that of the Buddha, in appearance and action, he is a bodhisattva. He is a “bodhisattva-Buddha.” The Buddha is not arrogant. He lives among the people, and shares their sufferings and joys.

**Suda:** This is certainly just the

opposite of the narcissism of false saints.

**Endo:** Fromm, whom we talked about earlier, says:

It is the goal of man to overcome one’s narcissism. Perhaps this principle is nowhere expressed more radically than in Buddhism...The “awakened” person of whom Buddhist teaching speaks is the person who has overcome his narcissism, and who is therefore capable of being fully awake.<sup>16</sup>

**Ikeda:** That’s an astute point. It could be said that the human revolution is a great struggle with the self. Specifically, it is the struggle to achieve the state of “caring nothing for our bodies or lives.” By undergoing difficulties and struggling to overcome them, we can eradicate the fundamental darkness in our lives. Apart from this, there is no true attainment of Buddhahood.

#### A Priest Who Lined His Pockets Behind a Veneer of Hypocrisy

**Suda:** In Nichiren Daishonin’s day, the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple was a typical example of such a false saint. He carried out a great many public projects like building bridges and charitable works such as engaging in helping victims of leprosy; and he was widely venerated as a “living Buddha” and a “bodhisattva.”

**Saito:** But Nichiren Daishonin deftly perceived the true nature behind Ryokan’s facade. He writes:

... if we examine the behavior of the monks of today who supposedly observe the precepts, we find that they hoard silks, wealth and jewels and concern themselves with lending money at interest... And as for this matter of building roads and constructing bridges, it only causes people trouble. The charitable activities at Ijima-notsu and the collecting of rice at the Mutsura Barrier have brought unhappiness to a great many people, and the setting up of barriers along the seven highways of the various provinces has imposed a hardship upon travelers. These are things that are happening right in front of your eyes. Can’t you see what is going on? (MW-5, 48–49)

Ryokan is credited with building 189 bridges, building or repairing seventy-one roads, and digging thirty-three wells in various parts of the country. Gokuraku-ji temple was strategically located where the Tokaido road (a major transportation route linking Kyoto, Japan’s ancient capital and cultural center, with Kamakura, the seat of the military government) enters Kamakura. At a barrier along this important thoroughfare, Ryokan levied a transit tax on each person passing through.

**Endo:** He also collected a rice tax at points strategically located



Ryokan was in league with those in power and held concessions that gave him the right to collect tolls and taxes causing the people a great deal of suffering. Truly, he was the very image of a monk “greedy for profit.” This is the true nature of a false saint.

along the sea route, such as the ports of Ijima and Mutsura. It seems that he held enormous concessions.

**Saito:** There are historical accounts that back up the Daishonin’s point. Ryokan and others who carried out such charitable works were also avid consumers of luxury items. They accumulated a great deal of wealth, and ran money-lending operations. Collecting transit tax and carrying out public works no doubt enabled them to realize handsome profits. However, as the Daishonin sternly points out, these taxes must have been a great hardship for ordinary people.

**Endo:** In fact, current research corroborates the point that the barrier stations did in fact greatly burden people’s lives. Later, during the fifteenth century, there were even

popular uprisings against such oppressive taxation.

**Ikeda:** In any event, in terms of their true activities, people such as Ryokan were a far cry from the carefully cultivated existence of priests who placed first priority on upholding the precepts. There is a diary titled *Towazugatari* (Confession of Lady Nijo),<sup>17</sup> in which the author, Lady Nijo, describes her journey through various provinces. Among her recollections is her impressions of Kamakura at the time shortly after the Daishonin’s passing. Ryokan was 73 and at the height of his power and influence in society.

Having traveled from Kyoto, the author finds the narrow and constrained condition of people’s lives in Kamakura most pitiful. But when she goes to Gokuraku-ji, she records sensing in the conduct of

the priests the charm of Kyoto and confesses to feeling homesick.

**Saito:** One can well imagine that the priests of Gokuraku-ji enjoyed a degree of elegance far removed from the impoverished conditions of the ordinary people of the day.

**Ikeda:** Yes. Nichiren Daishonin says of Ryokan, “He never was without three robes,<sup>18</sup> as though they were his skin” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 349). Ryokan made a show of simplicity, but this was nothing more than a pose that he struck for society. In actuality, he was in league with those in power and held concessions that gave him the right to collect tolls and taxes, causing the people a great deal of suffering. Truly, he was the very image of a monk “greedy for profit.” This is the true nature of a false saint.

Also, a priest’s robes were originally supposed to be “work



Much of the media today, because it is devoid of guiding principles, treats information simply as a commodity. The attitude seems to be that anything that attracts people's attention and boosts sales is printworthy.

clothes" for helping and serving others. Their becoming "robes of authority" is a complete reversal.

**Suda:** I feel we sometimes see the same sort of inversion in the way the physicians' white smock and the lapel badges sported by lawyers and politicians in Japan have become symbols of authority.

**Endo:** In 1271, Ryokan was defeated in a contest with the Daishonin to pray for rain. His ensuing desperate actions exposed his true nature.

**Saito:** Ryokan had promised that, if defeated, he would become the Daishonin's follower. But when he lost, rather than honor his agreement, he began working behind the scenes to have the Daishonin persecuted.

**Endo:** First, he schemed to get the

priest Gyobin<sup>19</sup> of Jokomyo-ji temple to challenge the Daishonin in debate. When the Daishonin asserted in reply that rather than holding a private debate they should confront each other in a proper public forum, Ryokan and others submitted a letter of complaint to the Board of Inquiry at Kamakura in Gyobin's name slandering the Daishonin.

The Daishonin discerned that Ryokan was behind this. In "Gyobin Sojo Goetsu" (Rebuttal to the Claims by Gyobin), he pointed out that Ryokan had been slandering him to the constables and stewards of various provinces throughout the land, alleging that the Daishonin and his followers had "set fire to and cast into the water images of Amida Buddha," and urging that they "should have their heads cut off or be banished" (cf. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 182). Ryokan, in

other words, caused the Daishonin and his followers to be persecuted by spreading lies about them. That is how such people operate.

**Saito:** According to the Gosho, "Letter of Petition from Yorimoto [Shijo Kingo]," Ryokan and his cohorts urged in their letter of complaint to the authorities that the Daishonin should be executed. It seems the Daishonin had solid proof of this (cf. MW-5, 217-18).

**Ikeda:** Ryokan preached against killing any living being and was revered as a priest who staunchly upheld the precepts. This person thought to be above killing even an insect instigated an appeal to have the Daishonin put to death. This was the truth about this so called "living Buddha."

**Saito:** At the time there were very

few people who could see through the deceptiveness and perceive the true nature of this false saint. Even now, Ryokan is on the whole respected by the Japanese. The people of Kamakura probably thought, "It's intolerable for that Nichiren to be maliciously vilifying such a wonderful priest as Ryokan."

**Endo:** They were simply swayed by images, and made no attempt to try and find out who was correct. Much of the media today, because it is devoid of guiding principles, treats information simply as a commodity. The attitude seems to be that anything that attracts people's attention and boosts sales is printworthy.

**Saito:** Ultimately, the only way out of this kind of situation is for people to become wise. The only way is to create a world in which false saints are not at liberty to do as they please.

**Ikeda:** Every age has certain icons that are considered sacred and inviolable; any challenge to those are regarded as taboo. This sacredness and inviolability carries the weight of authority. False saints conceal their true nature behind this facade. And it is not only "religionists" who arrogate to themselves such authority; in different times and different places, different people and groups will don this mask. But while the manner in which false saints appear changes, the principle is always the same. They will use the institutions and whatever else a society regards as "sacred" to persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

**Endo:** Regarding the false saints of the present age, President Toda said:

When scholars, writers and other opinion leaders who are trusted by the people, as well as major newspapers and other kind of media that influence society, ally themselves with the authorities to persecute this Buddhism of sowing and our activities for kosen-rufu, out of personal interest and emotionalism, we can pronounce that the three powerful enemies have appeared.<sup>20</sup>

**Suda:** That is indeed the situation today.

**Saito:** In the present age, what people regard as "sacred" is certainly not limited to religion. In his discussions with you, President Ikeda, the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975) remarked that the "void" created in the West by the recession of Christianity in the seventeenth century had been filled by the rise of three new "religions": belief in the inevitability of progress through the systematic application of science to technology, nationalism and communism.<sup>21</sup>

**Ikeda:** That's right. And Dr. Toynbee's conclusion was that these three beliefs were showing signs of having outlived their usefulness. Our joint conclusion was that a new religion, a religion for the future of humankind, was necessary.

**Endo:** I recall that at the beginning of this series we talked about how the present dearth of philosophy and spiritual void is prompting many people to seek new principles of synthesis and integration. This may partially account for the spread of nationalism and other kinds of religions and ideologies.

**Suda:** What is considered "sacred"

is often what holds the fabric of human society together; without it, society cannot sustain itself.

**Ikeda:** To summarize Dr. Toynbee's comments, it's not that people in Western Europe have ceased to embrace religion, but that they have placed their faith in different things. The sacred never ceases to exist; it merely changes form.

**Suda:** A French social psychologist writes: "(Thus in theory) societies have all they need at any time to give themselves the gods they require. And it seems certain that the time must never come when science will be able to let them do without them, or create afresh a substitute for religion."<sup>22</sup>

**Saito:** In the early decades of this century, Japan was a kind of religious state. It might be that in the postwar period the economy has assumed the mantle of the sacred.

**Ikeda:** But the idea of economics for the sake of people's happiness was at some point supplanted by economic development for its own sake. Instead of economic development for human beings, we have a tendency to see human beings as existing for the sake of the economy.

The same reversal can and has in fact occurred in all kinds of human endeavor like medicine, scholarship, politics, science and education. It is the Lotus Sutra that can reorient all endeavors and institutions so as to make them function for the happiness and well-being of human beings and society.

**Endo:** We have to make human beings genuinely the prime concern. We have to establish true respect for human dignity. Otherwise, while



Instead of economic development for human beings, we have a tendency to see human beings as existing for the sake of the economy. The same reversal can and has in fact occurred in all kinds of human endeavor like medicine, scholarship, politics, science and education.

people continue to place their belief in those ideas and institutions that their age defines as sacred, sooner or later society will become dominated by “false saints donning the mask of the sacred.”

Fascism would be an extreme example. In such cases, when people finally realize what is happening, it is already too late.

**Suda:** A Japanese philosopher has commented that if the Japanese had from the outset experienced the tragic circumstances that militarism finally brought upon them, then it is likely that many people would have stood up in opposition. But by the time they realized what was happening, it was too late.

**Ikeda:** It is important to expose the true nature of false saints to the people. Bringing about change in society will take more than just a few people

with their eyes open. Therefore, we have to take bold action and “smoke out” the false saints.

Ultimately, people will either abandon the votaries of the Lotus Sutra or they will abandon the false saints. A society that abandons the votaries of the Lotus Sutra will be manipulated by false saints and follow a path to certain ruin. We are struggling to prevent this from happening. The struggle against the three powerful enemies is a struggle to actualize the principle of peace and prosperity based on the philosophy and principles of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

#### Selfless Dedication Is the Life of Religion

**Ikeda:** The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), who struggled against the totalitarianism of the Nazi regime, once wrote that for

any school of thought to have a lasting impact on the world, it would have to produce people of conviction, what he called “witnesses” willing to give their lives for what they believed.<sup>23</sup>

Individuals of selfless dedication are the pride and honor of a religion. They are the foundation of any religious body. The death of religion begins when such a spirit is lost.

**Endo:** This spirit, it seems to me, is the vital essence of the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter.

**Ikeda:** The three powerful enemies seek to persecute and kill people because of religion. By contrast, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra devote their lives to their beliefs.

Nichiren Daishonin was such a person. So were Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda. President Toda

## Those who stand up and selflessly spread the Mystic Law will become Buddhas.

often said: “I shall rejoice when they [the three powerful enemies] appear. I would like you all to feel the same. When that time comes, let us fight with all our might.”

In the “twenty-line verse” section of the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter, the bodhisattvas vow, “We care nothing for our bodies or lives / but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way” (LS13, 194–95). Those who practice with this spirit of “caring nothing for their lives” will attain enlightenment. Those who stand up and selflessly spread the Mystic Law will become Buddhas.

**Saito:** Gandhi said, “Even if I am all

alone.” In your address at the East-West Center in Hawaii, President Ikeda, you cited Gandhi’s remark: “You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with blood-shot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing that resides in your heart...”<sup>24</sup>

When he heard this speech, Dr. Robert Thurman, chairman of Columbia University’s Religion Department, remarked:

For there to be world peace, more people have to be willing to die not to do violence than are already willing to die to do violence. And

that’s actually the bottom line of what President Ikeda calls “human revolution,” or maybe it should be translated as “personal revolution”—that there are more persons on this planet who are ready to die not to be violent than there are already persons who are ready to die in the process of being violent. And then there will be world peace.<sup>25</sup>

Now is the time when we, as disciples, should bravely “roar the lion’s roar” for justice and truth.

*(To be continued)*

*Illustrations by Larry Ashton*

1. 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.
2. Voice-hearers (Skt. Shravaka): The people of Learning who listen to the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha.
3. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 8.
4. Editor’s note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
5. Ten major disciples: These disciples waged an all-out struggle to spread the Law, using as “weapons” the individual character and unparalleled gifts they had developed by practicing under their master.
6. Rahula: The foremost in inconspicuous practice. Inconspicuous practice means a form of practice in which good deeds are carried out secretly without others being aware of them.
7. Ananda: The foremost in hearing the Buddha’s teachings. He continually accompanied the Buddha and heard more of his teachings than any other disciple.
8. Alain: The pen name of Emile-Auguste Chartier (1868–1951).
9. Alain, *Définitions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), pp. 140–41.
10. Kansuke Naka, *Daibadatta* (Devadatta) (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1985), p. 131.
11. Translated from Japanese: *Kanto Zenshu* (Collected Works of Kant), trans. Tatsuo Owatari (Tokyo: Risosha, 1966), vol. 16, p. 295.
12. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1979), p. 225.
13. Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 66.
14. Pascal’s *Pensées*, trans. Martin Turnell (London: Harvill Press, 1962), p. 173.
15. The Buddha’s thirty-two features and eighty characteristics: Attributes described in the provisional teachings. These unusual qualities represent the Buddha’s wisdom, ability, compassion, etc.
16. Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 88; italics are the author’s.
17. *Towazugatari* (Confession of Lady Nijo): Autobiographical narrative covering thirty-six years (1271–1306) in the life of Lady Nijo, a high-ranking Kyoto aristocrat. *Towazugatari*, the culminating work in the long court tradition of autobiographical writing, describes life during a time of transition from an aristocratic culture to one dominated by the warrior class.
18. Three robes: The only personal belongings that the precepts allow a monk to possess. They symbolize the simplicity and nonattachment of monastic life.
19. Gyobin: A Nembutsu priest during the days of the Daishonin. Dates of birth and death are not known. In July 1271, he challenged the Daishonin to a debate.
20. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1986), vol. 6, p. 400.
21. *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue: Man Himself Must Choose* (Tokyo, New York and San Francisco: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1976), p. 292.
22. Serge Moscovici, *The Invention of Society, Psychological Explanations for Social Phenomena*, trans. W. D. Halls (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 37.
23. Stefan Zweig, *Kenryoku to Tatakau Ryoshin* (The Conscience to Fight against Power) (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1973), p. 23.
24. Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers*, ed. Krishna Kripalani (New York: Continuum, 1990), p. 49.
25. Boston Research Center for the 21st Century Newsletter, Spring 1995, no. 3, p. 10.

# Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures



## A Person's Behavior Decides Everything

**E**VEN after he became prime minister of Sweden, Ingvar Carlsson continued to take the bus to work each day—a ride of some forty minutes. And though his work might continue late into the night, and no matter how tired he might be, he refused to use taxis or official cars. Like every other ordinary Swedish citizen, he rode the subway and lined up at the bus stop.

When his two daughters grew up and left home, he and his wife, Ingrid, a librarian, decided their house was now too large, and they moved to a smaller one with only three rooms. Prime Minister Carlsson, who had also once been minister of Housing and Physical

Planning, registered with the public housing agency for a rental and waited his turn for a vacancy, just like any other Swedish citizen would have to.

Also, whenever he entertained guests as head of his political party, Mr. Carlsson would contact the party's accounting department in advance for authorization. The ability to draw a clear line between one's private life and public life—nothing distinguishes a leader's genuineness more clearly.

## A Tradition of Leaders As "Ordinary Citizens"

**D**URING my meeting with Mr. Carlsson [in June 1989] at the Prime Minister's Office, I remarked on his commuting by bus or shop-

ping at the market after work. He smiled and commented: "We have a long tradition for a prime minister, cabinet members and political leaders to lead an ordinary life. This is important. Of course, today the issue of security is a growing problem and Sweden is no exception. But we are trying to lead normal lives."

The Prime Minister's Office, too, is simple and understated. It is neither imposing nor ostentatious, but has the refined and functional beauty of a modern office.

Stockholm, Sweden's capital, is known to many as "the Venice of Scandinavia." It is a city literally surrounded by water—built as it is upon thirteen linked islands and extending onto the mainland of the Scandinavian Peninsula. My first meeting with Mr. Carlsson took

## Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson — A Leader Who Lives Among the People



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A bicyclist rides on a dirt road beside the Gota Canal. The canal traverses Sweden between Goteborg and Stockholm.

place on the seventh floor of the Prime Minister's Office building. I was treated to a beautiful view of Lake Mälaren in early summer. The sky was a bright, translucent blue.

The Swedish leader's aforementioned remark that "the issue of security is a growing problem" was a specific reference to the February 1986 assassination of his predecessor, Prime Minister Olof Palme (1927–1986), who was shot on the street when returning home late at night after seeing a film with his wife. Mr. Palme had declined having bodyguards accompany him, saying it was his "private time." For Sweden, a nation that had prided itself on its civic order and low crime rate, this was a startling and unprecedented event. The world mourned for Prime Minister

Palme, who had been a leader devoted to the pacifist cause.

The government was thrown into confusion, but a successor was quickly decided upon. Ingvar Carlsson, then the deputy prime minister, was the unanimous choice. He shared his predecessor's commitment to peace, though being of a quieter, more restrained temperament compared to the vibrant charisma of Mr. Palme. No one doubted his integrity or his ability to implement government policy.

Before our meeting, the prime minister arrived alone five minutes early to the meeting room where press representatives from Japan were waiting, and he shook hands with each of them in a friendly, casual fashion. They were surprised by how warm and personable he was. I

was also dazzled by his brilliant smile—as bright as a blue Scandinavian sky—the moment we met.

### Toward a Just Society

PRIME Minister Carlsson was born in the small provincial town of Borås. His father worked in warehousing and his mother in the textile industry. Mr. Carlsson was 12 when his father died. He told me that his father's death had come as a terrible shock, and confessed that he will probably never get over it entirely. Raised by his mother, the young Ingvar Carlsson pursued his studies despite facing great obstacles and hardships, and entered the University of Lund [Sweden's second oldest university, founded in 1671]. In those days,



Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson meets with SGI President Ikeda June 1989. The prime minister states that “human beings are not controlled by an unclear destiny. We create our own future here and now.”

the educational welfare system was not yet in place, and it was very difficult for him to manage to pay for his university education. That experience may have led him to dream of a society in which everyone has a fair chance.

He threw himself zealously into his studies, completing a four-year course in just two years, while at the same time taking a leading role in political activities. That is when he was discovered by his “second father,” Prime Minister Tage Erlander (1901–1985). Erlander led Sweden for twenty-three years in the difficult years following the Second World War, and was responsible for the construction of Sweden’s welfare state. The young Carlsson adopted him as his mentor and father. Those who find a great teacher are indeed fortunate.

When we met again in Tokyo [in March 1991], Prime Minister Carlsson told me that one of his mentor’s dictums was that a politi-

cal leader must never ask others, or members of a rival political party, to do what he himself was unable to do. These are simple yet profoundly significant words; they resound with integrity and a sense of responsibility. If this one rule was universally adopted, how much healthier politics would be.

### An Open Government

**A** LONG process of trial and error ensued before Sweden achieved its high standard of living and universal welfare system. Up until the start of this century, Sweden was a poor agricultural nation. Almost a third of its 3.5 million population at that time emigrated to the United States. Now, immigrants from around the world flock to Sweden.

With a dynamic spirit of experimentation, Sweden attempted to create a “third social system,” combining capitalist competition in the cre-

ation of wealth and socialist justice in the equal distribution of that wealth. Many of the nations in Eastern Europe, it will be remembered, looked to Sweden as a model after their liberation from communism.

Though Sweden has faced crises on several occasions, it has always been able to summon the wisdom and ingenuity to solve them and improve its lot. Its open government is what has made these unceasing reforms possible. The agreement of its citizens is a necessity for supporting Sweden’s highly developed welfare system and the high taxes needed to sustain it. To assure that support, the government presents the facts to its citizens, offers policies, and has the citizenry debate them.

There are no lies, no conspiracies. Government information is completely open to the public. There is a prevailing belief that government is not a special job of a special group of people but the

People in traditional dress celebrate Midsommers Eve by dancing around the Midsummer Pole at Skansen Museum.



MACDUFF EVERTON/CORBIS

daily, ordinary task of ordinary citizens to make their society a better place. As a result, debates on current government policy and close monitoring of the government's actual performance are encouraged on all levels of Swedish society, including school classrooms.

Recently, the government has set researchers to the task of checking all spheres of Swedish society—including government, business and the bureaucracy—to see whether power is fairly distributed and whether there is any disparity or imbalance. The government's tradition of strict self-monitoring has built one of the most proudly democratic societies in the world. This mature spirit of self-discipline also governs Prime Minister Carlsson's life and work.

### The People's Happiness Must Be a Country's Fundamental Criterion

**R**EJECTING the insidious temptations of power for

power's sake and making people's happiness the ultimate criterion of all decision- and policy-making—this humanism forms the foundation of Sweden's policies of peace. Sweden is a nation that has not known war since the time of Napoleon (1769–1821), nearly two centuries ago. The efforts of prime ministers Palme and Carlsson for peace have also been conspicuous. They have always criticized the aggression of the superpowers from the standpoint of a small nation—a position not unlike that of ordinary citizens attacking the abuses of the powerful.

As deputy prime minister, Mr. Carlsson attended the opening of the "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" exhibition in Stockholm in September 1984. The exhibition was presented by the United Nations Department of Public Information and organized jointly by the SGI and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In his address on that occasion, he

denounced the concept of nuclear deterrent, insisting that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were clear lessons showing that nuclear weapons do not protect humanity but are its greatest threat.

We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by the pronouncements of so-called experts. We must follow the dictates of what our solid common sense as ordinary people tells us is right. The courage to do so is what will ultimately protect the people.

It is some five years since Mr. Carlsson remarked to me in Stockholm: "We human beings are not controlled by an unclear destiny that we cannot change. We create our own future here and now." In the most recent cabinet he assembled [in 1994], ten of the sixteen ministers are women. There are truly many, many lessons we can learn from Sweden as a pioneering nation leading the way for humanity with an unflagging spirit of challenge. □

# Proclaiming the “Palace of Life”

Philip Bakula, Chicago

**I**N the past thirty years, I’ve worked in such a variety of styles that people often wonder how one artist could do all of it. I lacked focus and direction, and I was angry and frustrated. I never seemed to have been able to tie my life together.

In 1986, when my friend approached me about Buddhism, I thought I’d try it. At the time, I was attracted to Eastern culture, but I still didn’t understand what I was getting into. Eleven years later, I realize that the practice is a very gradual centering process. I used to chant for miracles. Now I practice to “decorate the palace of [my] life” within.

Before I began practicing, I received a full-tuition scholarship to the Art Institute in Chicago in 1970. My graphic art was rich and colorful and highly developed. However, my work at that time was also overworked and dark, with details tightly knotted in the center. I was driven to fill the smallest spaces with decorative details. I was so taken with what I was doing that I had a hard time seeing the work as a whole.

Since my practice, I’ve seen my art become brighter, clearer and more structural. In my latest creations the largest, undivided areas are frequently in the middle, with the more detailed areas pushed further out. Now I can see the piece as a whole and create harmony in my work. Through my practice I have come to realize that the law of cause and effect is creation itself.

I really believe that my art and my practice are tied together. It is difficult to overcome ingrained negative thinking and to love yourself. It is more difficult to go even further and to reach beyond yourself and to love others. But my Buddhist practice gives me the clear vision, strength and motivation to keep working on that goal.

**I**AM seeing this process of change in my life reflected in my art as well. I am presently working in two styles: “scribble style” and “dot style.” In my scribble style, I work intuitively, even scribbling with my eyes closed. I approach the work from many different angles, distances and lighting conditions. Sometimes I’ll awake from sleep and work spontaneously when my rational guard is down. In this style I usually create multifaceted cartoon-like figures. I delight in finding that I’ve made a nose or an eye function simultaneously as parts of several different, overlapping faces. Isn’t that who each of us really is — multipersons?

My dot style is slow, deliberate and meditative. I become a neutral observer. Because maps fascinate me, I usually set aside the Renaissance concept of perspective and work intuitively on a two-dimensional grid. I hang an urban fantasy of facades, towers, windows and other architectural, geometric shapes on the grids.

My dot drawing “Glory” is a

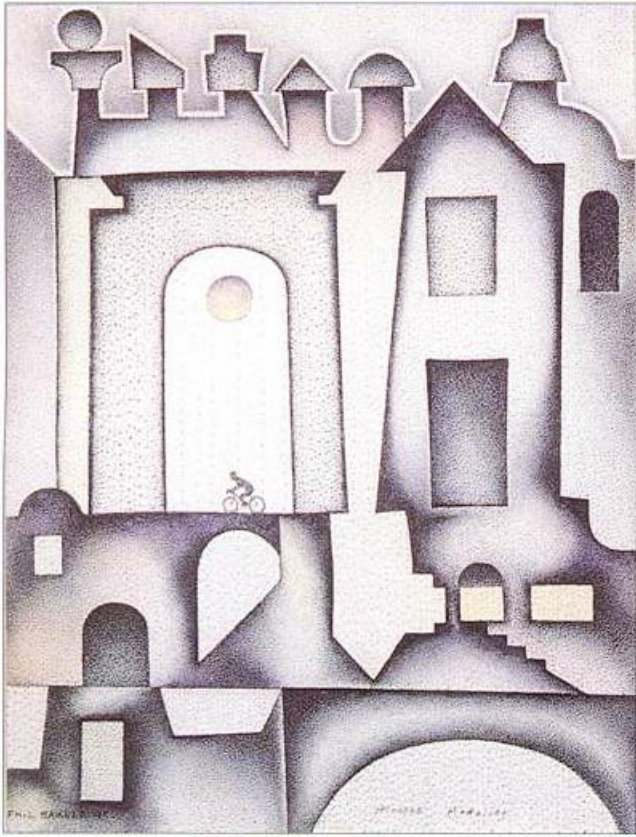


BOB NARDO

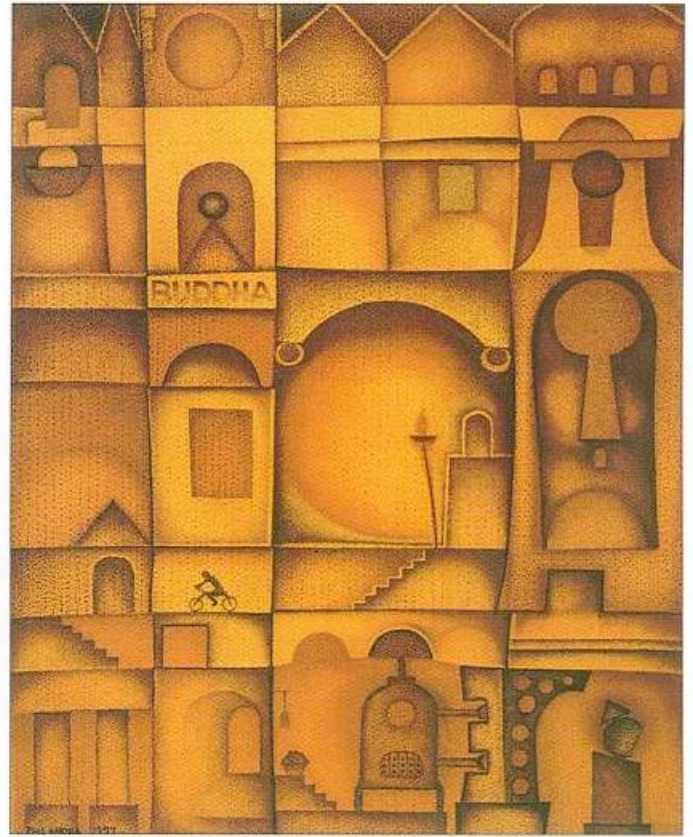
departure from my dot drawings in that I started with a conscious thought. I was taken by the horizontal structure of the “L” train and decided to use that as a basis for a dot drawing. I saw “Glory” shining out to me through reading President Ikeda’s thoughts on glory in our lives. The drawing presents a beautiful Buddhist idea in a twentieth-century urban setting.

Over the years I’ve learned that if I don’t practice consistently, I start focusing on myself and my art suffers. I forget that whatever ability I have is a gift. I feel isolated and cannot express myself clearly. This is ironic because I am supposed to be telling the human story through my art.

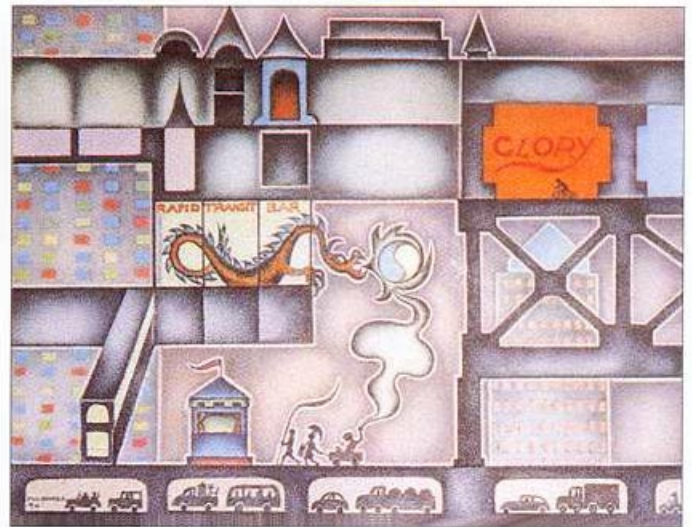
I must remember that my creative vision is a reflection of a transcendent force I express through my life. I return to the Gohonzon every day and am reminded that my consciousness is but a temporary part of an eternal karmic tapestry. I have always been weaving my individual fabric, but now I can do so with bold confidence and a sense of direction that I have never experienced before. □



*Architectural Dot Drawing #11, 1995, pencil and marker on paper, 10.5 x 13.5 in.*



*Architectural Dot Drawing #11: Buddha, 1997, pencil and marker on paper, 18.75 x 24.25 in.*



left, *Architectural Dot Drawing #10, 1994, pencil and marker on paper, 16 x 21 in.*

above, *Architectural Dot Drawing #12: Glory, 1996, pencil and marker on paper, 10.5 x 13.5 in.*

right, *Dot Face, 1994, pencil and marker on paper, 10.5 x 13.5 in.*





*Architectural Dot Drawing #13: Archway Cookie Factory, 1996,*  
pencil drawing on paper, 10.5 x 13.5 in.  
by Phil Bakula

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# LIVING BUDDHISM

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August 1997 • Soka Gakkai International-USA

## Germany Culture Center



**T**HE SGI Germany Culture Center, a refurbished acoustic studio, was opened in January 1987. Offering facilities to promote peace and culture, the building houses a prayer room accommodating 300 people, conference rooms and an office. From 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., the facilities are open to everyone who visits the center to chant daimoku, read or watch videos. The center is also used as a wedding hall for new SGI couples. The Edelweiss group, which is the housekeeping group of the women's division, and other youth division groups help maintain the culture center.

In October 1995, the opening ceremony of the exhibition "Toward the Century of Humanity — Human Rights in Today's World" was held at

the Römer, Frankfurt am Main's ancient town hall. Among the distinguished guests present for the occasion were Hans Eichel, minister-president of the state of Hesse, and Linda Reisch, head of the Frankfurt municipal culture department.

Also in October, in recognition of SGI President Ikeda's efforts in the field of art and learning, the Golden Funnel was presented to the SGI leader at the Fembohaus, the Nuremberg city museum. Among those attending the ceremony were Peter Schönlein, mayor of Nuremberg, and Tatsuo Takakura, vice director of the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum. Vice director Takakura accepted the honor and read a message on Mr. Ikeda's behalf.