

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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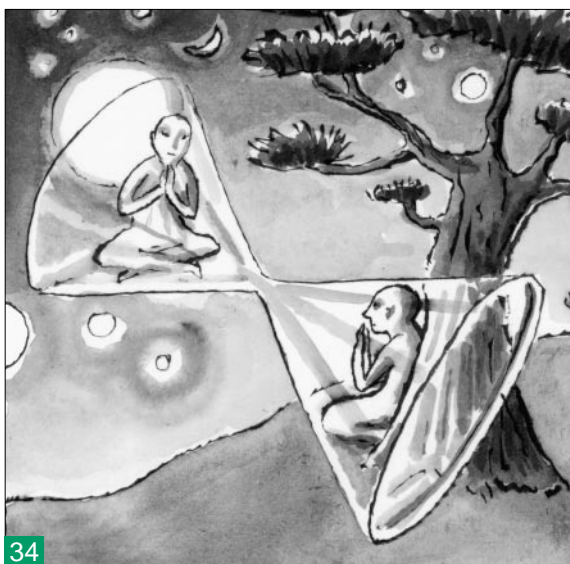
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FROM OUR READERS

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

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE CONFEDERATE FLAG

LAVORA Perry's letter in the July 1997 *Living Buddhism* inspired me to read both James Tramble's and Pamela Spratlen's letters in the June 1997 edition, which further inspired me to reread Jeffrey L. Towery's letter from the April 1997 issue regarding the Confederate flag. After reading their letters, I am now moved to write a letter offering a slightly different point of view.

The winners of any war are the ones who write the history books. They clarify who the good and bad guys are. Invariably, the winners are the pure-hearted good guys and the losers are thoroughly bad.

In the case of the United States' Civil War, history teaches us that the Union troops were fighting to free the slaves, while the Confederate troops were fighting to keep those slaves in bondage.

However, one could read hundreds of letters written by these troops and never find any mention of slavery. Robert E. Lee, who turned down command of the Union army to lead the Con-

federate forces, did not believe in slavery. He inherited slaves but freed them before the war. Yet many Union generals owned slaves during the war.

The average soldier of both the North and South gave his life because he was called upon by either the Union or the state where he placed his loyalty. The issue of states' rights verses federal rights was in constant debate and unresolved even after the signing of the Constitution. Southern states were not the only states that threatened secession before the Civil War. Slavery was the emotional issue that politicians played to drive the country to war over secession.

I was born in Alabama, the heart of Dixie. Many of my ancestors were born in Alabama, long before it was called Alabama. My ancestors—the Creek Indians—cannot be found in Alabama now. They were not cheated, lied to, murdered, nor chased out of their homeland by people carrying a Confederate flag. The people who committed atrocities against my ancestors were the good guys and they carried a United States flag.

The Creek nation has survived,

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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>

but other Indian nations that populated this land prior to the establishment of the United States have no survivors. In some cases we have never even heard of or read about them. They were annihilated by troops carrying flags of the Dutch, French, Spanish, English, but most often the United States, the same flag carried by Union troops during the Civil War.

To American Indians, that symbol—the United States flag—is easily the essence of evil. Whether it was carried by white soldiers, Buffalo soldiers, or other Indians. That symbol should not represent the pure-hearted good guys anymore than the Confederate flag represents the thoroughly bad guys. When a Native American travels to Montgomery, Ala., and sees the two flags flying over the Capitol, which one is most offensive? Which one most represents racism? Which one should be unfurled and eliminated from their homeland?

MIKE MORRIS
Wheaton, Md.

many reasons. The South was fighting for freedom from the Union. Another reason the South was fighting was because of tariffs on imports that protected the North's manufacturers and raised the prices Southerners had to pay on imported goods. The way my books put it was that Southerners felt that they weren't getting anything back from the Union; they paid taxes but weren't seeing any improvements.

All the railways, roads, factories and more modern technologies were being built in the North. As an Alabama newspaper put it, "We purchase all our luxuries and necessities from the North." Most Southerners were uneducated and too poor to own slaves. I respect your [Mr. Towery's] opinion about the Confederate flag because at the beginning of the year, I felt the Confederate flag stood for hate. Now I feel that the North and South were equally unjust and no one came out the better.

EMILY SHINADA
Beachwood, Ohio

I WOULD like to add to the controversial collage of responses to Jeffrey L. Towery's letter in the April issue. Just recently I was involved in a Civil War simulation at school [sixth grade] and was placed on the Southern side by my teachers, therefore I felt obligated to study the subject. The South wasn't fighting just for slaves, they were fighting for

IN response to Carolyn Mumford's letter in the August *Living Buddhism*, I would like to commend Ms. Mumford for her rational approach to the issues raised by Jeff Towery several months ago.

I would like to add that not only are we unaware of who we were and what roles we may have played in past lives, we have no

way of knowing who we might be in a future existence.

In light of this, I realized that I need to be very careful of whom I judge or criticize—I could be a white middle-class grandmother in the San Fernando Valley "today" and "tomorrow" a baby on my mother's back as she tries to cross the border from Mexico, a black man in South Africa, a Jew on the West Bank, a homosexual—anyone, anywhere.

We do not know what our karma has in store for us next, what lessons we need to learn or promises we have made.

Although I do not agree with Jeff Towery's view [of the symbolism behind the Confederate flag], his desire to defend his beliefs has caused many others to question their own beliefs and prejudices.

As a final point, throughout history, every race, religion, gender and age has been persecuted at one time or another. Being of Anglo-Saxon heritage in this life, my own lineage is particularly violent concerning the Normans, Saxons, etc.

Should we all live our lives full of hate and bitterness for the low life-condition of our ancestors or put efforts into changing all humankind for the better? In President Ikeda's poem "The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land," he urges us to return to our true roots and work toward the future together.

KITTY SCALZO
Winnetka, Calif.

Correction: In the September issue, page 4, second column, second to last line, it should read: "When Bodhisattva Fukyo bowed in reverence...."

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.

HONORING OURSELVES IS A RIGHT

THIS month I thought I would continue my exploration of the concept “praying for oneself and for others.” It is a subject that many people I talk with seem to have unanswered questions about. For one thing, people tell me that while the praying-for-others part is easy to do, praying for oneself isn’t. They tell me that their efforts to do so are often blocked by feelings that range from “Praying for myself sounds egotistical” to some people actually admitting, although reluctantly, that deep down they feel undeserving of happiness.

As you can imagine, it really concerns me to hear that members are going through such suffering, especially considering how natural our Buddhist practice ought to be. So I’ve tried to look further into the “why” behind this, in the context of our society.

One thing I’ve found is that many members, myself included, have a running critical commentary in the far recesses of our lives feeding us all kinds of negative messages about ourselves. Things like, “If you do or say so and so, people will think you’re arrogant.”

Or, “What makes you think you can learn to play the piano or learn another language or take up art or surfing or whatever at this stage of your life?”

Or, “You don’t really think your boss is interested in your ideas, do you?”

Or, “Don’t make too big a deal about that, remember you are a member of this or that ethnic group, or a woman or a man or too large or too skinny or too short or too tall or too this or not that.”

And the one I hear most often: “You’ll never amount to anything.”

The clinical psychologists Hal and Sidra Stone have written extensively on this very important subject of self-criticism. Their research has found that these less-than-inspiring messages that play like a

broken record in our lives aren’t limited to a particular region or community. The Stones write:

As we traveled around the world and worked with people from many different cultures, we were amazed at the power and universality of the Inner Critic. It might wear a different costume, but it was easily recognizable! Whether ... in Europe, Israel, Australia, or the United States or working with people from Japan, China, or Southeast Asia, we found that the Inner Critic was always present.... The great similarity we have noted among all the Inner Critics of the world is their ability to cripple people and to keep them unhappy and ineffective.¹

Those who usually feed our inner critic and provide it with its images—especially when we are young and most vulnerable—are usually those closest to us. Is it any wonder that many of us grow up feeling that we don’t deserve happiness? Or that it would be unseemly to pray for ourselves?

FORTUNATELY we have encountered the universal truth at the heart of the Daishonin’s Buddhism—an abiding appreciation and respect for the unfathomable value of each and every human life—yours and mine included, in spite of the ridiculous things our inner critic has been telling us. Just that knowledge alone, made solid in our lives by our practice, has liberated thousands of people from a future of unimaginable suffering and grief. It has allowed us to take actions to create amazing circumstances for ourselves in spite of all the “logical evidence” to the contrary.

Of course, one of the key actions we take is prayer. It is the impetus that allows our lives to move forward. By way of analogy, prayer for ourselves and for others could be thought of as a two-wheeled cart moving us

through life. We will make progress if we continue to take action. But if we were to limit the action of our prayers just for others and neglect ourselves, it would be like removing one wheel from the cart. It would then only go around in circles, never making any forward motion at all. The same would be true if we were to only pray for ourselves and neglect considering others. Remember, in Buddhism, we cannot separate ourselves from any aspect of our environment—an environment made up of ourselves and everyone and everything else in it.

Recognizing the central role each of us plays in the symbiotic relationship with the world we live in, SGI President Ikeda wrote in his 1997 Peace Proposal:

I feel a strong interest in and affinity with Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset's idea of life. The theme that he himself said epitomizes all of his philosophical speculation is, "I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself."²

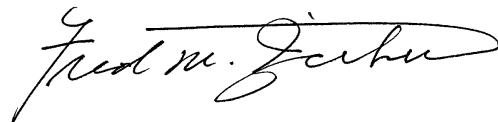
Another way to define the "Inner Critic" that Professors Stone refer to in Buddhist terms is the "lesser self," an aspect of life touched on by President Ikeda when he delivered an address at the East-West Center in Hawaii in 1995. He said:

The wisdom of Buddhism enables us to break the confines of the "lesser self" (Jp *shoga*), the private and isolated self held prisoner to its own desires, passions and hatreds. It further enables us to contextualize the deep-rooted psychology of collective identity as we expand our lives, with overflowing exuberance, toward the "greater self" (Jp *taiga*), which is coexistent with the living essence of the universe.³

On another occasion he said: "This greater, cosmic self is profoundly resonant with the unifying and integrating "self" which Jung perceived in the depths of the ego, and with what Emerson spoke of as "the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One." He continues, "I am firmly convinced that a wide-scale awakening to this greater self will give rise to a world of creative and symbiotic coexistence in the coming century."⁴

IN the final analysis, there can be no separation between prayers for ourselves and prayers for others. No more than we can separate ourselves from our environment. Or, as the philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset observed, you are yourself and your environment, and "If I don't save it, I cannot save myself."

With the foundation of our lives being the supreme Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, it is ultimately our privilege to be able to so honor our lives by praying to live in health, good fortune and happiness—to have the wisdom, compassion and the courage of the Buddha as we enjoy our wonderful existences along with those around us. As Nichiren Daishonin wrote over 700 years ago, "Since the Law is supreme, the Person is worthy of respect; since the Person is worthy of respect, the Land is sacred."⁵



Fred M. Zaitzu
SGI-USA General Director

1. Hal Stone and Sidra Stone, *Embracing Your Inner Critic, Turning Self-Criticism into a Creative Asset* (HarperSan Francisco, 1993), p. 5.
2. "New Horizons of a Global Civilization," April 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 18.
3. Daisaku Ikeda, "Peace and Human Security: A Buddhist

Perspective for the Twenty-first Century," March 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 16.
4. Daisaku Ikeda, "Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization," December 1993 *Seikyo Times*, p. 28.
5. *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 264.

EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS OF FAMILY LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

By Marlea Welton, Santa Monica, Calif.



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“The family is the basic unit in social life. People are social animals who cannot live alone, and from the moment of birth to the time of death, one’s life is a composite of interactions with others. The essential unit in social relationships throughout a lifetime is the family.”¹

—Daisaku Ikeda, *The Creative Family*

LIKE Marty in the movie *Back to the Future* who was able to transform his family’s past by traveling to the future, I hoped that by practicing Buddhism, I would be able to

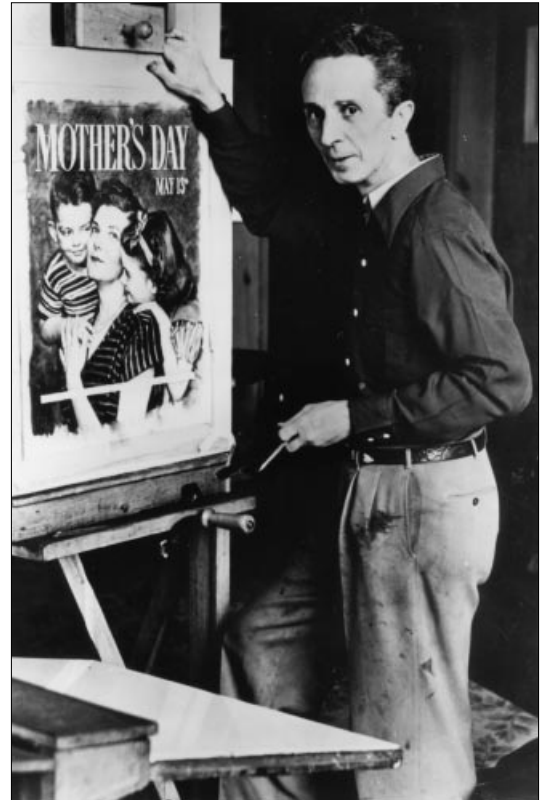
magically change my family. When I was told that the purpose of Buddhism was the fulfillment of one’s desires, I thought: “Great. Finally a way to get married, make peace with my parents,

start talking to my brother again.”

I was convinced I had a very unhappy family. I used to think I had the most unhappy family in the United States. But by the time I started chanting, I no longer was



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(L-r) Mrs. Emma Clement, American Mother for 1946, the first African American to be named an American Mother, with her family in her Louisville, Ky., home. Robert Young and Jane Wyatt with the TV show family of the show *Father Knows Best* (the children are, left to right, Billy Gray, Lauren Chapin and Elinor Donahue). Two families from Brigham City, Utah, 1959. American painter and illustrator Norman Rockwell (1894–1978), at work on official 1951 Mother's Day poster.

under the illusion that I was the only one who didn't have a Norman Rockwell kind of life. I'm not exactly certain when I decided that my family life was miserable, but I do know that I never told anyone—I was afraid to.

I grew up during the baby-boomer era at a time when, by all accounts, life in the United States never looked rosier. We had come

out of the Depression and a major world war and were living in a country that was experiencing the greatest prosperity for the greatest majority in the history of the world. The media (especially TV) had me convinced that everyone else was having a great time. But it wasn't just what I read or saw that made me feel abnormal.

Cheryl, my best friend in high

school, had what I considered the perfect family. Her father seemed like a *Father Knows Best* father and her mother was straight out of *Leave It to Beaver*. Her sister was so adorable that it made me cringe to think of my bratty brother in comparison. This was no media hype. Cheryl and I talked every night. If there was something wrong, I certainly would know it.



CORBIS/BETTMAN

Emigrants moving with covered wagon into Loup Valley, Neb., 1886.

I underwent a great awakening in college. We all lived in dormitories, and it was hard to conceal the truth. We sat around at night and compared notes, and we all had a horror story to tell. Everyone had been covering up the sorry mess of their family life. No one had invented the word *dysfunctional* yet, but it was clear that truly happy family life eluded most of my contemporaries. And then, just to settle the issue, the unbelievable happened: Cheryl called me from Michigan State to tell me that her parents were getting a divorce. The unbelievable happened, and it was happening to us all.

I began practicing Buddhism the year I graduated and it brought a new hope. Maybe I could change myself and my family. But what was the ideal kind of

family to have? And what did I have to do to make it happen?

I tried getting my family to chant, but, unbelievably, they resisted. I felt I was offering them something really great—happiness, world peace and enlightenment—but to no avail. I jokingly said I would have to drag them, kicking and screaming, to kosenrufu, to the best thing they could ever hope for. Even the joke fell on deaf ears. I was perplexed, but my leaders encouraged me not to push and to chant for my family's happiness and to become happy myself. So for the first twenty years of my practice, I got on with my life and stopped insisting that they (and/or my current boyfriend) should practice Buddhism so that they could become happy. I embarked on my own human revolution and tried to be a good

example that they might like to emulate. I put off my search for the ideal family while I pursued my own human revolution.

Meanwhile, it became common knowledge that happy family life in the United States was a myth about to be shattered. Divorce rates were skyrocketing and more kids were home alone and on the street. The sexual revolution and the "Me" generation were eroding committed relationships. Family values had not become a buzzword yet, and people even questioned if the family as an institution was outmoded. Even if the verdict was out on that question, everyone agreed that the family structure was changing, if not almost disintegrating.

After twenty years of practice, I made a new personal determination—I would spend the next ten

years challenging my elusive goal of a happy family. Coincidentally, I also started graduate school in anthropology. For my thesis, I chose a topic related to certain aspects of housework and the role of the housewife in the family, and it was from this academic vantage point that I began to search for answers to my questions about happy families.

SINCE women have traditionally been more responsible for family matters, I felt the key to understanding happy families was linked to understanding the woman's role in that family. I had always believed women in the United States were forerunners of the women's movement worldwide. While doing my research, I was especially impressed reading about the Seneca Falls Declaration on Women's Rights. The women were visionaries about equal rights as far back as 1848. It was also during the mid-nineteenth century that another trend emerged: pioneering women and men on the Western frontier were co-equal partners—sharing all labors and duties together.

The image of the pioneer on the frontier has always been inspiring to me. It seemed to capture the essence of the American spirit. When I first became a Buddhist and was told that we were "pioneers" for world peace, I felt doubly inspired. Pioneers have also been popular with the media. In the '60s and '70s, we were deluged with Western TV shows and movies portraying brave women on the wagon trains. In the '80s, a number of women's journals from the Westward expansion were published. I read these journals for my research and became even more inspired by these women.

Others have also been inspired

by this concept. Daniel Boorstin, historian and former Librarian of Congress, believes the frontier spirit is basic to what has made the United States great. He says "that place of encounter between the westward-moving settlement of modern Europeans and the wilderness ... [is] that secret of American vitality and the incubator of American democracy."² The image of pioneer women and pioneers for world peace became one in my mind.

Suddenly I saw the connection with the difficulty of creating a new way of family life. Those of us who wanted to have happy families were pioneers. We wanted something that had never been done before—a new definition of family and a new way of being.

Our country has been in the vanguard of creating new ideas—among them, democracy, a country born of a confederation of states, and women's equality. But we don't just "discover" these ideas—we create them. The creation is not really a "discovery" of something that already exists. Daniel Boorstin makes the distinction between the spirit to explore and the spirit to discover. He says that exploration of the unknown is America's "great contribution to the World Experience:

The discoverer simply uncovers, but the explorer opens. The discoverer concludes a search; he is a finder. The explorer begins a search; he is a seeker. And he opens the way for other seekers. The discoverer is the expert at what is known to be there. The explorer is willing to take chances.³

Put in those terms, part of the difficulty of finding a model for the ideal family was that no

model truly existed. I/we had to explore it, not discover what was already out there. As pioneers, we had to be willing to seek and open the way for other seekers. And we had to be willing to take chances.

So I write this article to give you background, history and insight, as well as my anthropological perspective on family life in the United States. This is my role in writing, even though by doing so I am only "discovering" what other people have said about the subject. I leave the exploring to you, the readers. You are the ones who will explore the new frontiers, based on Buddhist wisdom and the pioneer spirit, to open the way for other seekers of happy family life. Good luck on your journey!

The Importance of Family Life

More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all.⁴

—"The Treasures of the Heart"

OTHER than food, clothing and shelter, love and companionship are probably one of the most basic of human necessities. Daisaku Ikeda likens a family to an organism, and says that if society is a human body, "then each family is a group of cells. The family is the only organism by which love can be transacted between husband and wife, parents and child, brother and sister."⁵ To understand how this biological system works, we also need to understand the basis of its dynamism. Therefore, in order to understand human family life, we also have to understand human nature and human culture.

Francis Fukuyama, an econo-



Two men enjoying their pipes by the fire in a New England house during the colonial period.

mist with the Rand Corporation, calls the family one of the “three broad paths to sociability: The first is based on family and kinship, the second on voluntary associations outside kinship such as schools, clubs, and professional organizations, and the third is the state...”⁶ Of the three paths, only the family is the one whose existence is based largely on love, trust and human solidarity. No other institution is so basic or so universal; no other human system so wholly committed to accumulating the treasures of the heart. Having a happy family life is a goal we could probably say is shared by people the world over.

The structure of the family does vary widely throughout the world. Unlike all non-human primates (apes, chimpanzees and other monkeys) that organize identically irrespective of the time or place, human family and kinship groups vary significantly from culture to culture.⁷ In other words, monkeys group them-

selves exactly the same regardless of country or time; human family groups are different in different cultures.

THE diversity and variety of family structures is truly intriguing. People in industrial societies assume that the most common family system is the nuclear family (also known as the Eskimo system). It consists of two generations—husband, wife and their offspring—who live together. Although it is widespread, it is by no means universal. While we may think the nuclear family is “normal,” there are many other arrangements. Just two examples of a myriad possibilities are female members of the Nayars in India who go through a formal wedding in childhood, but never live with their husband; instead they have a series of affairs with visiting lovers. Or people on the islands in the Caribbean where most families are matrifocal (mother and children living together). Men circulate

throughout the community and establish relationships with different women.

In our contemporary American culture, there are a great diversity of family types. David Schneider says that “[a]lmost every conceivable kind of variation seems to be present in American kinship and family practices”⁸ due to the long history of immigration from other countries. Family structures we may encounter from other countries are: extended or stem families (from Oriental or European families) consisting of an elderly couple with their eldest son, his wife, and their children; joint families (from China) where brothers live in the same household with their wives and offspring, and even perhaps the parents of the brothers; and the tradition of “other mothers” as described by Patricia Hill Collins who are trained to assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities.⁹ This tradition began because the African-American community recognized that it may not be wise or possible to vest one person with full responsibility for mothering.

In addition to the above recognized anthropological categories of family types brought by immigration from other cultures, we also have contemporary American innovations which are not yet formally categorized: single-parent families; blended or reconstituted families (with one or two remar-

ried partners and their current and/or previous offspring from another marriage); childless marriages; partnerships of same or different sex agreements without the benefit of marriage; and people living alone.

History of American Families and American Communities

The peopling of British North America was an extension outward and an expansion in scale of domestic mobility in the lands of the immigrants' origins, and the transatlantic flow must be understood within the context of these domestic mobility patterns.¹⁰

ALTHOUGH we may talk about diversity of family types in the United States, there are similar cultural themes which run through our history. As quoted above, North American settlement has always been tied to domestic (family) movement. Some cultural terms regarding this movement have changed through the centuries. For example, in the eighteenth century, the word *family* included everyone living in one house, whether or not they were blood kin. Currently, however, contemporary definitions of the terms family and relative refer to someone related by blood or marriage. A family is considered a natural unit, and one in which members live together under one roof. Since family members are related by a common biogenetic heredity, it is impossible (to an American way of thinking) to stop being, for example, brother and sister or father and son. Even if you try to legally disown or disinherit children, to those who know the facts "nothing can really terminate or change the biological relationship

which exists between them, and so they remain blood relatives."¹¹

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the push to settle the far reaches of this country was accomplished, in large part, by families. Bailyn says that families were key to the growth of these areas because of "the demand they created, the markets they enlarged ... Above all, they were eager to take advantage from the start of opportunities created by the opening up of new land in America."¹²

In addition to strong family ties, however, strong community ties were also important—we have always had "a rich network of voluntary associations and community structures to which individuals have subordinated their narrow interest."¹³ Having strong family ties has never stood in the way of our economic and political development. In our culture, cooperation with others is encouraged. Fukuyama says that close families ties and cooperation with others are not always synonymous; in fact, they can be inversely related to each other.

...cultures in which the primary avenue toward sociability is family and kinship have a great deal of trouble creating large, durable economic organizations and therefore look to the state to initiate and support them. Cultures inclined toward voluntary associations, on the other hand, can create large economic organizations spontaneously and do not need the state's support.¹⁴

In other words, if one trusts only his or her own family, it is very difficult to place trust in voluntary associations, such as schools, clubs and professional organizations

(which include the work place). A society which turns its trust solely on the family relies on the state to make decisions or begin reforms. It is difficult to create a flourishing economy when most of the power is vested in the state, and not vested in spontaneous and voluntary economic organizations. Fukuyama also comments that another factor which promotes this trust is religion.

Sectarian religious communities like the Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers created small, tightly knit groups whose members were bound to each other through common commitments to values like honesty and service. This cohesion served them well in the business world, since business transactions depend to a great degree on trust.¹⁵

Although Fukuyama's background is in economics, the translation of the idea of trust to the spiritual realm cannot be mistaken. In naming his book *Trust*, Fukuyama was also talking about spiritual values. He gave examples of trust in our society by things we take for granted—people rarely leaving a restaurant or gasoline pump without paying or when people cement business transactions with a word or handshake. Even though we may see trust eroding in certain areas of our society, Fukuyama's point is clear: We are not a totalitarian state and we carry on much of our daily lives with implicit trust in other people's behavior.

David Schneider also found a similar phenomenon in his study of American kinship. He calls both family bonding and bonding between friends based on "diffuse solidarity"—meaning not

narrowly confined to a specific goal (“diffuse”) and something which is supportive, helpful and cooperative (“solidarity”).

Schneider calls the love among family members *enduring* diffuse solidarity because that love does not have a specific goal or a specific limited time in mind. As the old adage goes, you can pick your friends, but not your relatives. That’s both the good news and the bad news. Having a wide set of social contacts has definitely been primary to the making of our great country; it does not, however, undermine being close to one’s family. Actually, as Fukuyama and Schneider have documented, both phenomenon are closely related.

History has also been influential in shaping American culture. To help understand history’s influence on family life, I propose to examine two periods in our history, the Colonial era (1700) and the Civil War (1850). Since the next 150-year period will end at the new century, perhaps we can conjecture how future trends will develop from this snapshot of two periods in our past.

The Colonial Era

[T]he pull of the American colonies ... became an independent force ... created by entrepreneurship, promotion, and the sheer magnetism of economic betterment and religious toleration.¹⁶

WHEN Europeans settled our country, many were fleeing religious persecution. Some, but not all, came as families. Many were seeking economic opportunity or escaping from the tyranny of religious and political forces. At first, only the

young and strong could survive the ocean voyage and the harsh conditions of the first settlements. Many family members were left behind. In particular, there were few elderly, which may explain why the United States, more than any other industrial country, has traditionally relegated the elderly to separate living quarters from the nuclear family.

Although nuclear family structure was imported from the Motherland, the families who came depended more strongly on each other than they did in Europe. More cooperation was needed to help build houses, procure goods, and self govern (hence the famous New England townhall meetings).

Life was continually being reinvented, and with less interference from tradition, new ways of creation were possible. Boorstin calls this the “therapy of distance [which] worked in countless ways. Distinctions of social classes, which in Europe had been reinforced by all these other distinctions, did not survive intact in the New World ... American experience would show the world what a purging could for ancient institutions.”¹⁷

Family structures would eventually be reinvented, but during the Colonial era, European traditions still predominated. The breakdown of gender responsibility was still the same; women were in charge of the interior of the house, and men took care of everything outside. But women were more valued in the New World. Although men still dominated women in the colonies, their authority was “based on legal, political and religious coercion, not on men’s greater economic importance.” Perhaps the family unit become even more important during this time because it was viewed as a castle

in the wilderness. Phillip Greven describes a “genteel” family in colonial America around 1770:

[T]he family circle was felt to be the most secure place in the entire world—happy, embracing, forgiving, reliable, and free from selfishness. The members not only felt an extraordinarily strong sense of love for one another, they also felt an equally intense sense of obligation and of interest in one another. The family thus became something larger and more important than any single member...¹⁸

When the colonists began the next settlements westward, it was families who pushed on to the new frontiers. In *The Peopling of British North America*, Bailyn noted that “families, and not the many isolated emigrants bound in indentures to serve any master who could buy their services were destined to be the frontiersmen in this new segment of the American population.”¹⁹ This was to continue, and actually intensify, for the next 150 years.

The Civil War/American Renaissance—1850

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation — in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.²⁰

—Seneca Falls Declaration on Women’s Rights



Greta Garbo as Anna Karenina sits on the floor with son, played by Freddie Bartholomew, and husband, played by Basil Rathbone, 1935.

THE United States at mid-nineteenth century was seething with change, both positive and negative. Americans continued to populate even more territories, especially with the discovery of gold; Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau were forging the philosophical basis for the American Renaissance; and war between the North and South was about to erupt over the issue of slavery. During this tumultuous time, women staked claim on their own personal frontier and began to campaign for equal rights. Women who migrated out West and were settling the newest territories were no longer confined to duties inside the house; men and women began the era of “co-equal” partnerships in which division of labor based on gender became less distinct. As Joanna Stratton stated: “[m]en and women worked together as partners, combining their strengths and talents to provide food and clothing for themselves and their children. As a result, women found themselves on a far more equal footing with their spouses.”²¹

Meanwhile back East, women, particularly Quaker women, began actively campaigning for women’s rights. Many of them met each other through joining the abolitionist movement of William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was converted to the cause of anti-slavery by the Quaker, Benjamin Lunde, in 1823. He was an active abolitionist and editor of a newspaper known as *The Liberator*. He developed a number of followers, many of them Quakers and some of them women. He attended the first Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. It was at this convention that two women who would become pioneers of the women’s movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, met each other. At the second Anti-Slavery Convention in 1841, Garrison discovered that Lucretia Mott was refused admission to the convention because she was a woman. This infuriated Garrison. He said, “After battling so many long years for the liberation of African slaves, I can take no part in a convention that strikes down the most sacred rights of all women.”²²

Some historians have said that this incident was the original spark for the future of the women’s movement. Seven years later in 1848, Stanton and Mott met with three other women around a tea table in a small town in upstate New York. Their purpose at that time was to draft what became a remarkable document, known as the Declaration of Women’s Rights. Part of it is quoted above.

After drafting the document, the women moved rapidly. They held a conference two weeks later in Seneca Falls, New York, which was attended by 300 women and forty men (William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglas among them). The convention and the document were definitely an exploration, as Boorstin would define it, of female and family rights. The words and ideas of those women in 1848 still ring with a vitality and freshness which enabled women the world over to seek equals rights. As moments in history go, it was a time for Americans to be proud.

Seven of the original sixteen founders of the women’s rights movement were Quakers. In addition to being religious, many were very involved in their family lives. All but Susan B. Anthony were mothers. In later years, Susan B. Anthony was to look back and count—of the fifteen



(Left) New York Society Woman Suffragettes advertise a mass meeting to be addressed by the Governor of the Suffrage states. (Right) Madame Kimura, prominent Japanese Suffragist, is one of 20,000 Suffragists marching down Fifth Avenue in New York City, Oct. 27, 1917.

women (other than herself) who had married, they had successfully raised sixty-six children! These were not merely full-time revolutionaries, but working women in the true sense of the word.

The women's rights movement, which would become the family rights movement, was profoundly influenced by religion, Quakerism in particular. It was no coincidence that the Quakers (also known as the Society of Friends) would play such an important role. The Quaker philosophy was based on the spiritual equality of men and women.

From its inception, the Society of Friends had always recognized the spiritual equality of women with men as a corollary of the belief in the indwelling of the Light in each person.... While Quakerism obviously

did not claim secular equality for women, the opportunities it offered its female members and the dignity it accorded them could nurture such a claim.²³

The Quakers who originally came to this country were fleeing religious persecution. When they moved here, they championed the causes of anti-slavery as well as female equality, largely due to the very democratic structure of their prayer meetings. The seven Quaker women who were involved in the female rights' movement had varying levels of commitment to the Society of Friends. Susan B. Anthony (perhaps the most famous spokesperson) was born to a Quaker father and a Baptist mother and was raised as a Quaker. Although she never officially joined the church as an adult, she always main-

tained that her upbringing had been very influential in forming her views.

Lucretia Mott, on the other hand, was very committed to the religion. She was, in fact, a minister, whose sermons were well-attended and well-documented. But her views were not "narrowly sectarian, but reflected the universal teachings of the Spirit itself."²⁴ Again, it was the combination of the democratic push for freedom from religious and civil tyranny and the pioneering spirit that resulted in another breakthrough in world history: female and family rights.

The Current Dilemma

Since society is nothing but a collection of many families, if we do not have peaceful homes then we cannot have a peaceful

society. However, civilization does not regard the home as very important, and the home has become a casualty of progress. Out of this has come the tragedy of environmental destruction and war, and from the kind of education produced by contemporary civilization have come people who have forgotten what the meaning of being human is.²⁵

—Daisaku Ikeda

AS more women enter the work force, they are spending less time with their families. This is an unalterable fact. Even with the addition of hired substitutes (babysitters, daycare and after-school activities) and relatives who help, adults spend less supervised time with children. Less time is being spent on building the family support system. It has become increasingly more difficult to recreate that colonial dream where the family circle is larger and more important than any one member and is the most secure place in the world.

In addition, women are choosing to spend less time at home. As Arlie Hochschild reported in her book, *Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, even given the option to work less hours and take advantage of family-friendly policies, women often don't. Why?

Ms. Hochschild's book is a sociological study of a major corporation (disguised in the book under a fictitious name) which made many family-friendly work practices available such as flex time, job sharing and availability of day care centers. For five years, she interviewed and became acquainted with employees in the corporation in order to study how and why women and men were

dividing their time between home and work. What she discovered confounded her at first. She found that, given the opportunities for these family-oriented work options, women often declined them. She concluded that women were driven by economic necessity and a male-dominated ethos at work, as well as by the lack of support from a society which believes that caring for one's family is not as important as economic freedom. Women thus became managers who "outsourced" the jobs of mothering by hiring others. She goes on to say:

Women fear losing their places at work, and having such a place has become a source of security, pride, and a powerful sense of being valued. ... women are just as likely as men to feel appreciated at the workplace, as likely as men to feel underappreciated at home, and even more likely than men to have friends at work. Cutting back on work hours, to such women, means loosening ties to a world that, tension-filled as it is, offers insurance against even greater tension and uncertainty at home. ... Women now compose nearly half the American labor force. The vast majority of them need and want to be there. There is definitely no going back. The difficulty is not that women have entered the workplace but that they have done so 'on male terms.' It would be fine for women to adopt the male model of work, to enjoy privileges formerly reserved for men, if this model were one of balance. But it is not.²⁶

If this continues, our society may well bear out the dire predic-

tions of the death of the family as we know it. Even if we agree the current family structure is ineffectual and unwieldy, how can we continue to promote love and enduring solidarity without the benefit of something in its place? If family life and relatives are no longer important, how will we continue?

Happy Families

Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.²⁷

—Tolstoy

TOLSTOY began his story of families (*Anna Karenina*) with the above quotation and spent an entire novel explaining what he meant. There are no easy answers to the question, "What makes a happy family?" Nonetheless there are common threads running through the lives of happy families in all cultures. I would say that, based on research and personal experience, three words might describe the attributes of happy family members: trusting, warm and open-minded. Moreover, all three must be present as components of a happy family dynamic because all three are interrelated.

While people may feel that coming from a close-knit family is a highly desirable goal, members of close-knit or warm families are not always trusting of others or open-minded. As we have already seen from Fukuyama's book, trusting only one's family can lead to people who do not trust one another and thus create an insular society. Therefore, being open-minded must be one of the prime prerequisites for a healthy family and a healthy society. These sentiments are empha-

sized by Daisaku Ikeda when he says:

There is no group as vulnerable to unhappiness as a family that is closed off from the rest of society. I would like to see the kind of family equipped with a strong life force which will allow them to gauge and cope with the powers of the storm, even while buffeted by the rapid change in society. That family would be always open, ready to fight the evils that fill society. Families such as these in a society are like the white corpuscles and antibodies that fight disease in the human body.²⁸

Creativity and strong life force are necessary to create open families. Creativity and a strong life force can be greatly enhanced by philosophy and religion. As we have seen from the women's movement in the United States, the egalitarian viewpoint of Quaker women formed a strong foundation for the future of women's rights.

In order to establish a creative new structure for family life, we will need to call upon many philosophies and religions who can open-mindedly encourage each other to establish ground-breaking precedents in many different forms of family life. For those of us in the United States, it will mean continuing on with the pioneering tradition by creating new ideas and new ways of thinking.

However, just being open-minded and trusting is not enough—warmth and sharing the treasures of the heart are truly at the core of what it means to have relatives. In *The Meaning of Things*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton inter-

viewed 300 people from eighty-two families in the Chicago area in an attempt to understand how contemporary Americans relate to objects in their homes. They also were able to observe why some families seemed to be happier than others. They found that "warmer" family members were better able to become successful members in society. They defined members of warm families as displaying "personality traits of warmth, caring, orderliness, positive self-concept, and lack of suspiciousness."²⁹

They go on to say:

The advantages of a warm, emotionally integrated family are clear. ... internally focused families have more energy to invest in outside goals and activities: In warm households, the attention one receives from the family gives assurance of one's own worth, thus one is relatively freer to invest psychic energy in goals that go beyond self-ish intentions.... It truly seems that investment of psychic energy in the household frees attention for broader goals and tasks instead of just absorbing attention and tying it down to the maintenance of the family. The "return" on the "investment" seems worth the effort, for those who freely give their attention to their family to create a warm home ultimately have a richer, more diverse public life as well.³⁰

These comments reaffirm the thoughts of Fukuyama and Ikeda that the presence of a strong and supportive family creates a healthier and more diversified society.

Great creativity and life force

are mandatory in establishing these kinds of families. It is not necessarily the amount of time spent with family members that counts. Csikszentmihalyi's study found that "the warm families in our midst are practically invented by their members. Outside constraints are relatively light; the meanings that keep these families together are woven and mended by the constant attention of those who comprise them."³¹ In order to fill in the gaps caused by the lack of time, we must come up with creative solutions, more creative than we ever thought possible. The invention of new family lifestyles is part of why Boorstin calls us explorers of the unknown.

Exploring new paths is never easy. As Daisaku Ikeda says: "In any age, reform requires energy. Instead of sitting back and waiting, it is necessary to positively participate in creating a new age."³²

New Frontiers

Perhaps the greatest American opening has been toward boundless new vistas of the unknown and the unpredictable. The most important American addition to the World Experience was the simple surprising fact of America. We have helped prepare mankind for all its later surprises. America has invigorated the whole human quest for openings, and has provided a new energy and new resources for that quest. We are a source of faith, hope and charity for all who share the exploring enterprise.³³

—Daniel J. Boorstin

AFTER doing my research, I finally came full circle upon

the image of Marty in the movie *Back to the Future*. I began to find a new appreciation for my own family. After all, if I felt my friends were my family, it was because I had come from a healthy family life and could make warm ties outside of the family structure. If I was able to become a Buddhist without any objection from my parents, it was because of their implicit trust and support for my own identity. And if I descried the fact that family life in America was deteriorating, it was because I could dare to dream for something better.

I have never lived in a traditional family setting during any of my adult life. For seven years, I took care of my aging mother. I have had roommates, housemates, boyfriends and cats with whom I shared my space. I've never recreated the ideal of the nuclear family myself, but then, I'm in the majority. Statistics show that

only twenty-seven percent of people in the United States are living in what is considered a classic nuclear family. As Schneider remarked, every "conceivable kind of variation" of family life exists in the United States, creating communities that resemble global villages throughout our country.

Since we have always been pioneers anyway, let's become global pioneers. Let's create new lifestyles and new family styles that will be emulated throughout the world. To accomplish this, we need to carry with us the treasures of the heart, and we need to be bold. We need to explore the unknown seas of family life. There is no model to follow. As it says in the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, bloom as only you can, whether it be a plum, damson or cherry tree blossom. But bloom as you are and together we will create new frontiers of family life in the United States. □

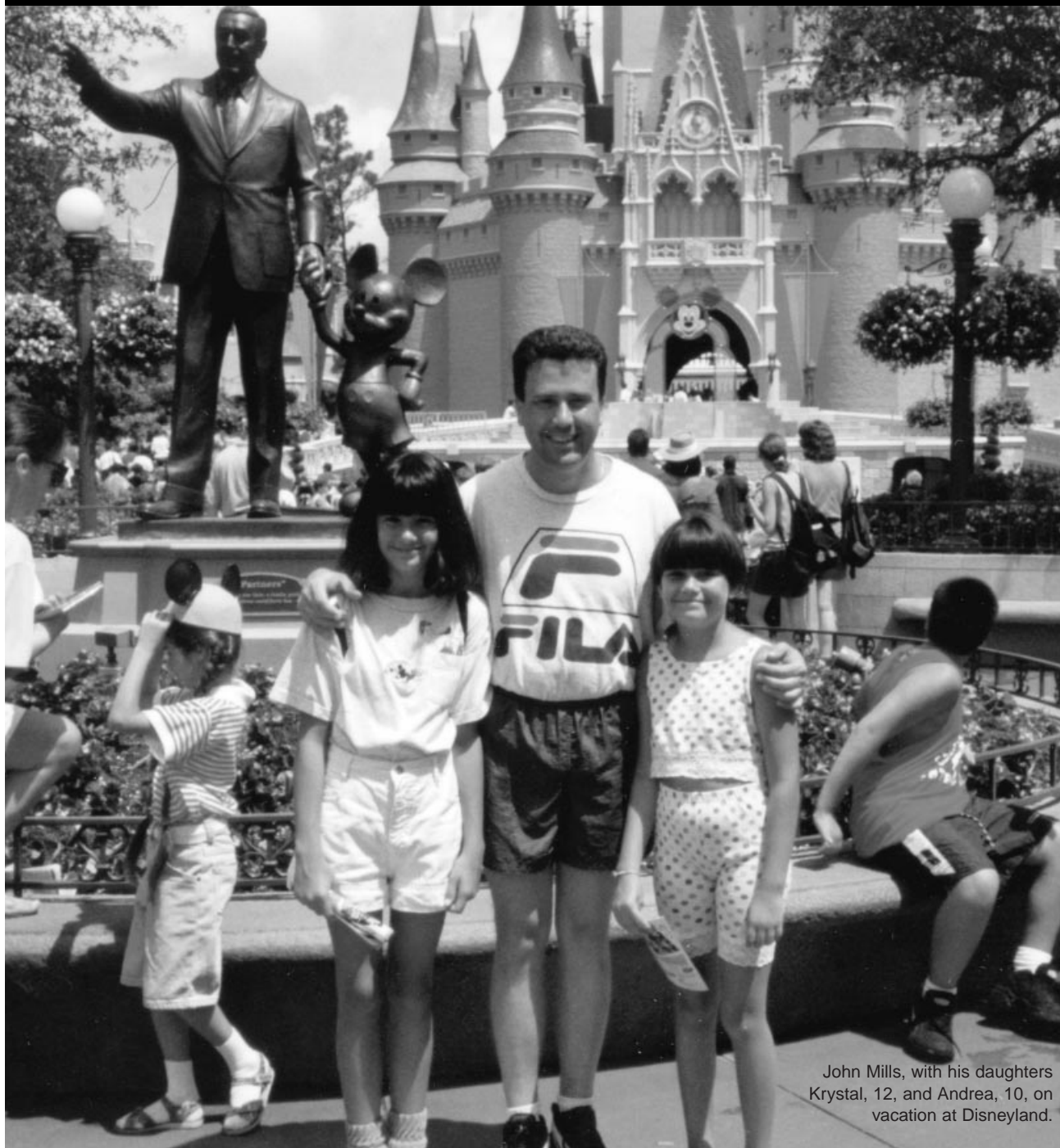


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A Single Father's Commitment

By Cheryl Utley, Kansas City, Mo.



John Mills, with his daughters Krystal, 12, and Andrea, 10, on vacation at Disneyland.

Becoming a single parent almost a decade ago catapulted John Mills of Kansas City, Mo., into a demanding daily schedule that he finds constantly challenging. In the following article, he shares some reflections on the commitment and sense of responsibility it takes to be a full-time single father of two children.

BUSY! Busy! Busier! That aptly describes John Mills of Kansas City, Mo., who has been a single parent of two daughters, Krystal, 12, and Andrea, 10, for almost a decade. John starts his workday at 4:00 a.m. with thirty to forty minutes of chanting followed by the recitation of his morning prayers.

On school days, he wakes up his children at 5:45 a.m. by singing and laughing as they prepare for school. He has learned through his Buddhist practice that possessing a strong, high life-condition is essential for his daughters to be happy. Due to his own personal struggles over the years raising his daughters, he has gained tremendous respect for all mothers. "I've come to realize that parenting is a lifelong commitment," said John. His Buddhist practice has taught him to take total responsibility for his life and that of his children. "If I want a better life for my children and me," he said, "changes and improvements must come from within myself."

A few years after he began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1983, John secured work as a truck driver for a major corporation that put him on the road to financial stability. Shortly

thereafter, he and his wife parted; their divorce became final in March 1988. Four months later, he had received custody of his two daughters, ages 10 months and 2 years, as his ex-wife had agreed that he was in a better position to raise the children.

"My children and I lived in a one-bedroom apartment," John said. "I asked myself, 'What am I going to do?' I was just learning how to become a responsible parent. I felt I had two choices: I could run away or take responsibility for my life."

John decided to dedicate his life to his daughters, and thus gave up his single's lifestyle. Fearful because he didn't have the slightest idea how to care for his children, he sincerely chanted to do his best and become a good father. He found he had to cope with higher stress levels when it dawned on him that he had to do everything himself, like chores around the house, buying groceries and clothes, planning meals, and most recently, a move to a new home. "I realized soon that it's very demanding to work all day, come home and do homework with both my daughters," he said.

"My daughters are my first pri-

ority," he continued. "Their needs come first. So I just can't go out and party and hang out with the guys, like I used to."

When his daughters were younger, John recalled that finding quality child care while he was working was his biggest struggle. "I chanted to the Gohonzon to find strength and wisdom because I was working over sixty hours a week so I could provide for my daughters and pay for good child care," he said. Although at times he took his children to day-care centers, he concentrated more on finding people he knew and trusted to babysit.

NOW that his daughters are older, John trusts them to be on their own, whether it be at home or visiting with friends, especially during the summer months. Although initially he had mixed emotions about leaving them alone at home at times, he now believes that it helps them to take responsibility. He feels that children should be treated with respect and not be limited in any way just because they're children—he takes the time to explain to his daughters how to handle a variety of situations and

The Mills relaxing at home.



CHERYL UTLEY

what is expected of them. He also has given them a pager in case of an emergency.

Sometimes John draws on his own childhood experiences to deal with situations like leaving his children alone at home. Recalling how he felt one summer long ago when he and his sister had stayed home alone by themselves, he feels he can empathize with his daughters and know what their needs might be when they are left by themselves. "I also realize that growing up in today's world is totally different than when I was growing up," he said. "And that my daughters' experiences as they grow up may be different from other young girls who live in two-parent families." Therefore, he encourages his daughters to explain things to him in detail so that he might better understand everything going on in their lives.

During difficult moments, support and encouragement come from other SGI-USA members, from whom his daughters have learned the basics of the practice. John gradually realized that his daughters respected him when he took them to discussion meetings and home visits. They also like the family-like atmosphere at the community center. His daughters

have taught him that children retain little of what you say—they learn by example. It's difficult to be a hypocrite as a parent, John indicated, and not do your human revolution. "Whatever the activity—discussion meetings, home visits and organizational meetings—my daughters saw that I never stopped in my Buddhist practice," he said. As they continue to watch their father, they see his selflessness and his attitude never to give up.

ANDREA, the youngest daughter, feels her father is "a cool dad" because he listens to her music and plays with them. Krystal said that "she would never give up her dad for a million bucks." She feels he has patience and a big heart. She shared that when they went shopping at a mall once, he had originally intended to buy them only two dresses each; instead, he bought each of them four dresses. "He'll sit down and explain

things to us," she said. "He wrestles with us, tickles us after work. We go to the mall, to meetings, movies, swimming, ice-skating, and vacation together. He even helps us clean our room. He's funny and has a sense of humor! He's like a child. After he yells at you for doing something wrong, he says, 'I'm sorry.' He doesn't spank or hit us. He explains everything to us so that we understand when we are wrong."

John sees that his daughters have developed a unique friendship with one another. "Even though Andrea and Krystal are competitive as sisters, they are very good friends and close to each other," he explained. "I treat them both equally and try not to compare one with the other. They share my personal struggles with me and they see that I am doing my best to challenge my life. I respect them as individual human beings who have their own separate identities, and we make decisions together as a family." □

THE COHEN FAMILY: IN SEARCH OF A BABY SISTER

By Sharron Cohen, Lacey, Wash.



Don and Sharron Cohen with Mikayla and new baby, Lili.

Don and Sharron Cohen adopted two children, one from Romania and another from America, fulfilling their dream of a healthy, happy family dedicated to peace.

THE thought of having a happy family is most everyone's dream. But many of us grew up in very unusual or dysfunctional envi-

ronments, contrasting the idea of happy families portrayed in television sit-coms.

My own parents rarely spoke to each other except when they

were fighting. My brother and I were used as messengers. "Go tell your father this!" "Go tell your mother that!" We actually liked it better when they weren't talking. It was more peaceful.

My mother had no respect for my father and so naturally, neither did we. I learned early on to manipulate men and had poor and brief relationships because of it. I was always searching for someone or something that didn't exist.

MY husband's family suffered the sudden loss of their father at age 51 from a massive heart attack, leaving his mother with two young boys and no means of support. My husband, Don, had a strained relationship with his mom and moved away to join a band and pursue a singing career. He lived in the fast lane, only for the moment.

As we grew up, our lives yet to cross paths, I entered nursing school while Don joined the U.S. Army. I was born and raised in Boston, a total city girl, and Don was raised in Nebraska, a real country boy.

Eventually, we found our way to Los Angeles and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the 70's ending up leaders in the same district—it was like Bette Midler meeting Garth Brooks. We struggled through many activities together and although we never thought twice about each other romantically, we were friends with mutual respect for one another.

I finally decided that I needed to plant roots and start a family. Coincidentally, Don was thinking along the same lines. We were sitting together talking with a senior in faith when the idea of him and me getting married suddenly

came up. We both laughed nervously and I said, "Not a chance!" We were already "married" to our district. But before long we were dating, and in two months we were married. Our relationship was based on the common goal of *kosen-rufu*.

Almost immediately, I got pregnant but soon miscarried. Over the next two years, I miscarried two more times. They were traumatic experiences, both physically and emotionally. Finally, through our prayers, we decided to consider adoption.

We ran into lots of dead ends over the next year, but with wonderful advice and lots of support from lots of fabulous friends, we flew to Romania and adopted a beautiful baby girl. Mikayla is now 6 years old.

SHE was a dream come true. We returned from Romania with our daughter, who has been a joy and a challenge, as most children are. She is extremely bright and nothing slips past her. She is a social butterfly and loves people, especially other kids.

When Mikayla was 4 years old, she started asking for a baby sister. First, we got her a frog, then we got her a dog, Petey. Petey and Mikayla have become inseparable. He is especially fond of her Barbie dolls and we have several "special needs" Barbies without limbs floating around the house. Soon this novelty wore off and we were getting strong baby-sister signals again. Now that Mikayla was in school and more independent, we decided we could handle another child.

We took a Foster-Adopt course and received our license with only one permanent placement in mind. About six weeks went by

and we got the call. A baby girl had been born the day before and was five weeks premature, but her prognosis was excellent. She weighed 7 lb. 5 oz. because her birth mother suffered from gestational diabetes. She had to be weaned off insulin and tube fed because she couldn't suck yet. The amazing thing was that there were no other families in competition with us for this child. The social worker wanted us and only us. We visited her in the Neonatal Intensive Care unit frequently and chanted in her ear. She started sucking and gained strength and determination. On Memorial Day we took her home. She weighed 8 lb. 3 oz. and looked gorgeous. Mikayla was so happy and proud. She made sure everyone at school heard of her new sister.

Mikayla learned quickly how to hold, feed and carry the baby. She even wants to change her diapers. She takes her into the backyard on the swing and pats her so sweetly, kissing her and protecting her like a mother hen. She has never shown an ounce of jealousy—at least not yet!

Mikayla says: "I love Lili. She's cute and lovable and I chant for her. She's fun to play with and I like her a lot."

THIS should be the end of the story—"...and they lived happily ever after." But it was really a new beginning with more human revolution that comes with no sleep, screaming babies and hectic schedules. Our little Lili has gastroesophageal reflux, which is common but very stressful. She has had a need to eat almost continuously to soothe her acid stomach and would never be awake without a bottle in her

Mikayla, 6, is proud of her new sister, Lili.



mouth. Many times this was not enough to make her happy either, and for a month only chanting daimoku would get us through the evenings and soothe her. The doctor finally found out what the problem was and gave her the correct medicine.

INCREASED frustration and fatigue compounded by Don's recent graduation from school and my labor union campaign at work kept us apart and on edge. There were conflicts and short tempers. Egos flared. Had we done the right thing bringing a tiny baby into this madness, or was the baby creating the impetus for all of us to challenge ourselves and stretch even further?

Our relationship has always been based on faith in the Gohonzon. We resolve issues as fast as they occur. We always find the other side of the mountain with clear water and sun shining. We feel it's our responsibility to

create a harmonious atmosphere for our family.

Since we've started a family, my relatives in Boston have changed their relationship toward me. After twenty years of silence, they have started calling me, asking for advice about their problems. I associate this with a deep change in the core of my life.

Don's appreciation for what his mother and father did has increased tremendously as well.

Don's dream of being a star in Hollywood never materialized, but in our family, his star shines bright. "Once I got married and became a father, I felt tremendous joy in my life and my reality now is much more wonderful than any fantasy I could dream of," he comments. As a parent, Don said that he feels extremely responsible for his behavior around the girls. He explained that when sitting in front of the Gohonzon, he knows that his daughters respond favorably—they see that he takes

responsibility for his own shortcomings. When he has a conflict with Mikayla, he takes the time to listen to her side of the story.

Don said that when he was single, he didn't feel comfortable around children and didn't know how he would be as a parent. But he explained that when we went to Romania to adopt Mikayla, he came to the realization that he didn't have to be a special person to be a parent, he just had to care. "To do your best to protect that person and be there for them is what it means to be a parent," he says.

As for myself, I'm learning how to be an SGI leader with kids, work full time and take care of myself, too. Not a day goes by that I don't think about how fortunate I am—and then I think about a nap! □

Aaron Franklin, Seattle *Living Buddhism* Bureau Chief, contributed to this story.



The following dialogue among the Pesante family members covers their more than two decades of practice in the SGI. Fred is originally from New York, of Puerto Rican descent. Helen is Native American, originally from Texas. Living Buddhism correspondent Maggie Bryan visited them last month in their North Hollywood, Calif., home.

Fred Pesante: It was June 6, 1971. I was 21, my wife, Helen, was 19, and our son, 15 months old, when we started practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I had heard a lot about the practice through five co-workers who



Team Players: The Pesante Family

Helen and Fred Pesante (center), at home in North Hollywood, California, with Kaiyoti, 27, and Athena, 21.

him. Three months later, through an error of scheduling, I had to work with him again. Much to my surprise, he was different. He was so nice, humble and just seemed like a great person. I saw an actual transformation in him. I then learned that he had become a Buddhist two-and-a-half months prior, so when he asked me to attend a meeting that evening, I said yes. As we were leaving, I received a call from my wife who needed to be picked up along with our son. My co-worker spoke with her, and against my wishes invited her to the meeting.

Helen Pesante: When we arrived at the meeting, they were chanting. I immediately felt a soothing vibration. I was constantly searching for my spirituality and had been to several religious meetings, but never felt the comfort I felt this time. During the meeting they asked if anyone had any questions.

were members, but I was not at all interested. The company had just hired a new employee, and when I met him I instantly disliked him. He was so arrogant, obnoxious and condescending that I requested not to work with

I raised my hand and asked, "How can I get a Gohonzon!?" Fred was not amused.

Fred: I was shocked when Helen said this, and immediately turned to her and said, "No way." I was cynical and the kind of person who wanted to know exactly how everything worked before I would attempt to try it. I was not ready to commit. Then a young woman asked me if I loved my wife and if I wanted to see her happy. I said, "Yes." She asked Helen if it would make her happy to try this practice and, of course, she said, "Yes." So I had no choice but to follow through, and sign the application for membership.

Helen: At the time we started practicing, we were dirt poor. We were on welfare and could not even make ends meet.

Fred: We lived in a dump and I worried constantly about the welfare of my family.

Helen: We were young so we did not have any sense of goals or future dreams. Our childhoods had not left us with much to hope for.

Fred: We were immediately swept into the rhythm of that time, attending meetings two to four times a week. The meetings would be followed by trips to Santa Monica for either a study session on Buddhism, guidance from our seniors or for Helen (who immediately joined a dance group in the organization) to attend her dance rehearsals.

Helen: In just one month of our practice (July), we were in Seattle where the organization held a convention; I participated by dancing in performances. In August, we had our Buddhist wedding. By September, we had moved into a nice apartment in the San Fernando Valley and had stopped hanging with our partying, "druggie" friends and started hanging with our new SGI friends. We had a completely new lifestyle.

Fred: All of these positive changes occurred within the first five months of our practice. In addition, I started college, and Helen was going to nursing school while also pursuing a dance career.

Helen: We had so much actual proof that sharing this Buddhism with others became a natural process for us. We didn't coerce anyone. We just told them our story.

Fred: Within that short time, we had ten new members whom we were teaching about the practice. We continued practicing and in 1974, I joined the Army. By September of 1974, we were in Massachusetts, where we practiced in a rural town. In December of 1975, our daughter, Athena, was born. We held responsibili-

ties unofficially as district leaders for about a year, during which time we, together with our women's division district leader, regrouped approximately twenty members in our area. I was then transferred to El Paso, Texas, where once again, we immediately connected with the SGI.

Helen: Our children were able to do a lot of Buddhist activities at a young age because in smaller cities, there is a larger need for member participation. Even we as adults would go back and forth between youth and men's and women's division activities.

Fred: I left the military after six years of duty, and we left Texas to come back to L.A. in 1982. By that time, our son was 12 and an active young men's division member. Our daughter, although she was only 6, had done young women's division activities. And as brother and sister, they were so united.

The Children

Kaiyoti and Athena Pesante, with Kenya Runyan, who was adopted into the Pesante family in 1988.

Athena: When I was younger, I used to hang out with my brother and his friends, and it never seemed to bother them. I always felt accepted. Maybe that's because in this family, everyone's friends become part of the family.

Kenya: I can attest to that! I remember the first time I came to a meeting at the Pesante's. There was a warm feeling, nothing like I had felt before. I knew I wanted to come back.

Kaiyoti: Our house was always a district house. We learned to interact with our parents in a way that was different

from the usual parent/child relationship. Our family was more like a team.

Athena: When we moved to Los Angeles, I was 6 years old. We began to have numerous meetings at our home and I loved it. I thought, "We're having all these parties! This is wonderful!", but then I began to understand that this is our practice. It's our way of living.

Kaiyoti: When we moved back to L.A., we immediately started going to meetings at the community center. It wasn't a new thing for us because it had always been part of our lives to go to meetings. And we were not forced to practice. We were taught that Buddhism was our way of life. When we were babies, my mom used to chant and do morning gongyo while she rocked us to sleep. I can remember her doing that with my sister until she was about 2 or 3 and I know she did the same thing with me.

Athena: I remember learning gongyo, and I can't really say at what age, but I just remember that it was always there in my life. Buddhism was part of our upbringing, and I'm grateful for that. I have noticed that some families don't teach their children Buddhism from the moment they begin to practice or from the moment the child is born, which is unfortunate because it can be very beneficial to a child.

Kenya: It sometimes seems as if the parents are practicing without the children, unaware that the children are not learning how to practice.

Kaiyoti: If you take your children to meetings and drop them off in the playroom for ten years and then decide that it's time for them to learn how to practice,



Helen and Fred with 2-year-old Kaiyoti, at the San Fernando Mission Festival, in San Fernando, California, September 1972.

they're not going to be receptive to doing gongyo or listening to a Goshō lecture.

If you truly view Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism as a way of life, how could you not want your children to have an even firmer grasp of the practice? You're teaching them the best way to live their lives.

Athena: I know that without realizing it, I was learning the strictness of the practice. It came naturally to me because it wasn't a separate thing or a once-in-a-while thing. It was an everyday thing just like morning and

evening gongyo.

Kaiyoti: I was always involved doing traffic control outside meeting locations or emceeding a meeting or giving the explanation of the practice. Our parents would just volunteer us and they knew we wouldn't mind because we were always brought up to view these things as making a contribution or doing our part.

Athena: My home was always different from most of my friends, and it shocked me when I came to that realization as a little girl. Prior to that, I assumed all families lived the way we did as

Buddhists, even if they weren't a Buddhist family. But the majority of my friends have come from a single-parent household, and I had never seen a family bond as close as the one we had in our home. So I began to think we were the odd ones, but when all of my friends embraced my family and enjoyed spending time with my parents, I knew we were okay.

Kaiyoti: I noticed my friends didn't have the open relationship with their parents as we did with ours. My friends would come over and say things like: "Wow, I



Kaiyoti, 7, and Athena, 18 months, in Texas, 1977.

could never joke around like that with my dad or mom. Your parents are so cool!"

Athena: I think we can relate with our parents because we know them so well. They were very young when they started this family, and we were all able to grow together.

Kaiyoti: We've heard all our parents' stories—their childhoods, their struggles. Sometimes at meetings when they gave experiences or after meetings during guidance sessions with members.

Athena: We've also seen them mature right before our eyes. My mom was always wild and crazy. You know, life of the party.

Kenya: She's still the life of the party!

Athena: Yes, but I can remember when she used to give people a piece of her mind right on the spot with no holds barred, and now she takes the time to think about the right time, manner and place to handle the situation.

Kaiyoti: We've learned so much from our parents' practice. When we lived in the Hollywood foothills, my room was right next to the kitchen where they would go to give guidance. Even if members had similar struggles, my mom would speak with each one in a way that was specifically appropriate for them.

Athena: I enjoyed going on home visits with my parents. It was always fun to be in different homes all over L.A. My father was always so positive and encouraging with the members. He still loves visiting them at their homes and is very committed to doing so. He can come off of a twelve-hour work shift at 7 a.m. and go directly to one of his member's house for morning gongyo at 7:30 or 8:00. That alone is encouraging!

Kaiyoti: In the past my dad didn't have to do that many home visits because everyone seemed to be at our home for guidance. I saw him grow to understand the importance of life-to-life, one-on-one dialogue. When he realized this point, he just naturally applied it to his district, his family and his co-workers. Anyone can call and talk to him about what they're going through in their life and get his 100 percent attention every time.

Kenya: He's that way with us too. They're both good parents.

Even when all of us were going through our rebellious periods they were supportive and patient with us. We were allowed to talk openly and honestly. We were treated with total respect.

Kaiyoti: It's not like it was perfect. There were times when some authoritarianism would occur between my dad and me, but I've seen him change to where he catches himself. If his anger gets the best of him he'll stop and say: "You know what? This is wrong. Never mind." Or he'll come back and say: "We're not supposed to interact like that as father and son or as human beings, for that matter. We need to chant first so we can do this the right way." That approach is something I've seen manifest only within the last ten years.

Athena: Watching our parents is like guidance. My guidance came indirectly. I don't remember ever going to get guidance. It just came to me.

Kaiyoti: Most of my best guidance came from watching and hearing, not just my parents, but also watching all the members around me grow, and show actual proof in their lives. We've seen this all our lives. Even when my parents argued with each other, watching them work through it and fight together to make it work was encouraging to me.

Athena: I have also learned a lot by spending time with members. I've had the opportunity to know people from all walks of life. Most of the members in our district were in their 20s and 30s. I developed a bond with many of them and looked up to some of them. They

were part of our family.

Kaiyoti: Our district was definitely an extended family.

Athena: My parents have the biggest heart in the world.

Ever since I was a little girl, it seemed as though anyone who needed a place to stay was always welcome in our home. Days would turn into weeks, and weeks into months.

Kaiyoti: That's how we got our sister Kenya.

Kenya

Fred: As children grow, they gravitate toward comfort. I feel that through our practice we developed a comfort that became a magnet for many young people. Especially our children's friends.

Helen: Kenya, who became our foster daughter, started out as one of Athena's friends.

Fred: Her mother came to a couple of meetings and then lost interest.

Helen: She actually received the Gohonzon because Kenya, who was only 13, wanted to practice and begged her to get it for her.

Fred: Kenya's mother had a drug addiction problem, so when she stopped coming to meetings Kenya would walk four blocks to our house to attend the activities. She started going to Fife and Drum Corps practices with Athena and would spend the weekend at our house so that they could go together. She occasionally spent the night during the week as well. Then one weekend when she was spending the night, her mother was evicted from her apartment.

Kenya: I remember my mother asked me to ask the Pesantes if I could stay with them. I couldn't ask them. Even though my moth-

er was physically and mentally abusive at times, she was still my mom. It was all I knew. In the past my mom had left me with others for six months and even a year. But I was frightened this time. I kept feeling that this would be the last time and she wouldn't come back for me. I didn't ask the Pesantes, so my mom called them herself.

Helen: At this point it didn't matter since she was always at our house anyway. She had already become part of the family.

Fred: Three months went by before we heard from Kenya's mother.

Kenya: I was having a very hard time during this period. I had a hard time trusting others and would wonder why these people had taken me in. What made them be nice to me? And even though my mom had her problems, I missed her. I would walk by our old apartment on my way home from school looking for her.

Fred: Kenya's mom came back and took her for two weeks and brought her back, saying that the environment they were in was not safe for Kenya.

Helen: This time six months went by. The girls went to the same school so it was no problem, but we wanted Kenya to have a stable home. So, after having a family dialogue, we let Kenya know that if she chose to she could stay with us until she graduated from high school. She worked so hard at school and we felt that we couldn't deny her the opportunity to win.

Kenya: I realized that my life was changing. I started looking at life in a different way. I found myself chanting about the new person that was developing. It

was happening so fast and because of my past, I couldn't tell if anything was normal. Chanting made me feel calm and focused.

Helen: I'm glad she decided to stay.

Fred: She's been with us ever since. Well, she left to go to college when she received a scholarship to U.C. Santa Cruz. She graduated from U.C.S.C. in June of 1996, and in June of 1997, she and her fiance returned home for their wedding. Her husband, Daniel, practices, also; he was born into it. We've known him since he was 3 years old.

Athena: We originally met Daniel's family in Texas where our families practiced together, and reunited in Los Angeles in 1984. Daniel was like a cousin. It's interesting that now he's my brother-in-law.

Helen: Athena and Kenya planned the entire wedding through long-distance phone calls and it turned out beautifully. They were presented with many challenges, but would constantly chant to overcome the obstacles. It was amazing to see their young women's division training show itself at every crucial moment.

Fred: Both Kenya and Daniel often call for encouragement.

Being an SGI Family

Fred: Many people, including family members, are continuously making comments to me about how wonderful my wife and kids are, or how lucky I am to have such great children and a sparkling wife. I get overwhelmed by this because when Helen and I started practicing, we just wanted to be happy. We didn't know then that happiness is a cause, not an effect. We've made a great deal of



CAROL SIMPSON



CRAIG ROWITZ

(Left) Athena, Helen, Fred and Kenya, at home in Hollywood, California, 1990.
 (Right) At the wedding of Kenya and Daniel Runyan in June 1997.

causes in order to manifest this reality.

Helen: Before we started practicing, we did not plan our lives. We were so young and had no role models. When I was a child, the dysfunction in our family came from my mother being a victim of domestic violence. The support given afterwards from her family was done out of obligation. It involved much slander toward my mother and her four children. My sister and I were also physically abused, and we had to constantly fight off advances from most of our uncles. This had left me with a general mistrust of people and the inability to feel I would ever win in life.

After I met Fred, I didn't know if I would ever be able to trust

and open up to him as he deserved. I was able to overcome this and many other issues of my life with the practice.

Fred: I'm the youngest of seven brothers and one sister. My mother was married twice and had five children from her past marriages prior to my father. She had three more sons by my father; but by the time I was 6 months old, my parents were separated.

I grew up with my father, two brothers and a stepmother. I had no lessons or insight about family bonding or unity. The only thing I truly felt then was that my father loved me, but he was also a victim of circumstances, and offered only what he knew. I grew up not knowing what I wanted and not knowing what to do.

I learned a great deal about

myself and others after I became an SGI member and practiced Buddhism. My schooling about life and my involvement in it began the first day I began my practice.

Helen: Our life just naturally shifted onto a positive path. The SGI became our family and some of the leaders became parents and/or role models.

Fred: I joined the military for six years and traveled with my family. Whenever I was relocated to another military base, Helen would write ahead of time to the nearest SGI organization and let them know we were coming and offered our support, wherever it was needed.

Helen: I realized early on how our lives had grown and improved based on our connec-

tion to the organization and our efforts toward kosen-rufu.

Kaiyoti: Whenever we moved, the discomfort of transition of being in a new place and having to meet new people and make new friends was lessened by participating in the organization. Within a week of moving, we would attend a couple of meetings and I would immediately have new best friends. Our parents would go out of their way to connect with members who had kids my age. Our whole family would have a great bond of friendship with another family. I think without even thinking about it, our parents always ended up making causes toward maintaining tight family unity.

Athena: Our parents are very different. My mother may appear to be very lenient and my dad very strict, but both of them are lenient and strict in different ways, so it evens out perfectly. One thing for sure is that they have always been honest with us and have always made time to talk to us or answer our questions.

Kaiyoti: I remember being 6 years old and asking my mom where babies come from. She said why don't we have this conversation tomorrow. At that time she worked at Planned Parenthood, so the next day she brought home books and all kinds of teaching tools to explain it to me.

Fred: She forced me to do some reading. It was embarrassing to me to have to use honest terminology with my 6-year-old son.

Kaiyoti: But it's because of their being so honest with us at such an early age that we knew we could always go to them with any question. They would never deny us an answer.

Helen: The quality of unity of our family comes from our prac-

tice because, although we have the same problems or issues as any other family, we deal with them in a Buddhist way. We all know about human revolution. We know we have to chant, get guidance and self-reflect to always create a win-win situation for all parties involved

Athena: It's because all of us practice that we are actually able to keep that same focus.

Kenya: Yes, because if we start to fight, or if a problem occurs between us, we don't give up and say, "Forget it," or "I'm the right one."

Athena: Well, maybe not in the beginning. But, after we realize that we're in one of the lower life-conditions, we know it's our responsibility to snap out of it.

Kaiyoti: Sometimes it takes more than a day or so, depending on the problem. But it is always resolved because all of the parties involved want to resolve it. And we know we have to go back to our practice to get there.

Fred: I didn't think about where I would be after more than twenty-six years of practice. When we started, our families did not look favorably at our practice, but all that has turned around. Just as we are close with one another, we also have become close with our parents and siblings.

Helen: We don't see our families as often as we would like to, but when we do we have mutual affection and respect for each other.

Athena: We do that with our SGI extended family, too. I actually have a lot of big brothers and sisters and tons of uncles and aunties. Our family consists of hundreds of people!

Kenya: Once you walk

through the door, you're instantly part of the family, whether you know it or not. You just start feeling it eventually. It's a warm feeling.

Fred: Embracing people was not a natural process for me. Through my Buddhist practice, my capacity for compassion expanded. I learned to appreciate people's differences when I realized that fundamentally we are all the same.

Helen: Both Fred and I have been R.N.s for many years. Our profession requires we give much empathy to others. Through Buddhism we have gained the ability to maintain unconditional empathy not just toward clients but also to our families, friends and SGI members.

Fred: We are very appreciative that our children have grown up in this practice, and for the family values instilled in them through Buddhist principles. Life has presented me with various obstacles that I've had to challenge and have overcome throughout my years of practicing Buddhism.

In order for me to continue to grow spiritually, I will forever be reflecting on my actions. I've had to lift myself up spiritually to keep myself from being defeated. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the only way I know how to raise my life-condition and rise to each challenge.

My faith in Buddhism comes from seeing the positive results in my life and in my family, and also knowing that I care about humanity, about helping others to practice so they may empower themselves. As a practitioner of Buddhism as opposed to a believer in Buddhism, my life must exemplify what living Buddhism is. □

WHAT DOES FAITH EQUALS DAILY LIFE MEAN?

BY DAVE BALDSCHUN
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR

What does the Buddhist principle “faith equals daily life” mean? Does it mean people have strong faith if

tion of our lives, the power of our life force. It is the attitude with which we approach each day.

Through our daily practice in

potential to the maximum. We can also control our basic life tendency and reveal our innate capability when our Buddha nature is strong.

Regardless of what role we assume each day, our daily lives are the arena in which we can display the benefits of our faith. We may or may not be successful or healthy at the moment, but we do have responsibility for our inner realm. Many of us may dislike our jobs, or our very lives, but through consistent practice we discover the key to finding happiness even under dire circumstances. Somy Niethammer of Long Beach, Calif., described it like this:

Gradually, something in me was awakening to the chanting. It was as if my heart had been buried under layers of darkness. At times it was painful to keep going—I begrudged my life and hated how I grew up. I was filled with self-doubt. However, as I continued to

This “Topics for Discussion Meetings” series is intended to stimulate lively conversations about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

they have successful careers? Or that the happiest families are those with strong faith? Or the healthiest people have the strongest faith? If people lose their jobs or contract serious illnesses, do we question their faith? Is the strength of our faith reflected in the conditions of our immediate environment? Or is our faith reflected in how we face our daily lives? Nichiren Daishonin says that neither saints nor sages can avoid problems, so strong faith is not the absence of problems and obstacles.

The point is not the conditions in our environment, but the condi-

tion of our lives, the power of our life force. It is the attitude with which we approach each day. Through our daily practice in front of the Gohonzon, we stimulate and solidify our inherent Buddha nature, putting ourselves into the highest of the ten worlds (of Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood). When we leave the Gohonzon and go about our daily lives, we are buffeted by the lower nine worlds in society. What we carry into these nine worlds—in other words, into our jobs, schools, families or other pursuits—is a high life-condition based on our Buddha nature. This is the spirit to do our best, to be victorious, to use our

“THE TRUE PATH OF LIFE LIES IN THE AFFAIRS OF THIS
WORLD. TO HAVE A PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF THIS
WORLD IS ITSELF BUDDHISM.”¹

chant, my life began to expand and shine, and I felt a deep, strong identity (August 15, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 6).

Her happiness was generated from within, not from a change in the environment. But what we find is that when we change our inner life, the outer environment will improve as well. This is what happens when we bring our Buddha nature into the nine worlds of daily life. When we are in an elevated state, we can display our true potential. If we are facing financial difficulties, relationship difficulties, health problems or whatever, the key to victory is to generate the fighting spirit of the Buddha through our faith. We can describe the Buddhist faith as a discipline for putting oneself in agreement—establishing life resonance—with the universal Buddha nature.

Our expanded life will enable us to embrace other people—to be compassionate for the sufferings of others. Soudy explains that “I spent every moment I could shar-

ing and teaching others what I knew about this Buddhism that had changed my life” (Ibid.).

NICHIREN Daishonin teaches us to pour all our determination into every aspect of our lives. In 1278, he wrote a letter of encouragement to Shijo Kingo, who was being persecuted by his lord for practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The Daishonin obliterated any differences between the religious and secular worlds by saying: “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra. No affairs of life or work are in any way different from the ultimate reality” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 270).

By applying our faith to our activities each day, by doing our best, we are also contributing to the goal of kosen-rufu. SGI President Ikeda explains:

Human life and work for peace represent struggles between positive and negative energy. Throughout human history, the

triumph of the positive has required each individual to conquer his or her own negative aspects and convert them to positive aspects. Though it might seem circuitous, this is actually the shortest, most direct way to the goal, the attainment of which is the reason for the existence of Buddhism and the human revolution.

A person with powerful life energy exerts a great influence for orienting companions in a common direction. People of strong faith initiate flows of energy as surely as pressure differential causes air currents to flow from areas of high to areas of low atmospheric pressure. To facilitate encounters making these things possible, we must abbreviate social boundary lines and lower social barriers. (*Choose Peace*, pp. 74–75) □

1. *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 268–69.

**“Upsetting Attachments and Arousing Doubts”
—A Great Jolt That Induces a Revolutionary Leap in Consciousness**

This is the twenty-third installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the December 1996 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This installment covers the first part of their discussion of the “Emerging from the Earth” (fifteenth) chapter, which marks the opening of the essential teaching, or latter half, of the Lotus Sutra. At the chapter’s outset, countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear from within the earth. The sight of these vast legions of bodhisattvas fills Maitreya and Shakyamuni’s other disciples with surprise and doubt.

The discussion here centers on the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts.”

Katsuji Saito: The theme for 1997 is the Year of Advancement toward the New Century. The dawn of the twenty-first century is now just ahead. I hope we can proceed with renewed determination in our discussion on the Lotus Sutra, as we now turn to the latter half of the sutra, or the “essential teaching.”

Daisaku Ikeda: The most crucial act in our drama begins now. Both in our efforts for kosen-rufu and in our study movement, we need



now to display our underlying strength and ability to the fullest. What we accomplish from here on is what really counts. The brilliant essential phase of our movement now begins. Let us redouble our efforts.

At the same time, let’s put even more effort into this series of discussions. Together let’s discuss and clarify the essence of Buddhism! This is my ardent desire.

Takanori Endo: The transition from the theoretical teaching (first

half of the Lotus Sutra) to the essential teaching (latter half) represents a dramatic revolution. That’s because as we enter the essential teaching, the way of thinking that prevails in the theoretical teaching is completely overturned. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth both symbolize and are the catalyst of this revolution in awareness.

Haruo Suda: When the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear, the other bodhisattvas and beings

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA

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



taking part in the Ceremony in the Air are so startled that they begin to have doubts about what Shakyamuni has been preaching up to this point—that he attained enlightenment in this lifetime. This illustrates the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts,” or causing uncertainty in people’s minds about the ideas to which they have been attached. Having doubt cast on the correctness of their current beliefs allows them to open their eyes to a higher

plane of awareness.

Ikeda: Their surprise, shock and doubt represent the reaction of all those believing in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, as well as the Lotus Sutra’s theoretical teaching. “Upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” indicates a sudden overturning of the beliefs and convictions that people have held up to that point. It is a decisive blow to the foundation of an existing worldview. Through this dramatic overturning of the val-

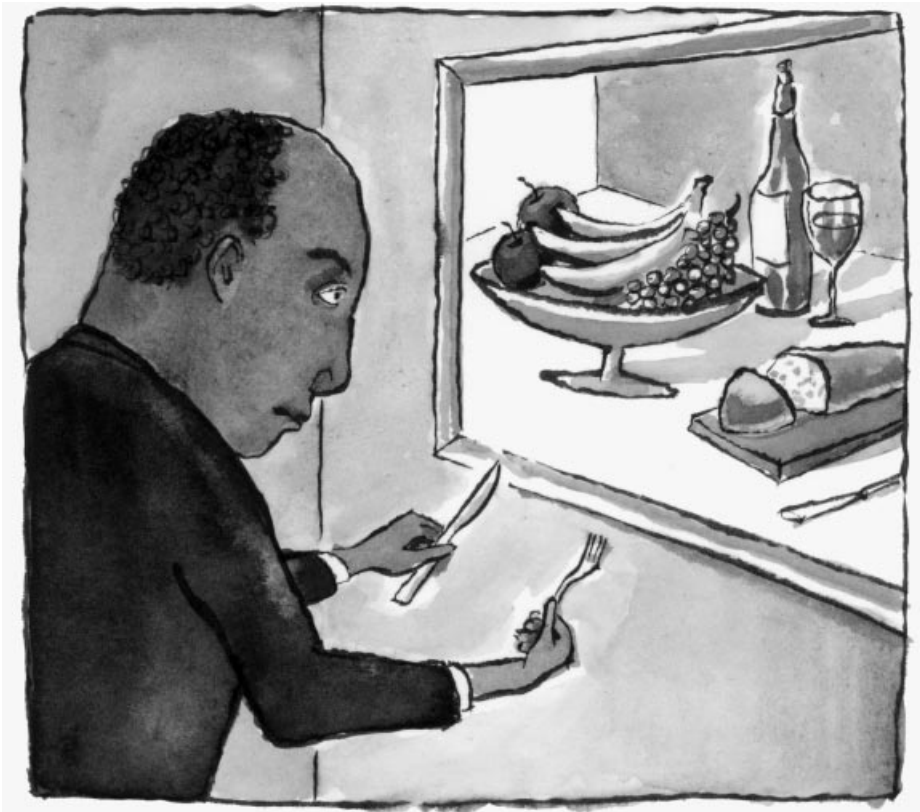
ues the people were familiar and comfortable with, Shakyamuni reveals his true identity, his true state of life.

Suda: Philosophy has been described as “the product of wonder.”¹ The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) writes, “The spirit marches from surprise to surprise.”² In that sense, we could perhaps say that this “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” in the Lotus Sutra sparks an important development in Buddhist thought.

Ikeda: On a deeper level, it amounts to a spiritual revolution that completely transforms people’s views of life, human existence, the world and society. Uncovering this significance concealed in the “Emerging from the Earth” and “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapters provides a potent treatment for the ills of modern civilization, which now stands at a crossroads.

**Countless Bodhisattvas
Emerge from the Earth**

When the Buddha spoke these words, the earth of the thousand-millionfold countries of the *saha* world all trembled and split open, and out of it emerged at the same instant immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas.³ The bodies of these bodhisattvas were all golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness. Previously they had all been dwelling in the world of empty space underneath the *saha* world. But when these bodhi-



Even though they understand that all people have the Buddha nature, this alone is insufficient. That's because without the clarification of the teaching in the "Life Span" chapter, the path for all beings to attain Buddhahood has no more substance than, for example, a picture of food in a painting.

sattvas heard the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha speaking, they came up from below.

Each one of these bodhisattvas was the leader of his own great assembly, and each brought with him a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. (LS15, 213)⁴

"The Thus Come One wishes now to summon forth and declare the wisdom of the Buddhas, the freely exercised transcendental power of the Buddhas, the power of the Buddhas that has the lion's ferocity, the fierce and greatly forceful power of the Buddhas." (LS15, 218)

Saito: Let us now consider the flow of the text.

Suda: The title "Emerging from

the Earth" refers to the appearance from within the ground of those bodhisattvas who will spread the Mystic Law after Shakyamuni's death. They are called Bodhisattvas of the Earth because they emerge from the earth.

Ikeda: The time after the Buddha's passing means the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law; that is, the eternal future. Pervading the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha's immense sense of responsibility to lead all people over the course of eternity to happiness. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth themselves embody this responsibility, compassion and wisdom. They are a gathering of great benefactors who are working to elevate the spiritual state of humankind. And we are their forerunners. This is truly amazing. Our mission is tremendous.

Endo: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear at the start of the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter. Up to this point, the central theme from the "Teacher of the Law" (tenth) chapter through the "Peaceful Practices" (fourteenth) chapter has been the question of whom Shakyamuni can entrust with the task of propagating the teaching after his death. The voice-hearers, even though they have received specific prophecies that in the future they will become Buddhas, aspire to spread the teaching not in the strife-ridden *saha* world but in other lands.

By contrast, in the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, the bodhisattvas vow to spread the teaching in the *saha* world, even if it means having to endure the attacks of the three powerful enemies. The theoretical

teaching thus ends in such a way as to give the clear impression that the “baton” of the propagation of the Mystic Law will be passed to these bodhisattvas.

Suda: Then, at the start of the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter, the bodhisattvas who had joined the assembly from other worlds vow to spread the Mystic Law in the saha world after Shakyamuni’s passing. This is the pledge of these bodhisattvas of high attainment who have gathered from throughout the universe. From the way things develop, one feels sure that Shakyamuni will entrust them with this great mission.

Saito: Shakyamuni’s first statement in the essential teaching therefore comes as a complete surprise: “Leave off, good men!” he tells them. “There is no need for you to protect this sutra” (LS15, 212). When he said this, the entire assembly must have recoiled in shock. Everyone doubted their ears at these words; they must have felt as though their hearts had stopped beating. But Shakyamuni’s next words surprise them even more.

Suda: Yes. For he then says: “Why? Because in this *saha* world of mine there are bodhisattvas ... who are as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges” (LS15, 212ñ13). And he explains that these bodhisattvas will spread the sutra. Next, the earth trembles and splits open and countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth come forth. In appearance they are magnificent. They are described as “golden in hue, with the thirty-

two features and an immeasurable brightness” (LS15, 213).

Ikeda: It’s a momentous scene. Their entry is most dramatic. The earth splits open and countless bodhisattvas appear in unison. Moreover, each of them emits a golden light. Nowhere in any sutra are there any bodhisattvas as brilliant as these Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Even the bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings and the bodhisattvas who have gathered from other lands are struck with admiration.

Comparing the two groups, Nichiren Daishonin says that the bodhisattvas already present at the assembly “seemed like a pack of apes or monkeys, with the new bodhisattvas appearing among them like so many Taishakus⁵” (MW-2, 121 [142]).⁶ The sutra explains just how noble the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are.

Suda: Yes. It describes them as follows:

Firm in the power of will and concentration, with constant diligence seeking wisdom, they expound various wonderful doctrines and their minds are without fear. (LS15, 220)

It also says that they are “skillfully learning the bodhisattva way, / unsoiled by worldly things / like the lotus flower in the water” (LS15, 222). And:

They are clever at difficult questions and answers, their minds know no fear. They have firmly cultivated a persevering mind,

upright in dignity and virtue. (LS15, 223)

Endo: It’s like a description of the Buddha.

Saito: In a sense, they might have been even more magnificent than the Buddha himself. If Shakyamuni is compared to a youth of twenty-five years, then the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in appearance like great elders with a hundred years of rich life experience.

The Daishonin says of the appearance of these Bodhisattvas of the Earth:

Solemn, dignified, they were beings of great and lofty stature. Aside from Shakyamuni, Taho [Many Treasures] and the emanations of Shakyamuni from the ten directions, they were worthy of being good friends upon whom all beings could rely. (MW-2, 121 [143])

Ikeda: In other words, he says they towered above others like great mountains over small hills, and were true leaders on whom all people could rely.

Suda: Each of the bodhisattvas is also the leader of a great assembly, as they brought with them a “retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges,” or retinues “equal to the sands of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges” or “only one thousand, one hundred, or ten” followers (LS15, 213).

The sands of one Ganges indicates the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River of India. Since sixty thousand

Ganges means sixty thousand times this truly enormous number, the figures here are utterly beyond reckoning. This might be impossible even for a supercomputer to calculate.

Endo: Narrowly defined, “retinues” means a Buddha’s family members. But in a broad sense, it indicates all who receive a Buddha’s teaching.

Ikeda: That’s right. And the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is certainly not disorderly or confused. They are vital, energetic and free; but at the same time they are united and harmonious. In a sense, this is the image of an ideal organization.

Saito: We often say that the SGI is an organization that exists and is advancing in accord with the Buddha’s decree, but I think we need to carefully consider what this means.

Suda: The first thing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth do is bow to the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures who are seated within the Treasure Tower. Then they go around to the innumerable Buddhas who have gathered from the worlds in the ten directions and praise them in various ways. For countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to greet countless Buddhas takes time. The sutra says that although this takes the long period of “fifty small kalpas”⁷ (LS15, 214), Shakyamuni uses his supernatural powers to make it seem to those in the assembly like only half a day.

Endo: It must have been tremendously engrossing. By contrast,

when you are bored even an hour can seem like an eternity.

Surprise at the Magnificent Relationship of Mentor and Disciple

Ikeda: In praising these Buddhas with the utmost respect, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are actually praising the eternal oneness of mentor and disciple. A Buddha lives each moment with the greatest sense of fulfillment, fully awakened to the truth that the present moment is itself eternity. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact also Buddhas whose lives are illuminated by the awareness that the present moment is one with eternity. This, in other words, is a meeting between Buddhas. Therefore it is joyful. Accordingly even fifty small kalpas does not seem like a long time.

Next, representing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the four great leaders Superior Practices (Jp. Jogyo), Boundless Practices (Muhengyo), Pure Practices (Jyogyo) and Firmly Established Practices (Anryugyo) begin conversing with Shakyamuni. Their discussion is about the great objective of leading all people to enlightenment.

Suda: Yes. They press their palms together and say to Shakyamuni, “World-Honored One, are your illnesses few, are your worries few, are your practices proceeding comfortably?” (LS15, 214)

Saito: That’s a standard way of greeting the Buddha. The Buddhas of the worlds in the ten directions extend Shakyamuni the same greeting on their arrival. But the four bodhisattvas then

follow by asking: “Do those whom you propose to save readily receive instruction? Does the effort not cause the World-Honored One to become weary and spent?” (LS15, 214)

Ikeda: This shows their heartfelt concern for Shakyamuni’s well-being. Their attitude is completely different from that of the voicehearers who, in their state of abject dependence, sometimes express doubts or complaints.

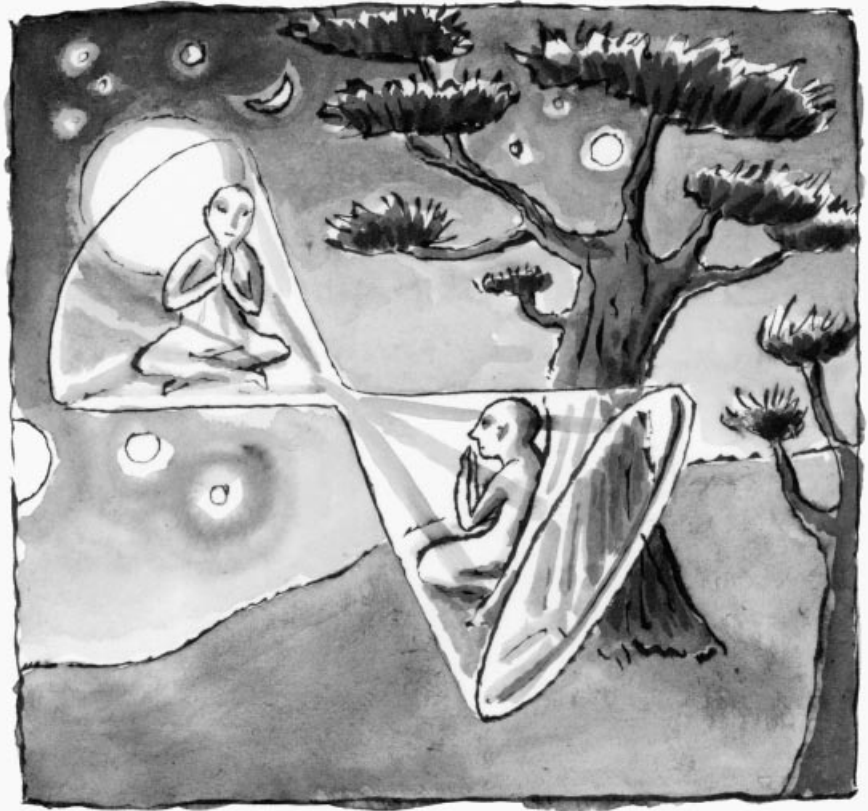
It’s on a different level, but I was always concerned about my mentor Josei Toda’s health. Whenever I saw him, I tried to get a sense for whether he was tired, how he was feeling. And President Toda was even more concerned about my health. If I was perspiring, he would say to me: “Dai, you should change shirts right away. Otherwise you’ll catch cold.” He was truly a wonderful mentor.

From the conversation between the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and Shakyamuni, we get a sense of profound heart-to-heart exchange. It is like a scene in a great painting.

Suda: Indeed. Shakyamuni says in reply:

... The Thus Come One is well and happy, with few ills and few worries. The living beings are readily converted and saved and I am not weary or spent. Why? Because for age after age in the past the living beings have constantly received my instruction.... So when these living beings see me for the first time and listen to my preaching, they all immediately believe and accept it, entering into the wisdom of the

Up to that point, Maitreya and the others in the assembly had all believed that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment in his present lifetime when he sat in meditation beneath the bodhi tree. They all supposed he had attained Buddhahood for the first time in his present existence as a result of an arduous practice carried out over many previous existences.



Thus Come One.... (LS15, 214-5)

"I'm all right," he says in effect. "You don't need to worry. I will lead all people to happiness without fail."

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth praise Shakyamuni: "Excellent, excellent, great hero, World-Honored One! ... We are accordingly overjoyed" (LS15, 215). And Shakyamuni in turn praises the Bodhisattvas of the Earth for having aroused a spirit of rejoicing in their hearts.

Endo: Shakyamuni's disciples who have been at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra all along are quite surprised by this exchange. A succession of events totally inexplicable to them has unfolded. First there was the appearance of the Treasure Tower, then the gather-

ing of the Buddhas from the worlds in the ten directions, and the opening of the Ceremony in the Air. All of this was unprecedented; yet they have somehow managed to understand and believe. And now there is the additional surprise of the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It is easy to imagine that if one were at the scene, one would be totally dumbfounded by this point.

Saito: Giving expression to the wonderment felt by all in the great assembly, Bodhisattva Maitreya asks Shakyamuni:

a great host of bodhisattvas
such as was never seen in the
past—
I beg the most honored of two-
legged beings to explain
where they have come from,

what causes and conditions
bring them together! (LS15,
216)

Ikeda: This is the famous "question of Maitreya." This great question is what prompts Shakyamuni to expound the "Life Span" chapter, his quintessential teaching. Questions are very important. Shakyamuni therefore praises him saying, "Excellent, excellent, Ajita, that you should question the Buddha about this great affair" (LS15, 218).

Saito: The attendants serving the Buddhas who are Shakyamuni's emanations from other lands ask the Buddhas who are their respective teachers the same question that Maitreya has asked: "World-Honored One, this great multitude of immeasurable, boundless *asamkhyas* of bodhisattvas—

An important development of the essential teaching is that people are guided to seek out their own inherent brilliance. The “Emerging from the Earth” chapter directs all people to the greatness of their own lives through the grand preaching that calls forth countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

where did they come from?” (LS15, 218)

The Buddhas then admonish their attendants saying:

... Good men, wait a moment. There is a bodhisattva and mahasattva named Maitreya who has received a prophecy from Shakyamuni Buddha that he will be the next hereafter to become a Buddha. He has already inquired about this matter and the Buddha is now about to answer him. You should take this opportunity to listen to what he says. (LS15, 218)

Ikeda: This is very interesting phrasing. The fact that, among the vast number of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers who have a profound connection with Shakyamuni,



muni, Maitreya is the one to ask this question has deep significance.

Saito: Maitreya, who is also called Ajita, is known as the bodhisattva who will succeed Shakyamuni Buddha after his next rebirth and become a Buddha after Shakyamuni. He enjoys high standing even among Shakyamuni’s most senior disciples. Maitreya’s ques-

tion raises an important issue that had not been resolved in the theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra.

Ikeda: Yes. Even though they understand that all people have the Buddha nature and have received specific prophecies that they will attain enlightenment in the future, this alone is insuffi-



cient. That's because without the clarification of the teaching in the "Life Span" chapter that Shakyamuni actually attained enlightenment in the remote past, the path for all beings to attain Buddhahood has no more substance than, for example, a picture of food in a painting.

I will discuss this in detail later, but for the time being suffice it to

say that the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is indispensable for clarifying the eternity of Shakyamuni's life. And it is in response to Maitreya's question that Shakyamuni expounds his true teaching.

Suda: The reply that Shakyamuni gives is more surprising still. For he reveals that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are people he has been instructing since the remote past in this saha world.

Endo: That's the line where he says, "Ever since the long distant past / I have been teaching and converting this multitude" (LS15, 220).

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China interprets this passage as constituting the "abbreviated opening of the near and the revelation of the distant" (where "near" means the teaching that Shakyamuni first attained Buddhahood in his present lifetime in India, and "distant" means the teaching that he actually attained enlightenment in the remote past).⁸ He calls it this because it explains in summary the "opening of the near and the revelation of the distant" that is expounded more completely in the "Life Span" chapter that follows.

Suda: This comes as a great shock. Up to that point, Maitreya and the others in the assembly had all believed that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment in his present lifetime when he sat in meditation beneath the bodhi tree. They all supposed he had attained Buddhahood for the first time in his present existence as a result of an arduous practice carried out over many previous existences.

This is known as the view of Shakyamuni's "attaining enlightenment during his lifetime in India."

Saito: The teaching of his "actual attainment of enlightenment in the remote past" has not yet been spelled out in its entirety. Still, Shakyamuni's statements here decidedly contradict the view that he attained enlightenment for the first time in his present lifetime in India.

Suda: The members of the assembly are utterly baffled at seeing for the first time these countless legions of Shakyamuni's disciples, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Everything they had believed up to this point about Shakyamuni now rings hollow. It all comes crashing down. They could not have been more shocked if the ground on which they were standing had suddenly flipped over and switched places with the sky.

Saito: This illustrates the principle of "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts." Their attachments crumble and they are filled with great doubt. Maitreya, again voicing the thoughts on everyone's mind, then asks:

World-Honored One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince, you left the palace of the Shakyas and sat in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya, and there attained *anut-tara-samyak-sambodhi* [the supreme perfect enlightenment]. Barely forty years or more have passed since then. World-Honored One, how in that short time could you have

accomplished so much work as a Buddha? ...

Suppose, for example, that a young man of twenty-five, with ruddy complexion and hair still black, should point to someone who was a hundred years old and say, "This is my son!" ... This would be hard to believe, and so too is what the Buddha says....

"... We ourselves have faith in the Buddha, believing that he preaches in accordance with what is appropriate, that the words spoken by the Buddha are never false, and that the Buddha's knowledge is in all cases penetrating and comprehensive. Nevertheless, in the period after the Buddha has entered extinction, if bodhisattvas who have just begun to aspire to enlightenment should hear these words, they will perhaps not believe or accept them but will be led to commit the crime of rejecting the Law. Therefore, World-Honored One, we beg you to explain so we may put aside our doubts, and so that, in future ages when good men hear of this matter, they will not entertain doubts!" (LS15, 220–22)

The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter closes with this question from Maitreya.

A Great Transformation in People's Perception of the Buddha

Suda: Maitreya's question, being very candid, clearly illustrates the great turmoil that is in the hearts of the disciples.

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin says,

"this present doubt was the greatest doubt of all"; and "If the Buddha had failed to dispel Miroku's [Maitreya's] doubts, the sacred teachings of his entire lifetime would have amounted to no more than froth on the water, and all living beings would have remained tangled in the snare of doubt" (MW-2, 125–26 [147–48]). It could be said that this is the fundamental question on which the enlightenment of all people hinges.

Suda: In the first place, the assembly is surprised at the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth—bodhisattvas whom they, including even the most experienced Maitreya, had never seen or heard of—who in the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter suddenly bound forth from within the earth.

Endo: While the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are frequently described as "equal in number to sixty thousand Ganges sands," this is in fact but a mere fraction of their total number. If their followers and retinues are included, their number is truly "immeasurable, boundless, beyond anything that can be known through calculation, simile or parable" (LS15, 213). Their number far surpasses human comprehension.

Saito: In appearance, moreover, unbelievable as it may seem, they are even more splendid than Shakyamuni. Nevertheless, their attitude in greeting Shakyamuni is most humble and respectful. They are filled with a spirit of great respect for their mentor.

Endo: On that point, the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching may still have been lacking

somewhat in respect for their teacher. They might have taken him somewhat for granted.

Ikeda: Maitreya knew of Shakyamuni's practices in his previous lives. What's more he was a person of great wisdom who had grasped the principle Shakyamuni revealed in the theoretical teaching that all people can attain Buddhahood.

But with the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the very foundation of what Maitreya believed up to that time was demolished. "Just who is this person Shakyamuni that he is being reverently greeted by this multitude of great bodhisattvas?" he must have wondered. Seeing for himself these mysterious disciples from the remote past—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—causes him to wonder, "What is the truth about my mentor?" "What is my mentor's true identity?" In other words, the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth brings on a great transformation in how people view the Buddha.

Saito: They must have thought: "We were mistaken about the identity of the World-Honored One. He may be a much greater Buddha than we had imagined. Have we ever really known our mentor's true greatness?"

Ikeda: That's right. This is the condition Shakyamuni describes in the "Life Span" chapter where he says that living beings "do not see me even when close by" (LS16, 229). At the very least, Maitreya senses this. This brings him to reflect on where he stands as the disciple of so great a Buddha as Shakyamuni: "What does

The Italian Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) adopted the heliocentric theory and developed a new view of the world based on the idea that the universe is boundless. This overturned the common sense of his contemporaries, who believed that the earth was the center of the universe and could not possibly be in motion.



it mean to live my life together with this great World-Honored One?"

An important development of the essential teaching is that people are guided to seek out their own inherent brilliance. The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter directs all people to the greatness of their own lives through the grand preaching that calls forth countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Suda: These disciples—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—arise in quick succession. Their appearance is all too dazzling. "If our mentor's disciples are this splendid," the others muse, "then he must truly be amazing." I think this appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in response to Shakyamuni's call well illustrates the true nature of the relationship

of mentor and disciple.

Endo: I may be presumptuous in making this comparison, but I heard the following account from someone in the Kansai area. He told me that when you, President Ikeda, took the lead in that region's activities, everyone was really moved by that alone. However, you displayed all the more thoroughness and seriousness in matters pertaining to your mentor Josei Toda. Your spirit to serve your mentor left a truly inspiring impression on all. The complete earnestness of your actions and words toward President Toda displayed a dedication that gave people a feeling of momentousness. Observing your behavior allowed everyone to understand what an outstanding person President Toda was.

Saito: The transition to the essen-

tial teaching of the Lotus Sutra thus begins with all of Shakyamuni's disciples from the infinite past assembled before him.

Looking back on the course followed in the theoretical teaching, we see that the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena in the "Expedient Means" (second) chapter clarifies that all people possess the Buddha nature. The disciples who hear this teaching dance for joy and resolve to set their sights on attaining the same state as the Buddha, and to undertake the actions of the bodhisattva. They say that they have well understood the Buddha's intent.

But when we come to the essential teaching and the vow of the disciples present to spread the teaching after Shakyamuni's passing, they are adamantly rejected. It is as though Shakya-



Therein lies the fundamental cause for the sense of helplessness in the world today. Convinced of their own insignificance, people have ceased even to question things. They live complacently, unquestioning. Such spiritual sterility makes people smaller still. However, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra breaks down the petty limitations that people set on their lives.

muni himself overturns all he has taught up to this point.

Endo: “Why should he say such a thing now after we’ve resolved to do what he’s asked of us?” they might have wondered, somewhat crestfallen.

Ikeda: When we come to the essential teaching, everything Shakyamuni has taught up to that point is fundamentally overturned. The theoretical teaching reveals a succession of important doctrines; these include the true entity of life, the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles (the voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*), the enlightenment of women, and the enlightenment of evil people. In addition, predictions of future enlightenment were bestowed on Shariputra, the disciple reputed to be fore-

most in wisdom, and Shakyamuni’s other disciples who had comprehended these doctrines.

But in an instant, all of this becomes meaningless. That’s because the very foundation of these teachings, the premise upon which they were based, has fallen apart.

Saito: In “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin says:

When we come to the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, then the belief that Shakyamuni first obtained Buddhahood during his present lifetime is demolished, and the effects of the four teachings are likewise demolished. When the effects of the four teachings are demolished, the causes of the four teachings are likewise demolished. (MW-2, 88 [103–04])

In other words, Shakyamuni himself rejects his earlier teaching about the causes leading to the effect of his Buddhahood, which was based on the premise that he had attained enlightenment for the first time in the present existence.

Ikeda: That’s right. His denial of the “effect of Buddhahood” expounded in these teachings amounts to a denial of the “cause of Buddhahood” undertaken with that aim. He thus completely refutes people’s understanding of the causes and effects of his enlightenment. It is a revolution with truly Copernican implications.

Endo: Speaking of Copernicus (1473–1543), the revolution in thought for which he is credited from the view that the heav-

ens move and the earth is stationary to the view that the earth moves—entailed a tremendous “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts.”

In a speech, Mr. Ikeda, you once described the final events in the life of the Italian Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). Bruno adopted the heliocentric theory and developed a new view of the world based on the idea that the universe is boundless. This overturned the common sense of his contemporaries, who believed that the earth was the center of the universe and could not possibly be in motion.

Suda: We cannot fathom the extent to which people’s thinking was constrained by traditional views of the world. As for reaction to the idea that the earth revolved around the sun, reportedly many people had the attitude that they did not want to believe it even if it were true.

Ikeda: That was probably the honest sentiment of many. “Even if I am called ignorant for not accepting this,” they might have thought, “I prefer ignorance to having my world destroyed.” To have one’s common sense—the basic assumptions in which one has believed and relied—overturned is extremely painful. It is very hard to accept.

The doctrine expounded in the essential teaching came as perhaps even more of a shock. The essential teaching reveals for the first time the eternity of the Buddha’s life over the three existences of past, present and future. That’s a dramatic revelation, one that fundamentally overturns Shakyamuni’s previous teaching. It is a revolution in how people view the Buddha.

A Movement That Shakes Up Existing Value Systems

Saito: Seen from that perspective, we might say the Daishonin’s practice of shakubuku was itself a great attempt to “upset attachments and arouse doubts” in the people of his day. Wasn’t it a struggle to shake up the existing Buddhist establishment?

Ikeda: The impact was not limited to the world of Buddhism. He also “upset attachments and aroused doubts” in the minds of those in power in the Kamakura government, those allied with the government, and in general throughout the populace.

He essentially refuted mistaken views of religion and faith that had prevailed up to that time. Many people’s beliefs about life, society and the people were entirely overturned. That there was a great reaction against the Daishonin is only natural. It is inconceivable that he could have failed to encounter difficulties.

Endo: SGI members are carrying out the practice of propagation just as the Daishonin taught. In consequence, they, too, “upset attachments and arouse doubts” in society.

Saito: In the case of Japan, certainly, the tendency of most people is to suppose that religion concerns only a select group; or, conversely, that it makes no difference what religion people believe in. In such an environment, Soka Gakkai members are

seriously discussing the truth and error of religions, and asserting the correctness of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. There is no doubt that in many instances, their efforts have had an earthshaking effect.

Suda: More than just a matter of surprise, many people have become livid with anger. To begin with, Japan has a cultural climate in which even the spirit of propagation, the very life of religion, has been lost. The spirit to determine through dialogue what is true and what is erroneous in matters of religion is itself lacking. The disposition expressed in the saying “Yield to the powerful” has deep roots indeed.

Japanese people seek solace in ambiguity and tend to dislike anything that clarifies matters in black-and-white terms. Perhaps it is only natural, therefore, that the conviction of Soka Gakkai members who don’t mince words in religious matters has aroused a negative reaction. Moreover, because the existing order is shaken by this movement of the Soka Gakkai to open people’s eyes to the correctness of Buddhism, it has unavoidably invited suppression by those in power.

Ikeda: The greater the degree to which attachments are upset and doubt aroused, the greater the difficulties that will arise. Since we are “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” in order to fundamentally improve the lives of all people, it is impossible for us not to face tremendous obstacles.

Also, our efforts have the world as their focus. We are implementing the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” on the global



Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, they become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental power we have as human beings to break through all differences—whether of ethnicity, race, gender or social standing—and lead people to happiness.

stage. While spreading peace and culture, education and friendship, we are steadily changing people's views about Buddhism and about what it means to be human.

Saito: This reminds me of something we talked about at the start of this series. At that time, President Ikeda, you said that all human endeavor is inspired by the effort to answer the questions: "Where do we come from?" "Where are we going?" and "Why are we here?" It would seem that the view of the Buddha as eternal, which develops in the "Emerging from the Earth" and "Life Span" chapters, certainly offers a reply to those questions.

Suda: Petrarch (1304–74), the poet laureate of the Renaissance, writes, "Often have I wondered with much curiosity as to our com-

ing into this world and what will follow our departure."⁹ He asked why we had been born, where we came from and where we went after death. For Petrarch, to speculate about the disposition of fish and fowl without the spirit to pursue answers to such fundamental questions testifies to humankind's nonchalance about life.

Ikeda: That's exactly right. Never before have people been so oblivious to their own existence, nor have they looked down on themselves as so inconsequential and insignificant as they do now. Within the immense systems of modern society, people's hearts are shrouded in a sense of powerlessness; they feel: "My own ability is trifling. Nothing I do will change the world. All I can manage is simply to try to keep up with society."

Saito: Therein lies the fundamental cause for the sense of helplessness in the world today. Convinced of their own insignificance, people have ceased even to question things. They live complacently, unquestioning. Such spiritual sterility makes people smaller still. However, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra breaks down the petty limitations that people set on their lives.

Ikeda: Yes. The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter breaks through the frozen earth of resignation, the sense that "this is the way it has to be." It is a struggle to reveal before the entire world the underlying power and towering dignity of humanity and of the people.

Suda: President Ikeda, when you

met with Dr. Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya of the Institute of the Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Science [in February 1996], I was impressed by Dr. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya's comments on the "eternal Buddha" of the "Life Span" chapter. She said she felt the "Life Span" chapter explained the state in which the individual fuses with the Buddha. She suggested that in this state the energy of the universe becomes one's own energy, and that one experiences the eternal.

Ikeda: That's a keen insight. Don't the Bodhisattvas of the Earth themselves embody this state of fusion with the Buddha, of oneness with the universe? Though we speak of them as bodhisattvas, they are in fact Buddhas.

Where have the Bodhisattvas of the Earth come from? The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai says that they dwell in "the ultimate depths of life, that being the absolute reality."¹⁰ In other words, they represent the truth in the depths of life, the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the wellspring of the universe and the fundamental power of life. It is the ultimate expression of wisdom, and the foundation of all laws and principles. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth embody that fundamental energy. Moreover, they are committed to the bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva is not a stage of completion (the effect of Buddhahood), but of incompleteness (the cause of Buddhahood). Bodhisattvas, while incomplete, cause their lives to overflow with the

state of completion (the effect of Buddhahood). To put it another way, while partaking in a state of life of boundless joy and completion (the effect of Buddhahood), a bodhisattva at the same time takes action to advance further ahead, to ascend ever higher, and to lead still more people to enlightenment. In other words, it is a state of "incomplete completeness."

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are eternal activists who base themselves on the Mystic Law; theirs are lives of eternal advancement. Our summoning forth the bounding energy of these bodhisattvas constitutes the "emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth" within our own being. When we do this, we can break through the shell of the small self that has hitherto constrained our lives.

Saito: Certainly, if we were not practicing faith, it would be all we could manage simply to take care of ourselves. In all likelihood, we wouldn't have the latitude to try to help people who are miserable become happy. And probably the thought of trying to change the country or of changing the destiny of humankind would have never even occurred to us.

Endo: But through the SGI, we have learned about the Gohonzon and have been able to lead incomparably greater lives than we might have otherwise. As the saying goes, "A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles" (MW-2, 25 [30]). This thought fills me with immense gratitude.

Ikeda: It comes down to people revolutionizing their state of life.

From a broad perspective, our efforts to cause countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge—to help many people revolutionize their lives—amount to a struggle to change the state of life of society at large. It is a struggle to elevate the state of all humankind. Isn't this the transformation that "breaking through the earth" symbolizes?

Saito: In that sense, the preconception held by those in the assembly of the Lotus Sutra—that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time during his present lifetime in India—is indicative of their confusion about the origin of their own lives. They don't understand the eternal energy of life that is the foundation and wellspring of their own existence. This is comparable to the delusion of people in modern society.

Ikeda: That's right. Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, they become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental power we have as human beings to break through all differences—whether of ethnicity, race, gender or social standing—and lead people to happiness. We are plain and unadorned ordinary people; we are thoroughly human and infinitely courageous. This is the pride of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is an earthshaking event attesting to the greatness of the underlying power of life. We have to convey this to people throughout the world. The transformation of the percep-



He is saying: You must not lament! Because great evil exists, great good is sure to follow. You should advance, dancing joyfully and in high spirits, just as the bodhisattvas leapt forth, dancing, from the earth. We are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Therefore, let us vigorously dance forth from within the "great earth" of the people.

tion of the Buddha in the essential teaching amounts to a fundamental transformation in the perception of human beings.

Endo: Yes. The Nobel prize laureate Dr. John Eccles [who received the prize for medicine and physiology in 1963] comments on the superstition of the present age as follows:

It takes no deep philosophical insight to recognize the connection between what a person does and what a person thinks he is, between what others expect of us and what they think of us. So close is this connection that much of social and political history can be understood in just these terms. Whether one takes human beings to be "children of God,"

"tools of production," "matter in motion," or "a species of primate" has consequences.¹¹

He says that modern people are benighted by what he terms the superstitions of materialism and environmental determinism, and argues that they should question those superstitions. He also says:

One need only consider such phrases as "the divine right of kings" or "the African is a slave by nature" or "Pharaoh is the living god" to recall how entire epochs have been colored and shaped by eccentric theories about ourselves and others.

But every epoch is generally far more uncritical about its own perspective than about those embraced by an earlier age.¹²

Saito: The view of humanity that people today suppose to be self-evident may well be seen by later generations to be greatly distorted.

Suda: The ideas that Dr. Eccles terms the superstitions of the present age all tend to narrowly limit the parameters of human existence. For instance, although Buddhism teaches that the mind in fact expands to encompass all time and space, people today generally suppose it to reside only within the brain.

Endo: This is a case where "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" is necessary. For a society informed by such a view of human beings will inevitably become spiritually desolate and bereft of hope.

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Ikeda: This process of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” will be initiated by the voices and actions of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, just as in the Lotus Sutra they “upset attachments and arouse doubts” through their grand appearance. In any event, we can take the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth today as an overture setting the stage for the global revolution that will continue over the course of the twenty-first, twenty-second and twenty-third centuries, and throughout eternity.

The Daishonin calls out to his followers:

Since the worst slander already prevails throughout the country, the supreme True Law will spread without fail. What have any of you to regret? Although you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should leap for joy! Although you are not Shariputra, you should rise and dance! When Bodhisattva Jogyo emerged from the earth, he leapt forth joyfully... (MW-5, 161)

He is saying: You must not lament! Because great evil exists, great good is sure to follow. You should advance, dancing joyfully and in high spirits, just as the bodhisattvas leapt forth, dancing, from the earth. We are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Therefore, let us vigorously dance forth from within the “great earth” of the people.

(To be continued)

Illustrations by Larry Ashton

1. *Bloomsbury Thematic Dictionary of Quotations* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, 1988), p. 291.
 2. Henri Bergson, *La pensÈe et le mouvant* (Geneva: ...ditions Albert Skira, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946), p. 91.
 3. Mahasattva: A great being, another term for a bodhisattva.
 4. 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 fol-

lowed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
 5. Taishaku (Skt. Shakra Devanam Indra) Together with Bonten (Brahma), one of the two principal tutelary gods of Buddhism.
 6. Editor’s note: Quotes from vol. 2 of *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
 7. Kalpa: An extremely long period of time deriving from ancient Indian tradition. There are various explanations of a kalpa, but all of them, except one, are metaphoric and defy exact compu-

tation. According to the one exception, a kalpa is 15,998,000 or approximately 16 million years long. A hundred kalpas, then, is about 1.6 billion years.
 8. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 9.
 9. *Petrarch’s Secret*, trans. William H. Draper (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911), author’s preface.
 10. *Hokke Mongu*, vol. 9.
 11. Sir John Eccles and Daniel N. Robinson, *The Wonder of Being Human: Our Brain and Our Mind* (New York: The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., 1984), p. 1.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures



OUR society is like a piano that is badly out of tune. So discordant is its melody that listeners are left with a sense of disquiet. Even when well-intentioned people play a heartfelt melody in this midst, their beautiful notes degenerate into jarring noise. How is such a piano to be tuned?

Amaral Vieira, the internationally acclaimed Brazilian composer and concert pianist, who is also the current president of the Brazilian Society of Musicology, remarked to me with a warm smile: "We live in a dualistic world. There is a plus and minus, a good and bad to everything. I believe music has the power to

lead us from disharmony to harmony." He also observed: "Today, everything is moving forward; everything but the human spirit. Music, a symphony of many sounds, can express the eternal, the universal, and the limitless.... Music has the power to change our emotions even transform the way we live. I want to contribute

Amaral Vieira — Internationally Acclaimed Brazilian Composer and Pianist

Sidney Lanier (1842–81), American poet and musician, has said that music is love in search of words. And isn't it the kind of pure-hearted love that brings happiness and encouragement to others that makes art great? A small-minded person, whose life is shriveled around a tiny core of ego, can produce only a petty and inferior kind of art. True art enhances our humanity. The heart of a great artist beats in time with the hearts of the people.

Mr. Vieira is well known for the intensity of all his performances. He says: "I relish each concert as an opportunity to reach my audience—people whom I may never see again. Some may come to my performances searching for hope. That's why I take my concerts so seriously."

He is utterly without the spoiled and selfish nature that we often regard as "artistic temperament." He has the strength to preserve his integrity as a human being, without becoming arrogant, without stagnating, and without becoming influenced by the superficial fashions of the times.

The Brazilian pianist declares:

to a new era of harmony by reviving the human spirit through music."

Mr. Vieira's eyes shine with a crystalline strength and clarity that is like the purity and undefiled innocence of a child—they seem to embody the art of music.

The fine arts, by definition, should strive toward perfection in

bringing out the best and the brightest of humanity. In reality, however, exactly the opposite can be true in many cases. In the midst of this, Mr. Vieira is regarded as a true musician, one who cares more about people than popularity. It isn't applause that he is after; his only thought is to bring others joy.

Peninsula of Salvador

JEREMY HONER/CORBIS



SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda have a reunion with Brazilian pianist and composer Amaral Vieira and his wife, Yara, in Tokyo, April 1994.

"We mustn't become robots. Mechanical performances are of no value. We mustn't become complacent but should always be reaching for the next stage of our development. Isn't that the meaning of *soka*—to create value?"

Mr. Vieira's remarkable life seems to point to an innate mission. Although he did not come from a musical family, he began playing the piano at the age of 6. Listening to the piano lessons of his sister, five years his senior, he fell in love with the sound. He told his sister, who wasn't all that enthusiastic about her lessons, "You just play for five minutes, and I'll play the remaining fifty-five." While their parents thought their daughter was practicing, she in fact sat nearby reading a book, while their son played the piano. When young Amaral tried to persuade his parents to let him go to music school, they discouraged him, saying that a boy should be out playing soccer instead of sit-

ting at the piano. But he was not to be deterred.

The famous Brazilian composer and conductor Souza Lima recognized the young boy's talent and arranged to give him special private lessons. Lima said: "I'll teach you, but on one condition. I won't make special allowances for you because you are young. I will treat you as an adult."

Mr. Vieira began composing music at the tender age of 8. In 1965, when he was 13, he went to Paris to study alone. His entire family was strongly opposed to this move, which, considering his age, was perhaps not unjustifiable. The thought must have caused them untold worry. They finally agreed to let him go, however, on the condition that he phone home every ten days. He eventually passed the examinations for the Paris Conservatoire with top marks.

Living alone in Paris, he had to become entirely self-sufficient—

doing all his own cooking, cleaning, laundry, budgeting and paying bills. Whenever he called home, his mother would tell him, "If it's too hard, you can come home any time." But he always replied, "I'm doing fine"—in spite of the fact that he actually was finding it very difficult. "The hardships I encountered back then created the foundation of my personality as a musician and as a human being," he declares.

Eventually, he traveled to Germany and England to continue his studies. The boy became a young man. At age 25, he reached a turning point. He was recommended for the position of head of the Music Department at the distinguished Yehudi Menuhin School for musically gifted children in the United Kingdom. This was an enviable post, carrying with it both prestige and financial stability.

But Mr. Vieira hesitated. "I am a Brazilian," he thought. "Don't I

The Iguasso Falls viewed from Brazil and looking toward Argentina.



JEREMY HOMERCORRIS

have a duty to work for my country?" After a great deal of agonized soul-searching, he decided to return to Brazil. Everyone around him tried to dissuade him, saying that he was throwing away a golden opportunity. Today, Mr. Vieira recalls: "If I had accepted the offer then, I'm sure I wouldn't have developed to the extent that I did. I might have been blessed with opportunities, but my life would have been one without challenges. And it is challenge which makes us grow as human beings."

Mr. Vieira constantly reflects on his purpose. He has his philosophy, his code. He always determines to devote himself to a lofty purpose, transcending egotistical desires. It is this sense of mission that purifies the self, the arts and society.

After his return to his homeland, the Brazilian composer consistently devoted himself to offering genuine music for the people. In order to accomplish that, he has not only performed and composed music, he has also written many columns in newspapers and magazines; in addition, he has participated in music education programs for youth and musical exchanges with other nations.

"The nation of Brazil does not belong to the elite," he maintains. "It belongs to the people. No human being is better than any other. We are all the same, all equal."

He also says, "Musicians who do not share the same heart as the people cannot be called genuine — and neither can their music."

Mr. Vieira has been attacked

because he pursued his ideals and convictions. But the truth will not remain hidden. For his talent and accomplishments, he has received many awards, both from Brazil and from other countries, including the Arthur Honegger Composition Prize, the Grand Prix-Foundation de France and the Prix Liszt. The piece he wrote for me, "Sounds of Innovation," won Brazil's 1993 Symphony Award.

At our first meeting, Mr. Vieira told me how happy he was to be able to meet me. From that time on, he pledged to exert himself as a musical ambassador, conveying to the world through music our message of humanism, for which he had sought so long. He proclaims: "Those who believe we must devote our energies to culture after we have become a great nation have things backward. A nation never becomes great unless its culture flourishes at the same time."

Art is a form of self-expression. Someone has remarked that the reason Japanese artists don't produce true art today is that they lack a solid identity, a strong sense of self. No matter how popular it may be, any art that lacks the humility, honesty, thought,

philosophy and prayer to seek a higher perfection is ultimately mere vanity. Such shallow art cannot enrich the human spirit.

An old Chinese legend tells of a great musician who played the zither with such mastery that his music made a cool breeze blow in spring and brought on autumn, and even caused the trees and plants to bear their autumn fruits. When he played a different melody, he invoked summer; and then, again, his music changed the season to winter. And in a climactic finish, his music brought forth a perfumed breeze, auspicious clouds in the sky, and a bubbling spring from the earth all at once.

Spiritually charged music contains the power and harmony of the universe. It is the breath of divine life. Plato said that a change in music can change an entire society.

In this cacophonous, discordant age, we must open the door to our hearts and sing with joyous and vibrant voices. Through our great cultural movement of the people, we need to find new ways to "tune" the human spirit. Mr. Vieira continues to help us in this work by striking at the deepest chords of human feeling. □

Balancing Life As Mom and Artist

By Donna Estabrooks,
Belchertown, Mass.



Donna Estabrooks and Bruce MacPherson with their son, Ian, shown here at 11 weeks. "Bruce gives me 100 percent support in my Buddha's practice," says Donna.

I'VE always been encouraged by President Ikeda's guidance that says "now is the time to change," to take action. So I ask myself, "Do you wait for inspiration? Do you wait for things to be easy? Well, it's not going to be." So, I realize, this moment is the time to paint. I paint when my 6-month-old son is happy, or when he's asleep. No longer do I wait for inspiration!

It was difficult for me to have my own family—I had a miscarriage the day after Christmas in 1995, after nine weeks of an unplanned pregnancy. At the time it seemed as though I was so happy with my life. It was perfect and I was satisfied with it. I was living my dream. I was making a good living doing my fine art. I was living in the countryside on an organic farm and working at a

studio in the Northampton area. I was happy with my Buddhist practice and with my friends. I didn't really need to have children, but it wasn't that I decided I didn't want them either.

Six months after I miscarried, I was pregnant again. At the time I was working hard, painting over forty pieces, to create artwork for a 1997 calendar, a fundraising project for an organization called Friends of AIDS CARE/Hampshire County, a division of Hospice of Hampshire County. (They've also asked me to do their 1998 calendar.)

Throughout the project I experienced my own healing and transformation, for I was struggling with two things simultaneously—the personal challenge of creating and nurturing a new life growing inside me, while acknowledging

and honoring my first baby that I had lost the previous year. I felt the most incredible grief that I had ever felt in my life; but I found hope, courage, strength and joy alongside great suffering. They seemed to be inseparable for me.

Though I said I would take three months off and just care for the baby, in two months I was going crazy, so I knew I needed to bring the artwork back into my life. I remember the day I said, "No matter what I'm going to do my art." I gradually made it a regular activity. Now my challenge is balancing my life as a mom and my life as an artist for kosen-rufu.

My art is focused more on the human condition, such as courage or hope, love, unity, relationships. It's an expression of whatever I might happen to be dealing with in my life. After I create a piece, I look

(Right) *Courage*, 1997,
acrylic and collage on canvas,
20 x 22 in.

(Below) *Remembrance*, 1996,
acrylic on board, 12 x 14 in.

into it for some time, and then I see something that I might never have seen before. It's more of a discovery process, and it's really thrilling to me. I feel incredibly fortunate that I can make a living doing this. Ninety-five percent of my income comes from the sale of my artwork, which can be found in galleries in Northampton, Mass., Acton, Mass., Portland, Me., Kennebunk, Me., and Brattleboro, Vt. My market right now is doing originals. The latest thing is that these galleries are going to have their own websites.

I USED to teach full time and do my art. Now I teach a creativity class one day a week at my studio in Florence, Mass. Sometimes I teach a couple of private classes. I've seen my teaching style change over the years because before, I used to teach technique and ask students for a portfolio review. Today that doesn't matter to me at all. Someone can come to the class and have a master's degree or someone else may never have picked up a paint brush. Everybody's equal in the class, including myself.

I let my students know that the work they're doing in the moment is all right; that they're okay the way they are right now. Some people think they have to





Growing, 1996,
acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 in.

tious. I felt I had to be lucky to do what I really wanted to do. I thought that I would do art as a living only if things went well.

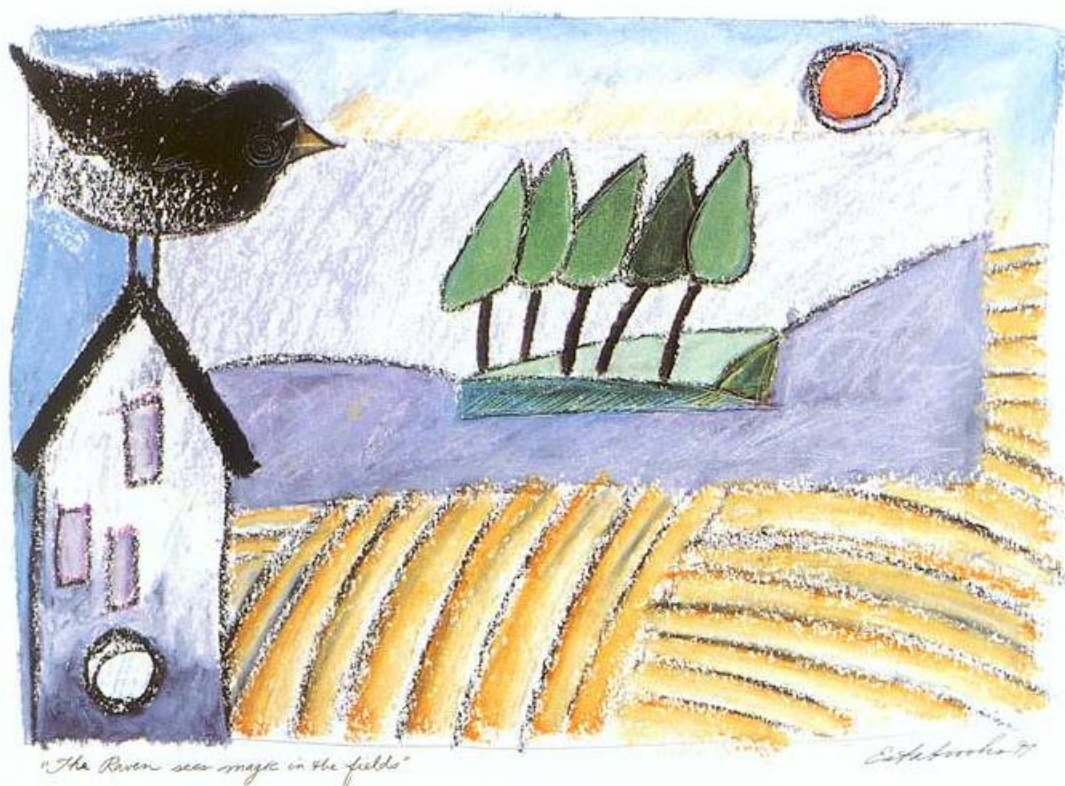
AFTER I graduated with a B.F.A. in painting from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1982, I taught there for nine years as an artist-in-residence. Although technically I work with acrylics and oil pastels, I feel any other aspect of my work is really about my spirituality and my Buddhist practice. Technique seems unimportant—it's really more about listening. Listening and also letting go. It wasn't until I started practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1987 that I felt I was standing up for myself and my passion for my art. I no longer needed recognition or good grades to make me feel important. That's when I started to appreciate my practice so much.

As a teacher, some people tend to place me in a high position and expect something significant from me. But what I strive to do is bring out and enhance what they already have inside their lives, their creativity. To me, it's a way to tap into the Buddha nature. Tapping into your Buddha nature, I think is important in art. □

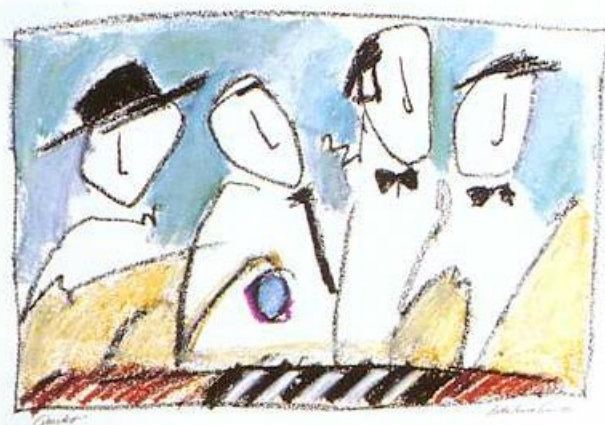
go to school and once they get their degree, then the degree means they know how to do artwork.

I pray every day to accomplish my mission as an artist dedicated to world peace by producing art that touches people's lives. This means to me that no matter what happens in my life, I won't be swayed in my faith or in my creative life. I'll continue doing my

art. One of my favorite quotes from Nichiren Daishonin is from "The Eight Winds": "A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure. He is neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 206). Before I practiced Buddhism, I was very supersti-



The Raven sees magic in the fields, 1997, oil pastel, 18 x 22 in.

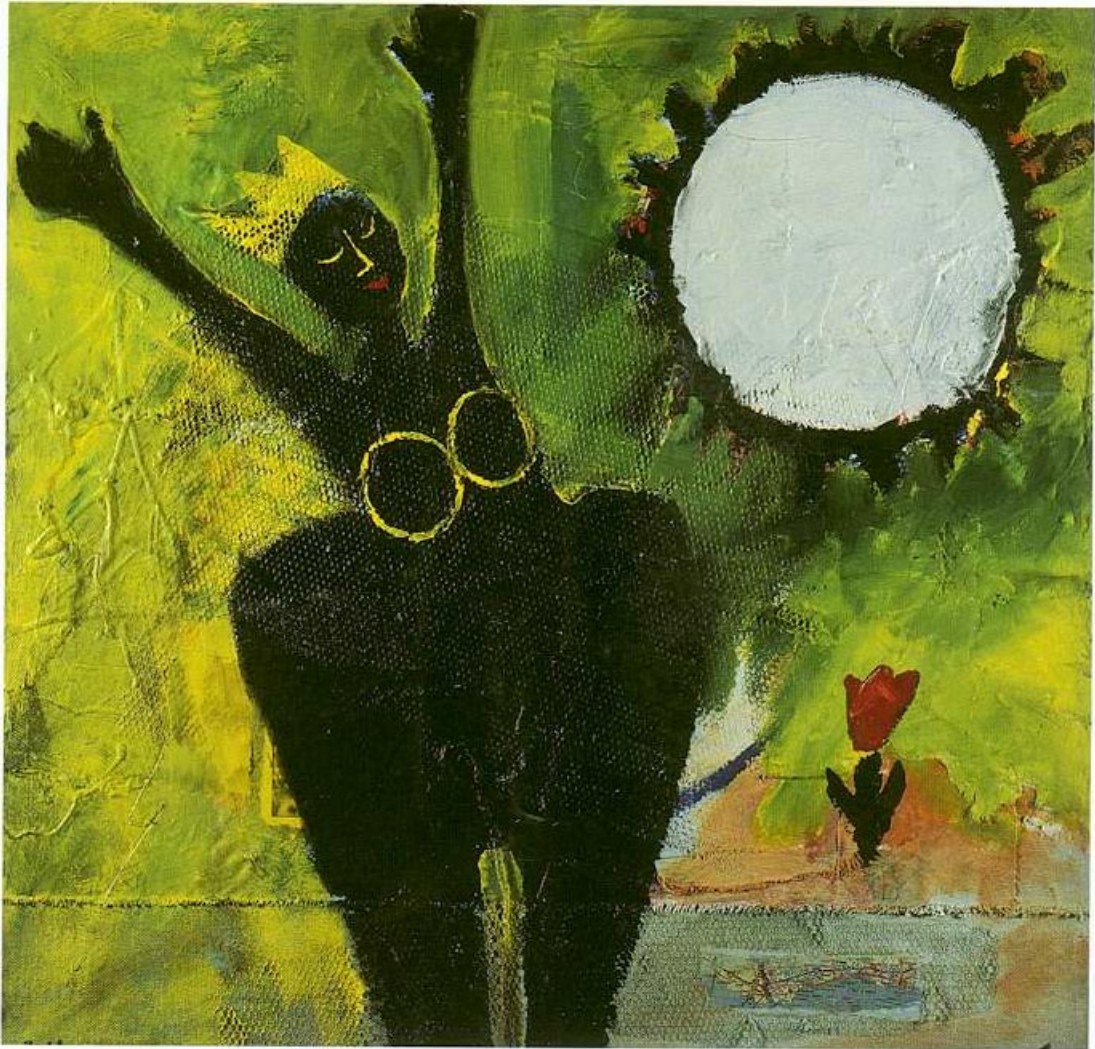


above, *Quartet*, 1997, oil pastel, 19 x 24 in.

left, *Couple in love*, 1997, oil pastel, 20 x 16 in.

right, *Open your eyes*, 1997, oil pastel and collage, 22 x 16 in.





Hope, 1996,
mixed media, 18 x 18 in.
by Donna Estabrooks

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LIVING BUDDHISM

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Exploring New Frontiers of Family Life in the United States

October 1997 • Inoka Gakkai International-USA

Bolivia Culture Center



THE SGI Bolivia Culture Center is located in Santa Cruz, a subtropical zone lush in greenery in southeastern Bolivia. Santa Cruz is the largest city in Bolivia, second only to the capital, La Paz, more than 600 miles away. Agriculture and cattle ranching are its primary resources, as well as petroleum and natural gas, which are exported to neighboring Argentina and Brazil.

The culture center has a seating capacity of 300 and was opened in 1986 on August 6, Bolivia's Independence

Day. Representatives from Beni and La Paz attended the festivities, during which the young women's Fife and Drum Corps, the young men's Brass Band and a chorus performed. Congratulatory messages were received from SGI President Ikeda and from members in Peru, Chile and Argentina.

In 1992, Bolivia members hosted the exhibition "SGI Activities for Peace" in Cochabamba, in conjunction with the University of Valle, giving viewers a deeper understanding of SGI's ideals and activities.