

# 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.

**4** **Publisher's Commentary:**  
The Daunting Challenge of Illness

**6** **The Promised Man:** A poem commemorating the birth of Nichiren Daishonin on February 16, 1222

**8** **Mending the Broken Ship of My Life:** The story of Eugene Boland, author of "The Promised Man"

**10** **Shijo Kingo—A Great Model of Lifelong Practice:** Samurai, doctor, family man and leader of thirteenth-century Japan

**14** **Shijo Kingo—My Story:** Triumph over life of hardships

**18** **A Conversation: Finding Joy in Family Life:** Gustavo and Cynthia Bulgach of Venice, California, discuss their life together

**22** **Photo Essay: Travels With Aunt Jean**  
Jean Pritchard's love affair with photography

**28** **Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra #26:**  
An Irrepressible Zest for Life—the Spirit of the "Life Span" Chapter

**44** **Recollections of Leading World Figures:** César Gaviria Trujillo and Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, former President and First Lady of Colombia

**48** **Global Friendships for Peace: SGI Activities Report:** Three countries from the continent of Africa



**COVER PHOTO** by SGI-USA member Jean Pritchard of Venice, California: Hand-painted infra-red photo of Gustavo and Cynthia Bulgach and their baby girl, Catalina Rose. See story p. 18 and photo essay, p. 22.

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## FROM OUR READERS

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### Changing Course

*By Anita Nevins Brown  
Sacramento, California*

Often you have snared me, but  
this time, Mara, I knew my  
song would bring you  
thundering, rattling  
the bars of my cell,  
using your wiles  
to distract me from the open  
cage door. Mara, blow your smoke  
in my face. Scratch at my  
chest with talons honed sharp  
on old fears. Whisper marching  
orders and croon that old number  
about how this course  
is too dangerous  
for me. Offer to bury  
me under a pile of  
your old  
newsprint until  
the pressure  
tapers off.  
Pressure on  
whom, Mara?  
Remember it  
was I summoned  
you, my  
friend. At last  
I know what to do  
with old  
news. My body  
is a reed turning  
toward the sun. My prayer  
a small flame trembling amid  
ashes. In my throat  
recurrent calling of a goldfinch  
in wind. In my ears the piercing echo  
of an unseen phoenix.

## Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

**karma:** Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds that

exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## 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.

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

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

The SGI-USA applies Buddhist principles through a nationwide network of grass-roots activities centering primarily on neighborhood discussion groups. Learn more about the SGI-USA, or find a discussion group in your area by calling our national office in Santa Monica, CA 90401-1427: (310) 451-8811. Check out our Web page at: <http://www.sgi-usa.org>

# THE DAUNTING CHALLENGE OF ILLNESS

I HAVE heard many moving experiences over the years about the heart-rending struggles people, young and old, have had with illness. Each time I am reminded of how we tend to take good health for granted. I am no exception. Just this past holiday season I found myself drifting into the tenacious grip of an ever-worsening cold—the insidious kind of cold that saps the strength right out of your life. It was a holiday season I was really looking forward to. My sons and daughter would all be home for the first time in years. Anticipating this time together, my wife and I had planned a short family trip. But by the time Christmas arrived, I was too sick to even leave the house. It would be the first time I stayed home during a holiday season in more than seven years.

The good news was that we were able to inter-

**Health means constant challenge. Constant creativity. A prolific life always moving forward, opening up fresh new vistas—that is a life of true health. An unbeatable spirit is what supplies the power to keep pressing ahead.**

act as a family again for a few days. We talked like we hadn't in years. I heard the plans my kids are making for their lives. We laughed, we ate, we did gongyo together. In fact, it occurred to me later that we were able to start the year practicing one of the three points for 1998—the strengthening of family ties. The bad news is that I gave my cold to my wife and daughter.

On New Year's Day, I was able to attend the gongyo meeting at the Ikeda Auditorium. But there was a literal chasm between where my spirit was and where my body wanted to be. As I struggled to overcome what was really a minor illness, I thought of the many times I have encouraged others never to be defeated. At the same time, I thought of those suffering from more serious, life-threatening diseases—cancer, asthma, heart dis-

ease, AIDS, drug addiction, and so on. What must their lives be like? I had a simple cold and found it difficult to do gongyo to my satisfaction. What a daunting challenge the obstacle of illness can be.

I recall SGI President Ikeda's comments on the subject, when he said: "Health is a universal desire of human beings. No matter how wealthy or powerful one is, health, after all, is the most precious thing" (May 17, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 9).

He then gave the example of a man who had worked his way up from pennilessness in his youth to eventually become one of the wealthiest people in the world. The man fell ill and confessed that he would give all his riches to be young and healthy once more. He said he wouldn't even mind being poor again, as long as he had the health and the strength to work. I think we can all appreciate that.

**B**UDDHISM," President Ikeda said, "recognizes illness as one of the most basic sufferings that human beings experience—as we can see from its inclusion in the four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. In seeking to free people from this suffering, both Buddhism and medicine share a common goal. What is the secret to living fully and vigorously day after day?" (Ibid.)

President Ikeda got to the heart of the matter when he shared an anecdote about his friend the late Dr. Norman Cousins. He said:

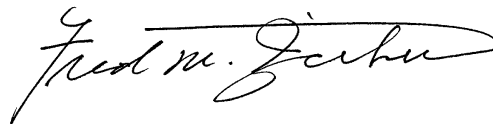
Dr. Cousins lived a life of continual challenge and eternal youth. His research into the oneness of mind and body was not simply theoretical, either. He himself achieved miraculous recoveries from collagen illness—a life-threatening connective tissue disease—with which he was diagnosed at 50, and a major heart attack at 65, going on to live until the age of 75. In those years, he produced an enormous amount of work of great and lasting value. The question is, what so strengthened his life force? I can't help but conclude that it was his love for people and a strong sense of responsibility. Both of those are based on a great faith in humanity. Dr. Cousins summed up his beliefs in the single word, *hope*.

"Hope," he said, was his secret weapon. In our dialogue, he remarked: "Death is not the greatest tragedy that befalls us in life. What is far more tragic is for an important part of oneself to die while one is still alive. There is no more terrifying tragedy than this. What is important is to accomplish something in this life."

Health is not simply a matter of absence of illness. Health means constant challenge. Constant creativity. A prolific life always moving forward, opening up fresh new vistas—that is a life of true health. An unbeatable spirit is what supplies the power to keep pressing ahead. (Ibid.)

All I had was a cold, which is over now, and of course I'm feeling as if nothing had ever happened. I want to chant more. And do more activities. But it is so easy to give up when we are sick. Some people I know go so far as to say they don't want to continue living. As Buddhists, we must never allow our friends and family to give up hope. To live is to continue until the last moment. Nichiren Daishonin says in his letter "On Prolonging Life": "If you are unwilling to take proper care of yourself, it will be very difficult to cure your illness. One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the universe, so first you must muster sincere faith" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 231).

He means for us to live life to the fullest. That is the source of joy, the joy we want to share with others. That is what I want to remember as I chant for all the dear members of the SGI-USA to overcome every illness and suffering and live a life filled with joy and hope.



Fred M. Zaitso  
SGI-USA General Director

# "The Promised Man"

By Eugene Bolände, Los Angeles

THE FOLLOWING POEM IS PRESENTED IN COMMEMORATION OF THE BIRTH OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN, ON FEBRUARY 12, 1222.

The prince sneaked out the palace gate  
Rode far as he could ride  
Turned his horse and scurried back  
His land he could not abide

The people were all suffering  
He could hardly draw breath  
For everywhere about him  
Was hate and fear, sickness and death

His father the King had told him  
Of a land so good and pure  
Over which he was to reign  
In a year or two, for sure

But what, thought Prince Siddhartha  
Could the best of kings provide  
To ease the life-conditions  
Of a people who had nothing inside

The religions they had did not serve them well  
They gave them heaven in-the-hereafter  
While their lives were a living  
Hell

He had to give them something  
A way to ease the strain  
Of this journey we all have to go on  
From the pain of birth to the death of pain

He took off his royal coat  
Of blue and scarlet red  
He buried them with scepter crown  
And put on rags instead

He gave up his royal heritage  
His castles and his crown  
And for fifty years he sought and taught  
Yet carefully did he expound

In the land of Shakyamuni  
Three thousand years ago  
A sovereign became a Teacher  
But could not teach all he came to know

He sat thinking beneath a mountain  
He sat thinking beside the sea  
But the greatest thought he ever thought  
Came sitting under a Bodhi tree

So he preached the Three Vehicles  
 This Shakyamuni prince  
 And then with the Lotus Sutra  
 Compressed 42 years of teaching  
 Into eight of common sense

He said: I cannot tell the people everything I know  
 Cause few would understand—  
 But soon, he prophesied, will come along  
 The Original Buddha man

Time passed—a year, a century— then two  
 Who—where was this Buddha man?  
 The Lotus spread from India to China  
 And finally Japan

It took 2000 years or more,  
 Before  
 A fisherman's son  
 A lowly lad  
 Who became Nichiren Daishonin  
 Was born with the mission to give permission  
     to the proposition  
 Of a mystical Law of the Universe  
 He faced opposition from high and low  
 But his mission was clear and he pursued it  
     without fear

At the age of 12 when most boys were playing  
     Simon Simple  
 He went to the temple  
 To study the sutras

And so it began, and for the rest of his life  
 Thru war and pestilence, sorrow and strife  
 Thru loneliness, darkness, hunger and cold  
 Sold out and slandered for envy and gold  
 Renounced and assailed by five priests bold

Battered and bruised  
 Convicted, abused  
 Cursed and benighted by deception and lies

Left in exile, sick and despised  
 Abandoned, forsaken, tried and condemned,  
 Led to be-headed by sad little men

They tried to kill him, this Buddha man  
 The way they do in every land  
 Kill!... What you do not understand

But he persevered, endured, he followed his road  
 He conquered, he soared, he lived—he lived bold  
 He engraved his enlightenment on a paper scroll  
 And left it for centuries, for one and for all  
 It erases negative karma and wishes fulfill  
 He called it Gohonzon! His heritage lives still

He was Parent. He was Teacher.  
 He was fisherman's son.  
 He knew his mission, the old son of a gun  
 He was proud, without ego  
 He was staunch—he was strong  
 He never used words like right and wrong  
 He knew one day we'd be singing This song.

I didn't know what was reality  
 I didn't know what was a dream  
 But I know now where I'm going  
 It doesn't matter where I've been

I know when I whistle in the dark of the night  
 There's a song I can sing that will stay terror's plight  
 And although the years have taken their toll  
 There's a song I can sing and attain any goal

I don't know what happened lifetimes ago  
 But I'm still responsible for changing the flow  
 I know that my destiny's not written in stone  
 I know with Gohonzon I'm never alone

I gather up the pieces, the fragments of pain  
 I stand like an Oak in a winter rain  
 And go back to Gohonzon  
 Again and again. □

# MENDING THE BROKEN SHIP OF MY LIFE

BY EUGENE BOLÁNDE, LOS ANGELES

I HAD the distinct honor of being asked to recite my poem, “The Promised Man,” at this year’s New Year’s activities to the guitar accompaniment of musician James Neal, a friend and fellow SGI member.

I first learned about the lives of Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin during study sessions I attended soon after I started practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism in 1984. I was so moved by what I learned that I tried to convey the sense of my inspiration in poetry.

I was born in the Caribbean Islands, and deep inside me I always felt that I was on some mission, that I could do great things. I just didn’t know what. So I read everything that I could get my hands on, to find the answer to the anxiety and fear that resided in me.

Much of it was about being black in America and what it meant. I didn’t really want to be white, I just wanted what they seemed to have. I wanted desperately to be able to make choices about my life and my destiny that were my own, not based on other people’s opinions, but based on information that was true to me—information that came from inner sources of truth so I could place

all my energy behind it. This only happened to me once and it was years later that I finally knew that I had done something I truly believed in.

All of my life I have been pursued by nameless demons, dark of the night terrors, anguish, weeping, suspicion and doubts so deep I could almost drown in them. It was as if things just happened to me. I was a receptacle, a dump site. I didn’t know who I was. I had no life plan. Nothing in school taught me about me. I was just this “black boy.”

Subsequently, I lived my life through movies and books. They were the only worlds that were real to me. I hated being a child. I hated being black. I hated being in such terror. At one time I thought the answer lay in white people—they loved me, so I surrounded myself with them. I mistrusted them, but at the same time, I loved them. I grew up longing to find someone I could respect, yearning to find a trustworthy mentor or even a friend.

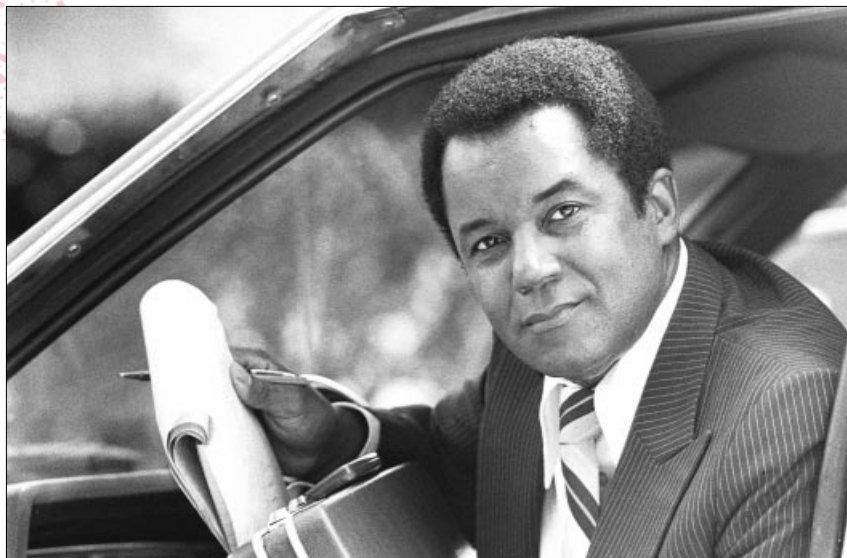
So I created and adopted a fictional identity called Gene Bolánde. That person did not care about others. That person did not love. I was never really an evil person. I was into status. The better your address, the

more likely I’d befriend you.

When I came to California, I got a part in a play directed by Burgess Meredith. Later, I found work in the industry as a screenwriter and playwright and was hired on the staff of a major television show. When I protested that my work was being rewritten by white writers, I was told in essence, “Take the money and shut up, you’re one of us now.” I found out that I couldn’t shut up. I was fired.

Two magnificent mentors finally appeared in my life. One was Academy Award nominee, Beah Richards (who played Sidney Poitier’s mother in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*), my first friend in the theater, who taught me practically everything I know about the theater—a great actress and woman. She led me to the man who would become my second mentor, a gentle iron-willed Buddha-of-a-man, Jack Jackson, of the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles. The Inner City Cultural Center was founded in 1965 for the purpose of using the arts to bridge the gap between Los Angeles’ diverse communities.

Beah told me: “Eugene, your work will take you wherever you want to go. Trust your work, not guile.” Mr. Jackson always



said, "Our art may be the only tool we have left to save us from destruction." Jobless, frightened, without hope, and overcome by despair, I was employed by the Inner City Cultural Center as a director of new playwrights. My job was to establish a theater where multiethnic authors presented works related to their experiences in a multiethnic society. Two thousand writers passed through that program.

Two years later I had a kidney stone attack that paralyzed me. At the time a friend asked me, "Eugene, what are you doing in your life that you're turning to stone?" I could not answer. I eventually overcame my illness and my fictional life went on. My search went on. My study went on. I had been a Baptist, a Mooney, a Religious Scientist, a Transcendental Meditationist, a Scientologist and a Catholic. Nothing was working.

Then in 1984, Beah told me of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. She said: "Eugene I have known you all your adult life, and I have told you everything I know, and nothing has helped you. But I

have found something that I think will help you. And if you try it, I will try it." So I did.

These days when Beah asks me where I'm going, I say, "I'm going to a Buddhist meeting." And I go because I can give something and get something that keeps me going. From 1984 on, my house became a focal point for Buddhist activities.

I see now that mine was a world in which any behavior was justifiable. Jesse Jackson tells an awesome story of a ship that was wrecked, its stern broken, but the ship made it on broken pieces to dry land. And that, through my practice, is what I found I had to do with my life—use that thing called instinct. I do think, at last, I have grasped compassion. My dear friends, whom I may have offended, I say: "Forgive me, I was wrecked. My stern was broken. But I will, through my practice, make it on broken pieces, to dry land."

Then in 1994, out of the blue, I received a call from the NAACP three days before the event, requesting that I accept an Image Award as someone

"who had great fortune in the industry and did not hesitate to give back to the community." I was flabbergasted.

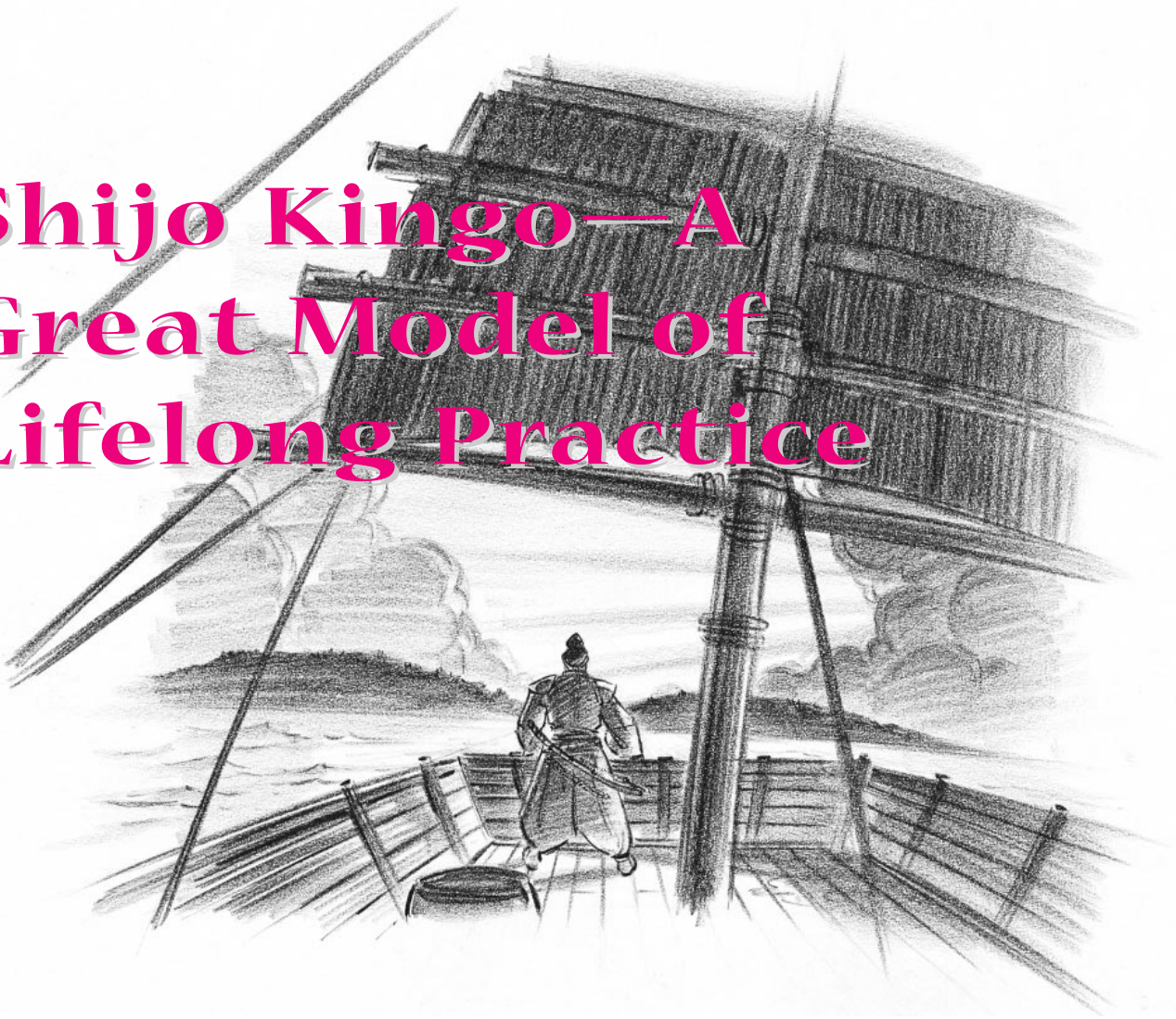
I wrote the acceptance speech of my life. From my heart. From my gut. Preparing this acceptance speech forced me to think about what I had given up and why, those long years ago. As several hundred people stood weeping and cheering, in standing ovation, I felt, "Well done, Gene Bolände." It was then that I became aware that I was on the road to knowing who I was and that I owed it to my Buddhist practice.

I gleaned from President Toda's guidance in *The Human Revolution* (vol. 1, p. 47): Man needs a religion. That without one he is condemned to a vulnerable, helpless, lonely life. But it must be a true religion—for false religion is frightening and its destination is disaster.

So I practice and study to find the word, the phrase, the sentence, the paragraph, the happy tune. The tune that will take me past the primal fears, the doom, the gloom, karma from ancient times that has poisoned my very spirit, so that in the last analysis, I can be true to the Buddhist teachings.

Through President Ikeda's encouragement, I have learned that an active examination and integration of what is happening in our daily lives—coupled with the theories and teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—enables us to further deepen our faith and practice. As Buddhists, we practice to make some sense of the real, daily events and to place those events in a broader perspective. □

# Shijo Kingo—A Great Model of Lifelong Practice



**By Margaret Singleton,  
Los Angeles**

*The following two articles introduce one of Nichiren Daishonin's most famous disciples, Shijo Kingo. The first article gives an historical account of his life. In the article on page 14, Faye Hovey presents a fictionalized, first-person account of Shijo Kingo's thoughts.*

**S**HIO Kingo was a great model of lifelong practice and dedication. Born in 1231, he met Nichiren Daishonin when he was 25 years old and began practicing his Buddhism. Throughout his life he surmounted all difficulties and showed great proof of the power of the practice until his death in 1300 at age 69. Like his father before him, he was a samurai in the service of Lord Ema Mitsutoki, a member of the rul-

ing Hojo clan, and later, Lord Ema's son, Chikatoki.

We can trace the development of Shijo Kingo's practice through the thirty-seven existing letters that the Daishonin wrote to him.

At first Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo to answer his personal questions. Later he wrote to encourage his disciple's own struggle with the three powerful enemies (ignorant lay people, evil priests and

evil priests in collusion with governmental authority).

In May 1271, the Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo and his wife to reassure and congratulate them at the time of the birth of their first child, whom the Daishonin named Tsukimaro. At that time Shijo Kingo was 40 years old and had been practicing fifteen years. In July 1271, the Daishonin wrote to thank Kingo for offerings he had sent

the Daishonin as a donation for a memorial service for his mother, who had died the year before. Nichiren Daishonin used this opportunity to reinterpret the memorial service from the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra, and concluded, "You should deepen your faith all the more" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 95).

Shijo Kingo irrefutably demonstrated his loyalty to the Daishonin when the crucial moment came—the night of September 12, 1271. The chief of military police, accompanied by a band of armed soldiers, had arrested the Daishonin and was leading him toward an execution site at Tatsunokuchi Beach. When passing Shijo Kingo's street, the Daishonin sent a messenger to Shijo Kingo, who rushed to his aid without a moment's hesitation, leaving his wife and infant daughter, not even stopping to put on his shoes; he also risked his employment by the ruling clan to so publicly support someone perceived as a criminal. The execution attempt failed when a meteor flashed across the sky and frightened the would-be executioners. The Daishonin wrote him a few days later, "You not only accompanied me to Tatsunokuchi but declared that you would die by my side. I was deeply moved!" (MW-1, 13) and "You accompanied Nichiren, vowing to give your life as a votary of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 14).

After the failed execution attempt, the government decided to exile the Daishonin to Sado, a cold island in the North

Sea, a forlorn place from which exiles never returned alive. He was given a hut to live in that did not really protect him from the cold, and insufficient rations to survive on. Shijo Kingo continued to send messengers to him with letters and offerings. The Daishonin, even in these circumstances, with not enough writing paper, and fighting against the freezing cold, struggled to pen his convictions: "I wanted to record the wonder I had experienced, in case I should be beheaded" (MW-1, p. 189). By February 1272, the Daishonin had finished "The Opening of the Eyes," and asked Shijo Kingo's messenger to take it to him.

**I**N April 1272, Shijo Kingo himself visited the Daishonin, even though it was dangerous. It required him to be away from his duties in Kamakura for over a month; he worked for a lord under the Hojo regime, which had exiled the Daishonin. He was risking his life to visit this "political prisoner." The following month the Daishonin wrote to thank him for his visit, and encouraged him, "Bring forth the great power of faith and establish your reputation among all the people of Kamakura and the rest of Japan as 'Shijo Kingo of the Hokke sect'" (MW-2, [2nd ed.], 201).

In September 1272, the Daishonin wrote from Sado to thank Shijo Kingo for offerings he had sent for his mother's third-anniversary memorial service. The following spring Shijo Kingo again made the dangerous trip to Sado to see the Daishonin.

In August 1273, Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo in response to a message that his 1-year-old daughter, Kyo'o, was seriously ill. "Nam-myohorenge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (MW-1, 119) he encouraged him, and then advised, "The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith." (MW-1, 120)

Up until this point, Shijo Kingo's correspondence with the Daishonin was focused on his immediate concerns and that of his family members. In 1274, two events caused Kingo's confidence to soar: Nichiren Daishonin was pardoned and returned from Sado; and the Daishonin's prophesy (that Japan would suffer foreign invasion due to its adherence to heretical beliefs) came true as the Mongols threatened invasion. Kingo could no longer keep silent; he tried to introduce his boss, Lord Ema, to the Daishonin's Buddhism. However, Lord Ema was not just an adherent of Nembutsu; he was a lay priest; and his clan had exiled the Daishonin.

From 1274 on, Shijo Kingo's practice changed as he himself began confronting the three powerful enemies that he had now seen the Daishonin confront successfully. In September 1274, the Daishonin wrote to Kingo to congratulate him for avoiding the offense of complicity in slander, the offense of failing to admonish slanderers: "You have been able to avoid the offense of complicity" (MW-6, 91). But, knowing what difficulties lay ahead for Kingo, he

warned, "You cannot be too careful" (MW-6, 91). Not only Lord Ema, but his fellow samurai resented him and would attack him if they could. In March 1275, the Daishonin wrote to remind him that happiness was not the absence of problems, and that "It is difficult to sustain faith in this sutra" (MW-1, 128).

A year later Lord Ema still disapproved of his practice, and his fellow samurai were looking for a chance to kill him. The Daishonin urged him in June 1276 not to go out drinking, but to stay at home with his wife. "Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. Then you will experience boundless joy from the Law" (MW-1, 161).

In July 1276, Kingo was apparently entertaining thoughts of getting out of his situation and becoming a lay priest. But the Daishonin urged him, "But you yourself must not abandon him [Lord Ema], no matter how your life may be placed in danger" (MW-6, 167). He gave Kingo very specific instructions not to go see Lord Ema at night, or to go out drinking, and that he could become a lay priest later.

In September 1276, Lord Ema gave Kingo an ultimatum: either renounce his faith, or be transferred to a remote rural province, Echigo. Nichiren Daishonin told Kingo exactly how to respond: "Answer him [Lord Ema] firmly in this way ... 'At this moment I am resolved to sacrifice my life

for my lord. Yet, should a sudden crisis occur, it is doubtful whether I could reach you in time from the distant province of Echigo. Therefore, even at the risk of losing my estate, I will not leave you this year ... I will devote this life to you, even if you disown me, for I have entrusted my life after death to the priest Nichiren'" (MW-1, 171-72).

**T**HIS response mollified Lord Ema for a time. But in June 1277, Kingo's enemies framed him. Kingo had attended a debate on June 6, at which a disciple of the Daishonin had thoroughly defeated a disciple of Ryokan, who was revered by Lord Ema. Kingo's enemies accused him of forcibly disrupting this debate, and nineteen days later, Kingo received an official letter from Lord Ema ordering him to write an oath discarding his faith in the Lotus Sutra, or lose his estate and be banished.

Kingo immediately sent Lord Ema's letter to the Daishonin, who was then in retirement at Mount Minobu, with his own determination never to give up his faith.

The Daishonin was delighted with his disciple's attitude, and on June 27 wrote a letter of petition in Kingo's name to Lord Ema. In it he clarified what had happened at the debate, thus enabling Lord Ema to understand Ryokan's errors, and clarified what true loyalty is. He mentioned the long history of service of himself and his father to Lord Ema Chikatoki and his father, Lord Ema Mitsutoki, and refused to

sign the oath, saying that Lord Ema would suffer. He urged summoning Kingo's accusers to face Kingo in Lord Ema's presence.

The Daishonin at the same time also wrote a long letter of encouragement to Shijo Kingo, praising him highly, but warning: "This life is like a dream. One cannot know if he will live until tomorrow. Even if you should become the most wretched of beggars, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra" (MW-4, 283). He pointed out to Kingo that his own exile to Sado had been in fact a protection; if the Daishonin had been in Kamakura during the civil unrest in 1272, he could have been killed.

He urged Kingo to unite with other believers: "You should band solidly together with your fellow believers. As for the others, let them clamor against you as they will. Then, if you can submit the petition, news of it may spread throughout Kamakura, and perhaps even reach the regent himself. This will mean misfortune changing into fortune" (MW-4, 284). He concluded with a warning: "Under no circumstances should you attend any gatherings" (MW-4, 285).

In July the Daishonin wrote another letter of encouragement to Shijo Kingo during this tense situation. He assured him, "Buddhism is reason. Reason will win over your lord" (MW-3, 238). He praised him highly, saying, "I have been ceaselessly praying for your sake to the Lotus Sutra ... for I am convinced that you are a man who can inherit the soul

of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-3, 239), but then warned him "be hundreds of thousands of times more careful than ever" (MW-3, 238).

Soon thereafter Lord Ema became ill, and Kingo wrote the Daishonin about it. On September 11, 1277, Nichiren Daishonin responded, saying he was grieved over Lord Ema's illness, and again warning Kingo: "I have a feeling you are in danger. Your enemies are sure to make an attempt on your life" (MW-2, p. 234). He then gave Kingo detailed guidance on how to dress, how to act, who to associate with and above all never to be alone. He praised Kingo, reminding him how he had accompanied the Daishonin the night he was to be beheaded. He also reminded him of the true priorities: "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. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!" (MW-2, 238).

In April 1278, the Daishonin again wrote to guide Kingo. "Unseen virtue brings about visible reward" he assured him, and warned him against eroding his faith with slander: "You must be on good terms with other believers, neither seeing, hearing, not pointing out anything about them that may displease you" (MW-5, 259). The Daishonin urged him to redouble his efforts at work: "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" (MW-3, 270).

In June 1278, Nichiren Daishonin wrote to thank Kingo for the medicines Kingo had prescribed and sent to him. "My complaint has diminished steadily and is now a mere fraction of its former intensity" (MW-4, 292).

Shijo Kingo's situation began to change when he also cured his lord's illness. In gratitude, in September 1278, Lord Ema gave him a larger estate. The Daishonin was elated at this news. "It must have happened because of your profound sincerity in trying to lead your lord to faith in the Lotus Sutra" (MW-3, 286) and added, "I entrust my life to you and will consult no other physician" (MW-3, 291).

**T**HE next month Lord Ema gave Kingo three new fiefs. The Daishonin advised in response: "No matter how poor these estates might prove to be, you must not complain of it, not to others nor to your lord. If you repeatedly praise them as excellent lands, your lord may grant you still more fiefs" (MW-6, 262).

But Kingo's troubles were not over, because his fellow samurai were now jealous. Nichiren Daishonin was worried about Kingo traveling, and wrote in October 1278, "Ride a horse which can easily carry you in your armor" (MW-1, 226). He recounted for him the story of General Stone Tiger, who was able to pierce with his arrow a rock that he

thought to be the tiger who had killed his father, and urged Kingo to have a comparable strength of purpose.

In October 1279, Kingo's enemies finally attacked him. The Daishonin praised him, saying he survived because he still possessed good fortune, and urged him to "Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. Then, just as the sutra says, 'All enemies are crushed'" (MW-1, 246).

In October 1280, Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Kingo to thank him for a gift of rice, and praised his unusual dedication: "You held on to the reins of my horse, accompanying me barefoot and shedding tears of grief.... In what age could I possibly forget it?" (MW-6, 307). He concluded, "It is certain that within this lifetime you will eradicate the karmic hindrances you have accumulated since the beginningless past" (MW-6, 310).

After the Daishonin died in 1282, Shijo Kingo continued practicing and encouraging others, until his death in 1300. In a way he represents the first lay movement. Aside from Nikko Shonin, who really understood the Daishonin's heart, he did not have much use for priests, who were already reverting to Tendai and other earlier teachings.

For us today he is a great example for us to follow. A true disciple, he was able to confront and overcome the three powerful enemies, just as he had witnessed his mentor had done. □

*Illustration by Ed Lee*

# Shijo Kingo—"My Story"

By Fay Hovey, Maui, Hawaii



*What follows is a story based on what is known about Shijo Kingo, a samurai who was one of the Daishonin's chief disciples; he was converted in 1256. His full name and title are Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Zaemon-no-jo Yorimoto. Kingo is an equivalent of the title Saemon-no-jo.*

*Imagine how it must have been for him, responsible for his lands, serving Lord Ema.*

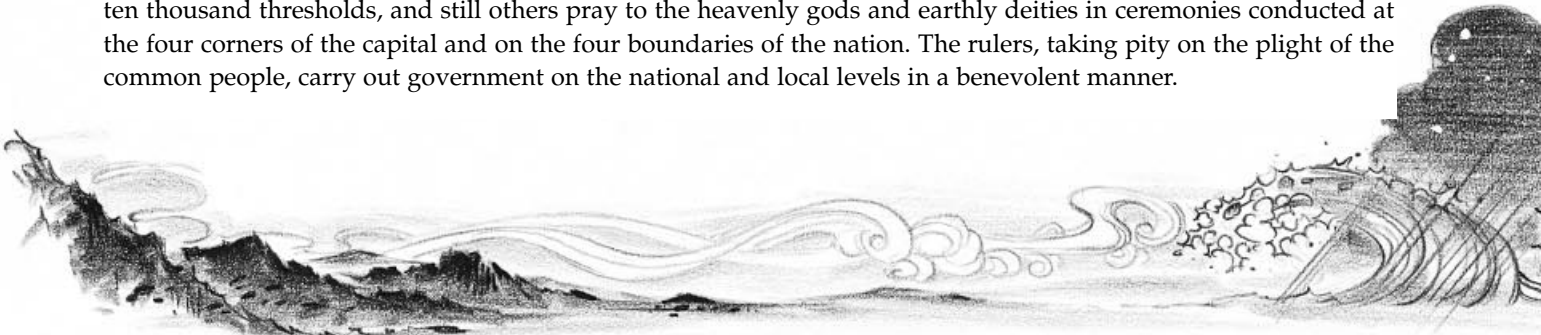
*He was a physician, a warrior, a family man and a man who commanded respect in his region.*

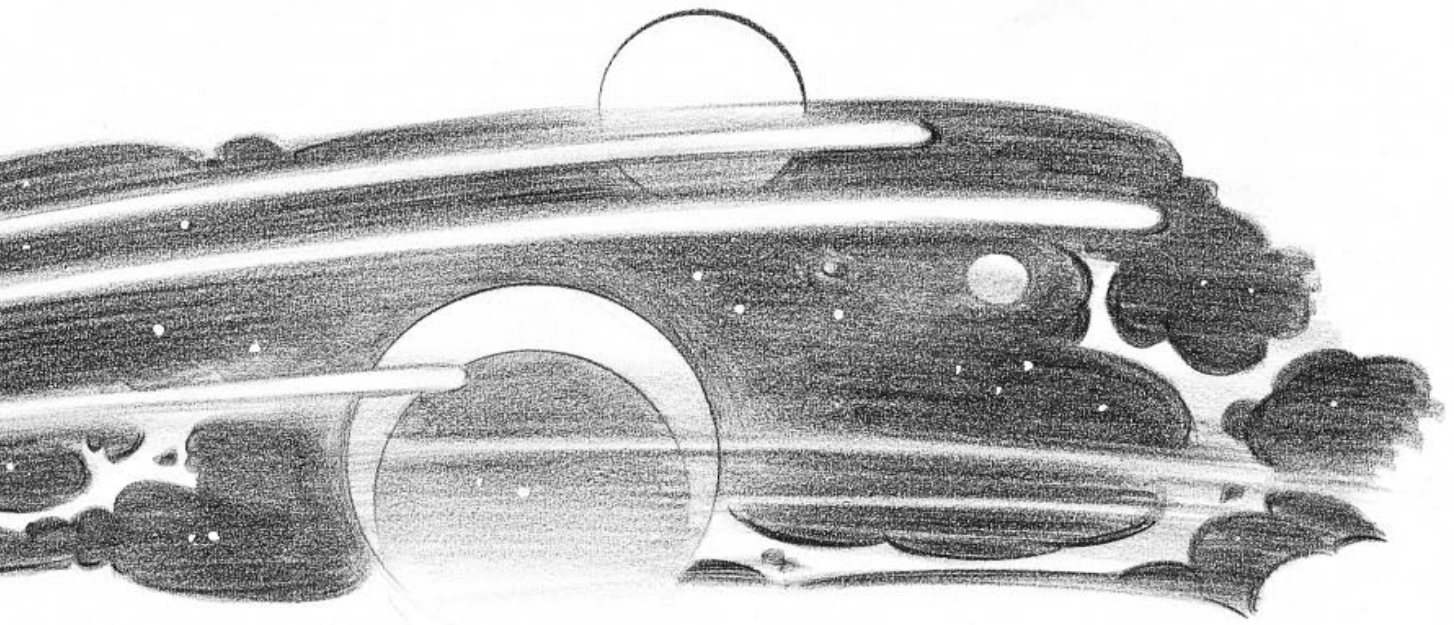
*What would it be like for such a man, trying to make his way through the world, as it existed for him so graphically described in the following passage from "On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism?"*

## **"On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism"**

**I**N recent years, there are unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and in every family someone grieves.

All the while some put their whole faith in the "sharp sword" of the Buddha Amida and intone the name of this lord of the Western Land.... There are those who follow the esoteric teachings of the Shingon sect and conduct rituals by filling five jars with water; and others who devote themselves entirely to seated meditation and try to perceive the emptiness of all phenomena as clearly as the moon. Some write out the names of the seven guardian spirits and paste them on a thousand gates, others paint pictures of the five mighty bodhisattvas and hang them over ten thousand thresholds, and still others pray to the heavenly gods and earthly deities in ceremonies conducted at the four corners of the capital and on the four boundaries of the nation. The rulers, taking pity on the plight of the common people, carry out government on the national and local levels in a benevolent manner.





But despite all these efforts, they merely exhaust themselves in vain. Famine and epidemics rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes. Corpses pile up in mounds like observation platforms, dead bodies lie side by side like planks on a bridge.

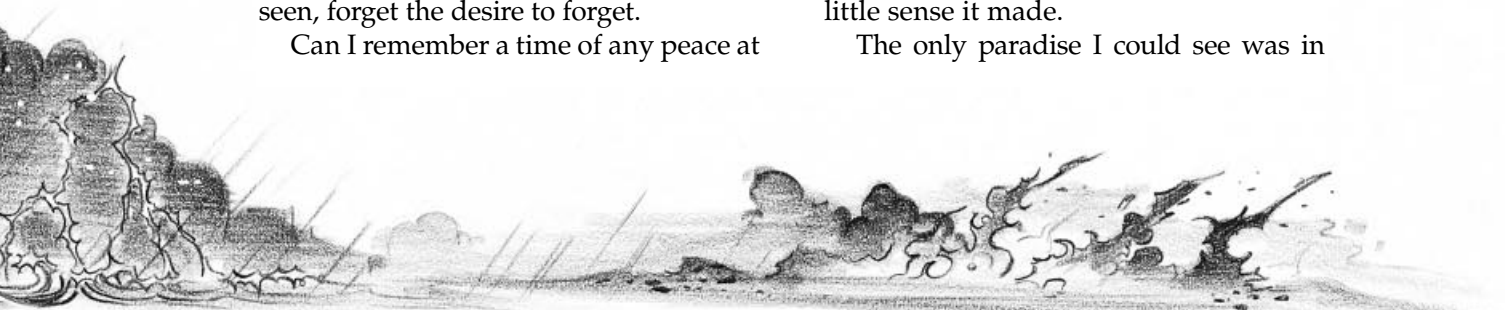
If we look about, we find that the sun and moon continue to move in their accustomed orbits, and the five planets follow the proper course. The three treasures of Buddhism continue to exist, and the period of a hundred reigns has not yet expired. Then why is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed? (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, pp. 3–4).

**W**HAT I have seen in my life, no man's eyes should see. Death. I have seen enough of it for 100 lifetimes. When I was younger, we ran toward death, a source of honor—for one is never more alive than at the point of sword. To fight an enemy, to live another day. To travel many days home to my wife and children. Sit once again in my *furo* (bath) under the stars, a container of sake kept warm and ready. And in the manner of men, drink away the blood on my hands, blind my eyes to what I had seen, forget the desire to forget.

Can I remember a time of any peace at

all? If there was, I know nothing of it. Peace has never been really important. Not in this life anyway. My prayers were for the harvest, for my mother and father to live long. Near the end of the famine, even I worked in the fields, as if I could force food from the earth with my sheer will. Hunger—we lived on rice and salt soup; what little sweet potatoes we could find. I see now it was those times, desperate, that I took to the fields and hillsides. I looked up to the sky and I wondered for what use are we here, so little sense it made.

The only paradise I could see was in



my wife's eyes, in the faces of the simple farmers who tilled my fields, in the laughter of my children—anytime I was here on this land where I had poured so much of my life.

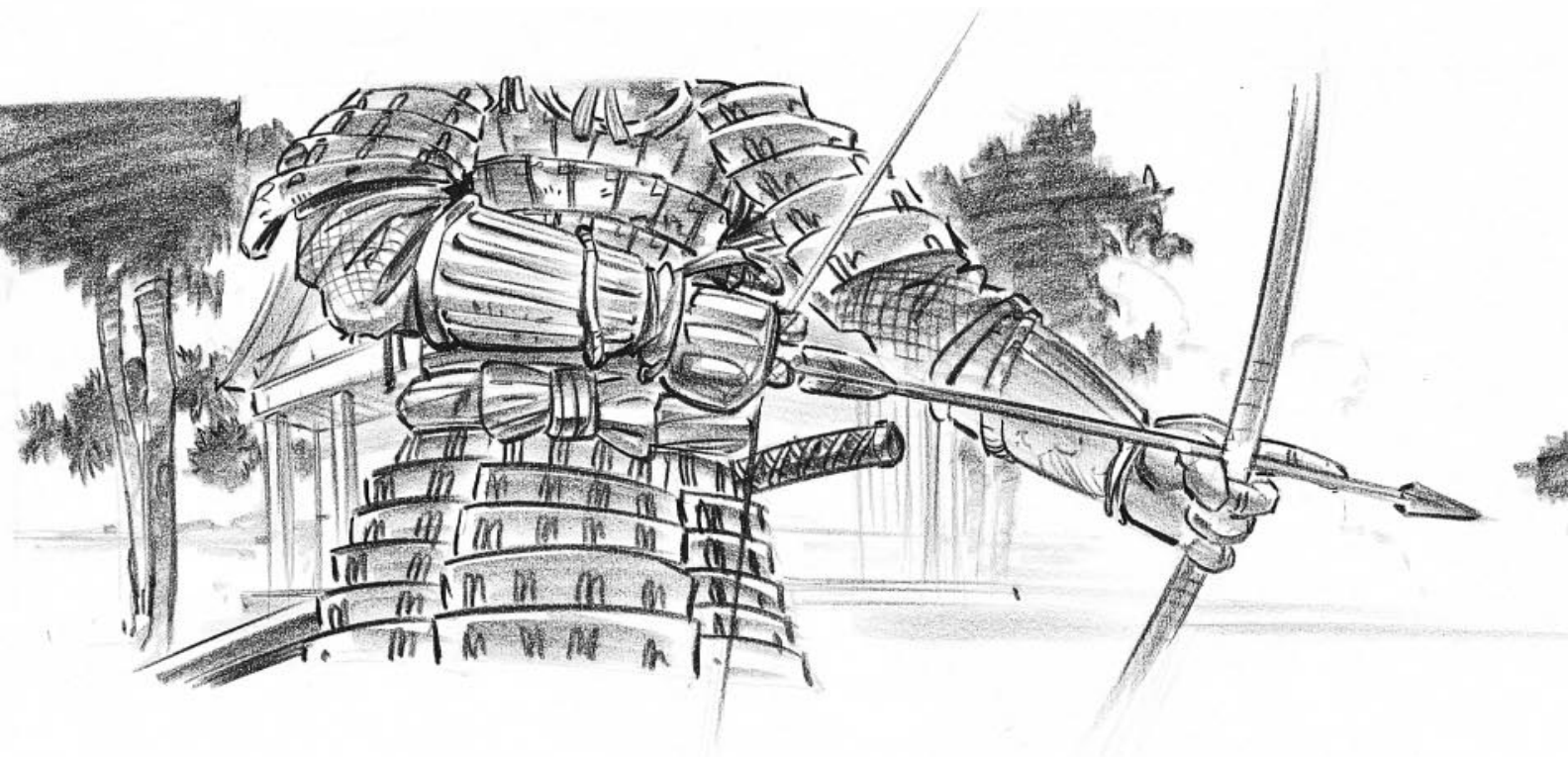
Even that would change. Shift at Lord Ema's whim. Cross him and I would be eating grass in some northern province, plowing the ground with a stick, anonymous as a stone.

And yes, the ground would shift and convulse beneath my hall like a ship at sea. Shake us from sleep like a dog shakes an old piece of skin in its teeth. Thinking about it now, I wonder at how we all made it through. Maybe everyone feels this looking back. Just surviving it was the miracle one always looked for.

AND I wasn't much for priests. I'm a simple man, really. Direct, headstrong and sometimes defiant, yes? All my life, my father's life, we served the Ema clan. I owed that man my very life, the safety of my family, the smooth tiles under my feet in my courtyard. Perhaps my headstrong nature was something Lord Ema liked, if only in secret. He had plenty of people around him to tell him what he wanted to hear. But I like to think he knew he could count on me for another view of things and a surprise or two.

But priests. How could they even pretend to know what to do in such a treacherous time? Part and parcel to dissent, they would weasel themselves

into political decisions, called to pray for rain during the drought! We would shake our heads in wonder. The only rain that fell was the drops of sweat that tricked off their shaven heads! And their earthly powers were more productive. Cross them, and it would be more than relocation to another fief. Their methods were subtle: hired men sent to wait for you at the crossroads in the night. So important they were as intermediaries, paradise having retreated considerably west of Japan, that the building of temples and the collection of food to feed all the priests became our primary purpose in life. That is, of course, in addition to the making of war, which we excelled in. Beautiful, per-



fected savagery. Like a sword, unbending, can cut a floating piece of silk.

Without the women in my life, I might have been a rough man. My mother, open-minded, capable. My first wife. Then, later my second. They were the silk in my life. They rarely complained of our often precarious circumstances. It wouldn't have been their way. Like me, they had their doubts about how things were, but never openly challenged what seemed inevitable. At times, sitting at dusk in our summer robes, dark falling over the fields, the children catching fireflies, we would venture talk about what it might be like if everything we had didn't balance on the favor of one unpre-

dictable man.

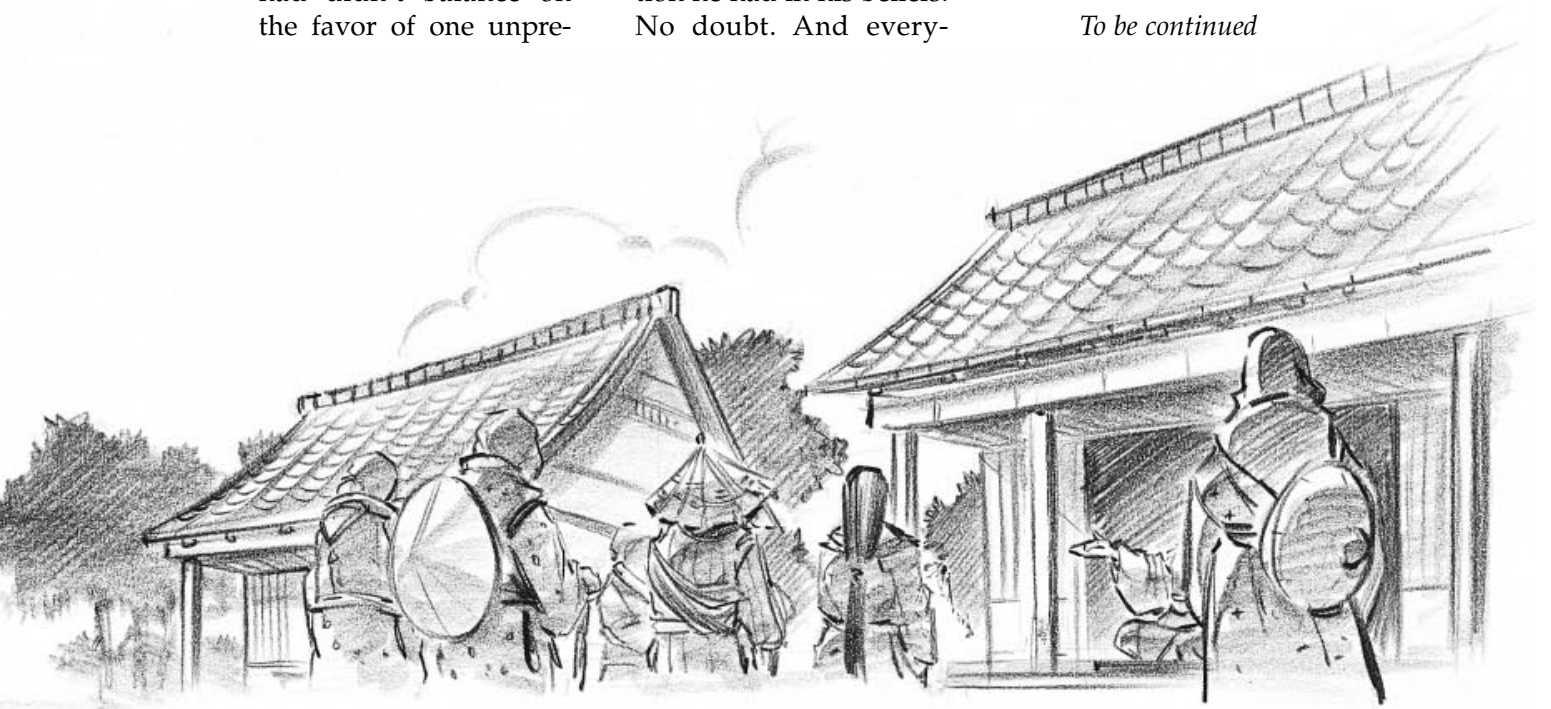
And what if...what if the priests were wrong? What if life was really worth living? What if there was more than to suffer in this life and vainly hope for relief in some other? This away from the ears of servants who might be pressured one day for telling what they heard.

**W**HEN I met the priest Nichiren, I couldn't believe at first that he dared to say the things he did in public! I stood in the back of a small crowd in a village square, my bow strung, at ready for some disturbance. The thing that impressed me about him was the absolute conviction he had in his beliefs. No doubt. And every-

thing he said made perfect sense. And then I realized just how dangerous he was. Because he made sense, and who among us could hear him and go home the same man?

If we had the gift of knowing the way of things while they're happening, I might have run to Lord Ema and begged him to send me to that northern province where I could happily dine on grass and stones! At least my world would not have suffered the upheaval I first experienced when I looked at this plain priest whose eyes knew my thoughts. A dangerous man. I wagered my best saddle that he would not live to see the year end.

*To be continued*



Illustrations by Ed Lee

# Finding Joy in Family Life



Cynthia and Gustavo Bulgach, with 3-month-old Catalina Rose.

*In 1998, the Year of Victory of the People for the New Century, the SGI-USA will focus on three major areas: supporting members' quests for happiness, nurturing youth and strengthening families. In the following conversation, Gustavo and Cynthia Bulgach discuss their work, marriage, parenting and the influence of their Buddhist practice in creating a harmonious family life. Gustavo is a musician, composer and music teacher, Cynthia is a producer of commercials. Living Buddhism correspondent Kathleen Slattery visited the couple and their 3-month-old baby girl, Catalina Rose, at their new home in Venice, California.*

**Cynthia:** It was New Year's Day, 1994, when we met.

**Gustavo:** I had started chanting two weeks before. One of my music students told me that if I wanted to change my life, I should chant and give this practice a try. So I did, and after thirteen days, I met Cynthia. I was playing in a band performing for the New Year's Day meeting, and she was helping with the sound system.

I'm always open for whatever is going to happen. You know, when you go to a meeting the first time, you hear about benefits, but you never realize the benefits are always there. It's up to you to have the life-condition high enough to see the benefits in front of your eyes and to be able to grasp them. So, a little slap in my face was Cynthia. "Open your eyes! I'm here!"

It was the way she cares about people that struck me, the way she in particular cared

about me. I was new in town. I had been living here about a year. I had moved from Buenos Aires, Argentina, to New York, then back to Argentina and then here to Los Angeles. American culture is so different from Argentinian culture, and that makes it a big challenge for people who are immigrants to fit into a new society. Especially in L.A. or in New York—it's a big collage of different cultures.

**Cynthia:** While I participated in young women's division activities for ten years, I was trying to find a guy. It's really important to me to do kosenrufu and do altruistic things, but I always found myself with people who didn't have the same values, or, whenever there was a conflict, we would reach a deadlock. I just couldn't find that right situation where we could be side by side, looking toward the future.

When Gustavo and I met, I

was a young women's head-quarters leader and we were holding monthly self-esteem meetings, which were so awesome. We had so many breakthroughs through our daimoku and dialogues. I remember distinctly one day when I had this catharsis, where I finally got the message in "On Attaining Buddhahood"—that you have to love yourself totally—we have Buddhahood inside us. It sunk in that the reason why my relationships weren't working was because I had to love myself 100 percent first; that was the bottom line. I had to accept myself as I am, stop picking on myself; that if I'm not perfectly thin or perfectly this or that, just get over it and realize I am a true Buddha, period. When I had that kind of deep change in my heart, I met Gustavo two or three weeks later. I realize I had to go through all those years of chanting and unfulfilling relationships to get to the point where I could see his value, his heart, his great qualities—and see that his whole being is so much more important than money, color, creed, religion, etc.

I think one reason why our relationship is so good, too, is that we started out as friends for a couple of months, hanging out, hiking. There was always a group of people, and we would just talk and laugh; we respected each other before there were any kind of romantic notions. That really helped to have a solid foundation.

I remember when we were first seeing each other, I was sick. I had finished working on a huge project, and I was really tired. Gustavo said, "Don't

worry, I'll take care of you." And I thought, what a concept! A guy taking care of me! I'm usually the caretaker, I'm usually the one who's making everything happen. Someone else actually can take care of me!

**Gustavo:** I ran over there to make sure she was fine. It wasn't a big deal for me, but it seemed like it was for her.

**Cynthia:** He's really nurturing, and that was such an eye-opener for me, to find a guy who is like me, someone who actually cares about other people, cares about the world. That to me was a really big reason why we're together, plus the fact that we laugh together so much.

We got married in Argentina nine months after we met. Then we had a Buddhist wedding four months later in L.A. We had people flying in from Argentina, England, Detroit, Oregon, San Francisco, San Diego, Mexico, Arizona, Florida and New York to attend the wedding.

Last Christmas Gustavo said, "Maybe this year we could think about having a baby." One week later, I conceived.

**Gustavo:** She brought the confidence to the family. I was completely in shock when she called me from Miami and said: "Guess what? I'm pregnant!"

**Cynthia:** I was in Miami shooting a commercial.

**Gustavo:** I was so scared that I said I have to take a shower. I realized that I had the phone in my hand when I was in the

shower. Then she said, "Everything's going to be fine." And it is fine. It's great!

**Cynthia:** My life is pretty close to what I was hoping it would be like, even better. Just having a family is an amazing experience, but I wasn't really mentally prepared for having such a commitment and responsibility. I really was dragging my heels about starting a family. I waited until I was 35 to have a baby. That's pretty old in some parts of the world (laughs). I thought that my youth would be gone if I had a baby, and it's just the opposite. Being around Catalina makes me see things through a baby's eyes. It's kind of like you start over with a kid.

**Gustavo:** I think people start a family because they want to share part of their lives. My vision of family is that we might have all these plans in the present, but we also have a bright future, and we have to be aware of that.

**Cynthia:** Yeah, you were also inspired by Catalina, because you composed a beautiful song for her, a saxophone solo, kind of jazzy.

**Gustavo:** I play the saxophone and also arrange and compose. Since I'm deeply involved in music, it's a great feeling to get inspired.

I always chant to create value. I'm trying to grasp all of these different benefits—money, my family. Money is welcome because it means that what I'm doing is fine. I can pay the bills, I can support my family. If I did-

n't make any money playing music, I would do something else. I'm really clear about that. I'm not a dreamer, like, I want to do music and that's it.

**Cynthia:** As a producer, I do commercials and music videos, though I've worked on a few feature films.

Since May 1997, I've been able to do every single job out of my house, which is unusual, because for the most part, I would have to go work in the production office. It's my baby's good fortune because I can be breastfeeding when I need to and take care of her instead of having some other person do it. That would have been such a dilemma for me. I used to wonder how am I going to be a career person and still take a year or two off? So far, we're fortunate we've been able to incorporate both.

I'm home a lot, but when I have to be out on the set, Gustavo's with her. Even when we're both here, we share in caring for the baby equally. It's not like: "She's dirty, you take her. You change the baby." I'm still feeding Catalina a couple of times in the middle of the night. If she needs to be changed, Gustavo will do it. He really helps so much. He doesn't feel like the baby is "the woman's job."

**Gustavo:** Well, before the baby was born, my priority was music. Now it's the baby. It's fun to be with her. Sometimes I play concerts for her, and if she cries, that means I'm not playing that well! I love to be with her.

**Cynthia:** We do things togeth-

er, but Gustavo's got to go off and do his own things at night sometimes. Now that we have a baby I rarely go to his gigs. I have my own friends that he doesn't necessarily hang out with, and we go and do our hikes or walks. We manage to have time together, but we both travel a lot. Even while I was pregnant I did a job in Spain producing a music video, and I was gone for three weeks. Then Gustavo might be gone for a couple of weeks on tour.

We both know that we have to take responsibility for the problems that come up. It's not like we blame the other person.

**Gustavo:** We stay united because we want to be with each other.

**Cynthia:** We talk every day on the phone. Even when we're in town, we talk at least a couple of times. I think it's consideration for the other person's schedule and feelings and opinions.

**Gustavo:** We know exactly who the other person is, what we each want. If I wanted to go

out of town for nine months, I could, but that's not what I want to do.

**Cynthia:** If that were to happen, he would consult me first. We would talk about it and figure out a way so that I would be able to go on the road with him. That's how we maintain our individuality. I'm not the type of person who will stop doing what I love to do because someone else is in my life. We respect each other's growth and individual journey.

Gustavo is totally supportive of me. A lot of people get married and want to change the other person—it doesn't work that way. I knew exactly what I was getting when I got him, and I want him to be happy with what he does. It's really important for us to keep going on our separate paths—him as a musician, me as a producer—and not compromise. We should continue on with our personal dreams. Why compromise? To live a life of regret? No thanks! I think that's really important, not to get so codependent that your every move has to be with the other person.

**Gustavo:** Sometimes we have the same point of view, sometimes not. We say, OK, we have to spend time talking about what we have here. So we chant first, then we talk about it.

**Cynthia:** Every morning we get up and we chant together; that is the foundation, first and foremost. The baby is usually with us. When there's conflict, I feel free enough and accepted by Gustavo that I can say, "You

know, this is a fear I'm having." I can talk to him, and even if we don't agree in the beginning, he invariably will go and chant about the situation on his own. He usually comes back to me and says, "Well, this is what I think," or, "This is how we can solve that," or, "Here's a solution," or, "I still think I'm right." We can move on, and I can do the same for him.

My parents were divorced when I was 11 and it was really hard. My whole life changed. I was able to see my dad a lot, even though I lived with my mom and my brother and sister. Then my mother remarried and we had a stepbrother and two stepsisters, so I've always had an extended family. To this day that's what a family is for me, because Gustavo and I have so many close friends whom we see every day, or four or five times a week. Our family includes our friends, and people in the SGI because our immediately family members live in Argentina, Oregon and Detroit. I feel with Gustavo, that we won't be breaking up, so I am really confident about Catalina's future.

**Gustavo:** I love to challenge myself; for example, I ride my bicycle a couple times a week to Soka University in Calabasas, and back, about a fifty-mile round trip, even if I feel weak or if the weather is bad. I'm committed, I have to go. There is no other way. I mean, there is no way for me to give up in the middle of the road, or to call Cynthia and say, "Come pick me up." When you have these weak attitudes, you start break-

ing up with your partner, when you start thinking...

**Cynthia:** That there is a way out.

**Gustavo:** Yeah. This is not a choice for us. We are not even thinking about breaking up, because this is not a choice.

**Cynthia:** It's not an option. As far as the family is concerned, it's about taking responsibility. I mean, we both know that we have to take responsibility for the problems that come up. It's not like we blame the other person. Instead, we talk about it, and then we really make sure that we take responsibility for our part in that conflict.

**Gustavo:** It's not about who's guilty, it's about how we can move forward.

**Cynthia:** Taking responsibility is a basic principle in Buddhism. I feel the reason why most people are unhappy is because they can't find the joy in the moment, or feel appreciation for what they do have. Instead they feel sad about what they don't have. Whenever it gets hard, I chant to have appreciation for the struggle itself. It's not like, "I have a problem, yippee!" But somehow it is the key to taking the next step in my faith. So I welcome whatever's happening.

**Gustavo:** We always struggle—everybody, every day, is in some kind of struggle. When you train yourself to live with that fact and feel joy for your little successes, I feel that's when you add to your life instead of subtracting. You learn to appreciate what you

have. I appreciate what I have now. Neither I nor Cynthia come from a rich family. We really appreciate what we have.

**Cynthia:** Going through all my struggles until now—learning how to take care of other people—is directly related to taking care of my family. By having young women's division members to take care of, to make sure they knew the schedule and that they were getting benefits in their lives—has had an impact on me being able to take care of my home, my husband, my baby.

Catalina has brought so much fortune to our family. She is such an individual already, so determined, with a will of iron. I don't feel an ownership thing. I just feel like we're here to get her going in the right direction, to really give her support and love, but not to make decisions for her. Obviously, we're going to raise her as a Buddhist, and hopefully she'll practice; if she doesn't, that's her choice. She'll know the values that we have.

**Gustavo:** The only thing we can teach her is...

**Cynthia:** Discipline and values.

**Gustavo:** Discipline and values. Discipline is one of the highest values you can ever show people. You can't tell them, you have to show them. I think every family is unique. Follow your heart—just do it. You're never going to be wrong if you trust yourself. □



# Travels With Aunt Jean

By Stephanie Celano, Staff Writer

Huntington Gardens, Pasadena, California, 1996



Benjamin Green, Las Vegas, 1997



Alice Fracchiolla, Pacific Palisades, California, 1997



Twin boys, Hong Kong, 1985



Jennifer Locke, 1990

Upon meeting Jean Pritchard, one is impressed by her clear blue eyes and gentle smile that set you at ease. Her demeanor is quite genuine and forthright, like that of a child. It's not difficult to understand why she's become such a successful children's photographer.

As a global photographer with more than thirty years of experience, Jean's honesty and purity of spirit are certainly reflected in her work; she simply captures the essence of whomever or whatever it is that she is shooting. Jean travels the world making friends while photographing children and landscape scenery using mainly black and white film—now specifically infra-red for scenery because, as she says, "Infra-red lends itself so well to scenery and people out there doing their life. Everything that has energy in the photographs will go light," creating a stronger contrast of light and dark. In combination with this technique, Jean sometimes hand-paints her photographs to accentuate aspects of her photos with color. She began hand-painting her photos over fifteen years ago, a technique that has recently become popular.



New York City, 1992

Originally a native of Decatur, Illinois, Jean moved to Los Angeles in the summer of 1966 upon the suggestion of a friend. It was at this time that she would discover her true passion in life, as well as the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. She had been working various jobs in bookkeeping and cashiering during this period of her life, and describes herself as being very lonely and needy, really negative about her life in relationship to other people. She had no appreciation at all for her life.

On September 25, 1967, Jean's friend Marcia Salisbury introduced her to the practice. For the first three years, Jean chanted to develop friendships. As a result, she learned through her Buddhist practice that she first had to learn to love herself and then her relationship with others would improve. Following an excerpt from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Jean encouraged herself to "employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 245).

Jean chanted to know if her mission was to be in photography. As long as she could remember, she was interested in photography. She gave herself one year to reach her goal. Two weeks later Jean was offered a job at her friend John Wolf's photo lab. It was here that she learned the fundamentals of printing and photography. After twelve years of develop-



Paris, The Louvre, 1994

ing her skills, she finally decided to start her own business.

At the beginning of her twentieth year of practice, with no money or prospects, Jean chanted to realize her dream. Her prayer was answered when she secured an interest-free loan for \$8,500 to start her business, and My Favorite Black and White Lab was born. Jean recounts: "The first week I was open I made fifty dollars. I made a determination to be debt-free within two years, and I was."

Jean's photo and processing business has been solvent for eleven years now, and is steadily increasing in revenue. Her clientele includes well-known professionals as well as amateurs who are great sources of encouragement for her. Jean has had the opportunity to photograph some familiar faces such as Dennis Hopper, Christopher Reeves, George Forman, Cynthia Gibb and Russ Tamblyn. She does her best to take a personal interest in all her customers no matter their status. Additionally, she travels the world photographing exotic places including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Europe and the United States.

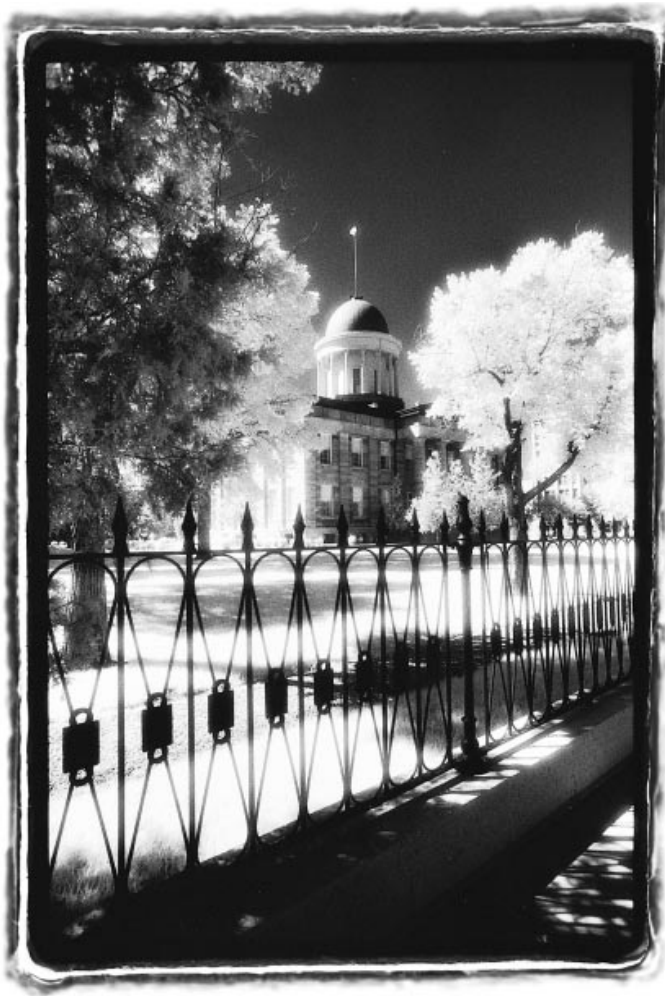
Although she enjoys all the places that she's visited, Jean is particularly interested in photographing the scenery of the United States. "I have a really big desire to leave something behind about the United States because we have such incredibly beautiful cities, every



Lisa Green and Aerin Ascher, New York, 1992



Port St. Nicholas, France, 1994



The old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois, 1997



Old barn, Washington, 1991

bit as beautiful as Europe—especially in the Midwest. I love the silos of the Midwest. To me they're just as beautiful as the castles of Europe." She likes to shoot "buildings and places that look like they've been around long enough to have been touched by a lot of people; that have great stories to tell." These photos are part of her exhibit titled "Travels With Aunt Jean."

As for her style as a professional photographer, Jean says she's "a point and shoot type of person"; she shoots the environment as it's happening, regardless of what the lighting conditions are. "I really go by my life rather than by my brain; I frame as I shoot." Finding infra-red

changed her work tremendously. She feels she has a special relationship with this type of film: "The first time I ever shot it and looked at what I got, it was like my life remembered it. I love it and I know how to shoot it and I know how to get good images on infra-red."

Children's photography is of particular interest to Jean because she feels so much like a kid herself. She says she's able to act really ridiculous, which puts children at ease. Jean loves to make kids laugh by making silly faces and being really animated. "Instead of trying to get them to fit into my rhythm, I fit into theirs. I love being around children."

As for the influences in her career, she credits her friends in faith—those who have been able to encourage her to pursue her dream. "Wayne and Lisa Green have encouraged me to go for it. They also give me a lot of love. If a person knows that they're loved, they're going to be more influenced and they're going to listen." Although Jean appreciates and admires the work of other photographers, she believes that her trust and strong connection to the people that she meets through her business are also some of the greatest influences in her life.

Jean is not overly concerned with fame and fortune, although she enjoys when her photo-



Jean's cousins at home, Centralia, Illinois, 1997

graphs are published. Her photos have graced the covers of *Photographer's Forum*, *Minolta*, *Essence*, *Modern Maturity*, *Women's View*, and the former *Seikyo Times*.

In 1997, Jean received a Mayoral commendation from Councilwoman Ruth Gallanter for her work with Lincoln Corridor Community Watch, a group of Venice business people and residents trying to clean up, make safer and more attractive Lincoln Boulevard. Also, the SGI honored Jean with the highest award for a photo taken in Idyllwild, California, which she entered in an international contest at the last minute. "If no one recognizes my photography

until after I die, that's O.K., as long as someone sees through my photography how beautiful the United States is." She loves her photography, she loves her customers, she loves her business and she feels very fortunate.

With all her success, Jean's heart always seems to be in an extraordinary place. When asked about her future, she comments: "I want to be able to make enough money to be able to travel where ever I want to and shoot. I want to have created enough fortune so that I don't have to sell my business. I want to be able to give my business to someone so they can do the same thing that I'm doing and create a business for themselves. Right



Jean Pritchard

now, I'm not rich but if I want to do something, I'm able to do it. If I want to go to France in May and take someone along, I can. And I have friends all over the world. To me, that's wealth." □

# Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra

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

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*This is the twenty-sixth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the March 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*What is the meaning of human existence in the boundless expanse of the universe? What is death? Is life eternal? What is the meaning of “life” given that we must all eventually die? How does the Lotus Sutra answer these fundamental questions of human existence? In this installment the participants begin a discussion on the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which contains the sutra’s central teaching. Tracing the main developments of the chapter, they touch on the importance of having a sound view of life and death, and the significance of the SGI movement in leading the way toward an “age of inquiry into life.”*

## 26 An Irrepressible Zest for Life—the Spirit of the “Life Span” Chapter

**Katsuji Saito:** Recently a great deal of attention has been focused on training that prepares people for the inevitability of death. Participants in these workshops and seminars engage in various programs. They may be told, for example, that they only have six months to live. They are then asked to decide how they would spend those final six months. Another approach might be to have people rank the three most important things to them in life. What these techniques seem to suggest is that thinking about death involves a refocusing on life.

**Takanori Endo:** It seems that in Europe and the United States, these seminars are also included in the curriculum of many schools. I understand there is even a program somewhere designed for elementary school students.

In Japan, too, given the unprecedented “graying” of society, it seems that more attention is being paid nowadays to issues of aging and death. All the same, I think that far too few people reflect on death as an issue that involves them personally.



CHARLES & JOSETTE LEVARS/CORBIS

The Pyramid of King Zosa, third dynasty, in Saqqara, Egypt. The pyramid was constructed (2737–1717 B.C.E.) by Imhotep, the first known architect in history. The structure was the first monumental royal tomb. In the foreground is a brick wall with sculpted cobras.

**Daisaku Ikeda:** In life, nothing is more certain than the fact that one will some day die. Everything else is indefinite and subject to change; death alone is a fact of eternal certainty.

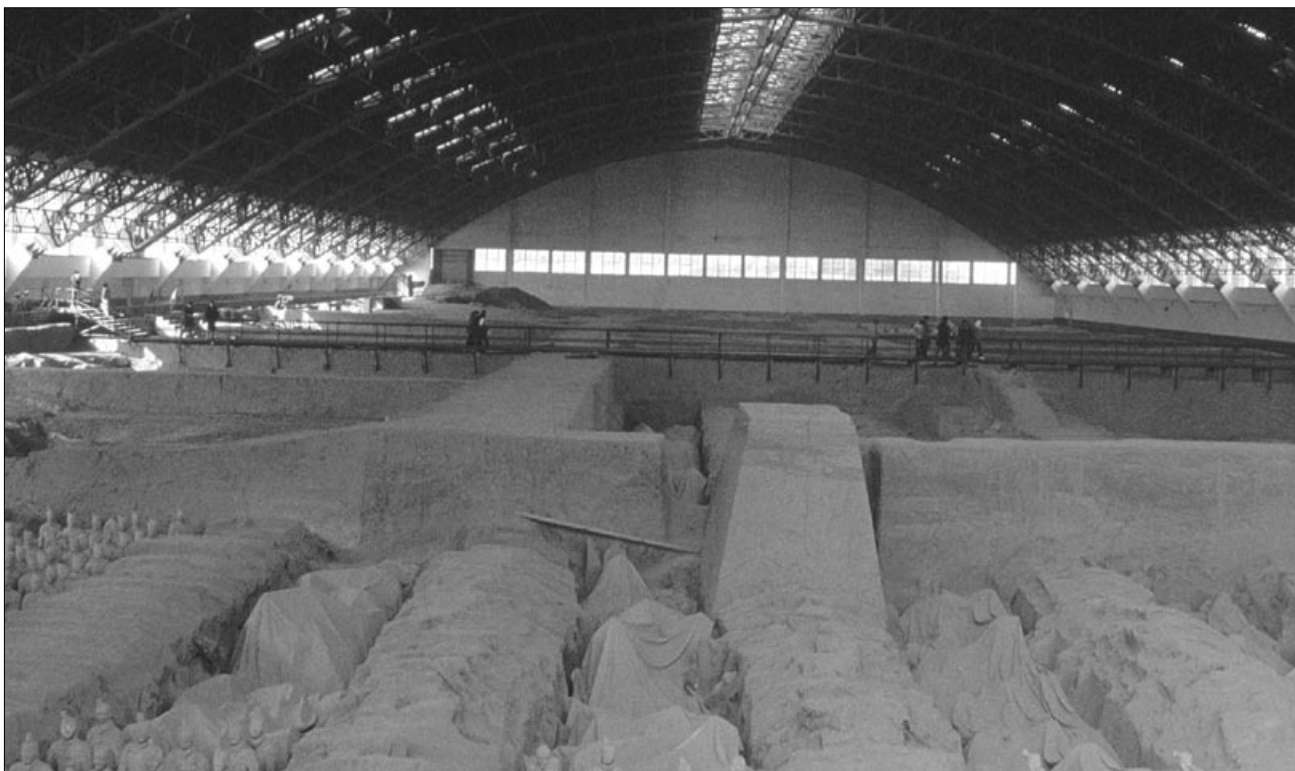
And yet, people try to turn away from this most certain of all things. While it may be true that, as the saying goes, “You cannot gaze directly at the sun or at death,” the lives of those who lack a sound understanding of life and death are like rootless grass. There is no question that without a perspective on death one cannot lead a stable and sure-footed life.

**Haruo Suda:** I think that to avert one’s eyes from death is comparable to averting one’s eyes from one’s true self. Incidentally, I notice that young people these days seem to be increasingly inter-

ested in learning about their past lives. One psychiatrist theorizes that this is because today’s youth, finding it difficult to ground their identity in their present self, are seeking to discover roots of identity in a self of the past.<sup>1</sup>

**Ikeda:** That may be so. On a superficial level, such a tendency might seem like nothing more than a passing fad. But on a deeper level, it may well be a sign of people’s heartfelt yearning for a firmer foundation on which to base their lives.

One of the more salient characteristics of modern civilization has been the treatment of death as something taboo and not to be talked about. But, the current boom in seminars and workshops about death the world over suggests that this tendency is rapidly changing. People today are



THE PURCELL TEAM/CORBIS

The rows of the Army of Terra-cotta Warriors who guarded Qin Shi Huang Di, the first Emperor of China, in death, near Xian, China.

earnestly seeking a clear-sighted understanding of life and death. I sense an ardent pulse of inquiry into the mystery of life.

**A Buddhist Movement for  
Both Young and Old To Learn  
About Life and Death**

**Suda:** I feel we have truly begun making our way down the runway toward the twenty-first century, the “century of life.”

**Ikeda:** From the standpoint of helping people learn about life and death, I think we can say that the SGI study movement is on society’s cutting edge.

**Saito:** Yes. Through our study movement, both young and old are continually deepening their understanding of the Buddhist view of life and death. For instance, I heard about an 80-year-old grandmother who was among the candidates

who took the essay exam administered in Japan last year for the rank of professor. The theme she chose for her essay was life and death.

I understand that afterwards she remarked: “Never in my life have I studied so hard. In the process of learning about the Buddhist view of life as transcending the three existences of past, present and future, the prospect of dying no longer made me afraid.” The fact that members are acquiring such insight through participating in study activities is really remarkable.

**A Life of Pride in Having Won**

**Ikeda:** That’s right. This is true learning. Buddhist study in the SGI is by no means limited to simply memorizing philosophical principles.

We must also learn from the way people die. People who have died, whomever they may be, are our “seniors in life” by virtue of their having preceded us in experiencing death. This is true even if the deceased was younger than we are,

even if they were a child.

**Endo:** I am reminded of an episode involving a 9-year-old boy who died of leukemia. It is described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who is well known for her work counseling the terminally ill and investigating near-death experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Jeffy, the boy in question, had been in and out of hospitals since the age of 3. By the time of his last visit, he was extremely weak, and Dr. Ross realized that he had only a few weeks left to live. Jeffy announced with a sense of great urgency that he wanted to go home "today." Dr. Ross talked with his parents, who were worried and reluctant to comply with their son's wishes. She finally persuaded the parents and accompanied them home.

When they arrived in the garage, Jeffy got out of the car and said to his father, "Take my bicycle down from the wall." It was a brand-new bicycle that his father had bought for him three years ago, but that he had never been able to ride. It was Jeffy's dream to once in his life ride around his neighborhood on his bicycle.

Jeffy was barely able to stand on his feet. He had his father put training wheels on the bicycle, and then said to Dr. Ross, "You are here to hold my mom back." She writes:

Therefore I held mom back, and her husband held me back. We held each other back and learned the hard way how painful and difficult it sometimes is in the face of a very vulnerable, terminally ill child to allow him the victory and the risk to fall and hurt and bleed.

And he then drove off on his solo journey on the bicycle around the neighborhood.

**Suda:** Did he make it back unhurt?

**Endo:** Yes. She writes: "He came back, the proudest man you have ever seen. He was beaming, smiling from one ear to the other. He looked like somebody who had won the gold medal in the Olympics."

One week later Jeffy died. And a week after that Dougy, Jeffy's younger brother, whose birthday it was, related how after the bicycling episode Jeffy, without their parents' knowledge, had

given him the bicycle for a birthday present. "Jeff had told Dougy that he wanted the pleasure of personally giving him his most beloved bicycle. But he could not wait another two weeks until it was Dougy's birthday, because by then he would be dead." He thus was taking care of his "unfinished business."

Dr. Ross continues: "The parents had a lot of grief, but no grief work, no fear, no guilt, no shame.... They had the memory of this ride around the block and that beaming face of Jeffy."

According to Dr. Ross, everyone has a purpose. "In all my work with patients, I learned that whether they are chronic schizophrenics, severely retarded children, or dying patients, each one has a purpose. Each one cannot only learn and be helped by you, but can actually become your teacher."<sup>3</sup>

**Ikeda:** What a moving episode! That young boy died having won a victory.

I think it was Yoshida Shoin<sup>4</sup> who said: "A person who dies at ten experiences the four seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter in ten years. A person who dies at twenty has the four seasons in twenty years. Those who die at thirty, fifty or a hundred also each experience the four seasons in their years."<sup>5</sup>

Shoin was thoroughly committed to his beliefs. Though he was executed at the age of 29, because he based himself on such a view of life and death, he was not daunted in the least by the prospect of death. In a sense, the key issue is whether one dies having achieved what one needs to achieve; whether one dies with pride in having won.

To learn about death is to learn how to live. Once on a philosophy exam, the French philosopher Alain<sup>6</sup> postulated the following situation, "A young woman is about to jump off the parapet of the Boieldieu Bridge," and directed his students to explain what they would say to keep her from jumping.<sup>7</sup> If you were to come upon someone seriously debating whether to live or die, what would you say to the person? Therein lies true philosophy. It might seem that this question pertains to an extreme and special situation, but in fact that is not the case. The question of how one ought to live as a human being is a fundamental issue that has been asked at all times, in all places and by all people.

## Death Has To Be Considered As a Personal Issue

**Suda:** That's right. A psychiatrist describes how he had asked a youth who had unsuccessfully attempted to commit suicide, "Why did you try to commit suicide?" Turning the doctor's words around, the youth immediately shot back, "Why are you living?" leaving him at a loss for a response. "I was really stumped," he says, describing his reaction. "Dying and living were opposites; they were like the two sides of a coin. Unless you can clearly articulate the significance of your own way of life and existence, you cannot tell another person, 'You must not die.'"<sup>8</sup>

**Saito:** It is certainly difficult to consider life and death as personal issues. No matter how eloquent someone may be in philosophizing about life or explaining theories of life and death, it will all count for nothing if deep down the person views such matters as pertaining only to others.

One physician explains that it took the death of his own child before he was able to come to grips with the meaning of life. He writes that whereas formerly, when he had cured a patient of illness, he would be filled with pride as a doctor, "With the death of my own child, for the first time I started to think about the death of my patients. In going from viewing it as 'another person's death' to viewing it as 'my own death,' I felt that I wanted to erase myself out of shame and a sense of guilt."<sup>9</sup>

**Endo:** That's a heart-rending confession.

**Ikeda:** The experience of losing a loved one impels us toward a deeper understanding of life. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, would talk about the profound sadness he felt at the death of his daughter. She had passed away some years before he took faith. He recounted how he had cried the night through holding her cold body in his arms:

The day my daughter died was the saddest day in my life.... I thought to myself, "What if my wife were to die?" That brought me to tears. And then my wife did indeed die. Later I wondered what I would do if my mother died. I was, of course, very

fond of my mother. Pursuing things still further, I shuddered at the thought of my own death.

While in prison during the war, I devoted some time to reading the Lotus Sutra, and one day I suddenly understood. I had finally found the answer. It took me more than twenty years to solve the question of death. I had wept all night long over my daughter's death, and I dreaded my wife's death and the thought that I, too, would die. It's because I was finally able to answer this riddle that I became the president of the Soka Gakkai.<sup>10</sup>

For human beings, to fear death is natural. Even President Toda struggled with the prospect of death. It's impossible that someone could have no fear of death, or could be entirely indifferent to whether they lived or died. The only way is to have struggled hard to develop such a resolute state of life.

Everyone fears and is saddened by death. That is natural. But by struggling to overcome the pain and sadness that accompanies death, we become more aware of the dignity of life and develop the spirit to share the sufferings of others as our own.

**Endo:** I understand what you're saying very well. I myself was in that position. Twelve years ago, my eldest son, who was then 4 years old, contracted bronchopneumonia and suddenly died. At the time, it was all I could do to contain my grief. I was in a daze.

But thanks to the repeated encouragement that I received from you, President Ikeda, and others, I became able to directly face the reality of my son's death. I really feel boundless gratitude for the support everyone showed me.

From then on, with your words to me, "This will definitely have meaning for your life," ever in mind, I began chanting much more earnestly. I read the Goshō and hungrily studied your guidance. In everything, I found fresh meaning. Everything touched me with new impact. I felt as though my life had been cleansed.

I keenly feel that without having gone through the ordeal of losing my son, I probably would not have been able to develop the deep conviction I now have in faith. And I'm afraid I would have remained rather shallow in my ability to understand people's sincerity or the profundity of life. I might add that I am personally confident that my



SPACE TELESCOPE SCIENCE INSTITUTE/CORBIS

Eagle Nebula—Large formations of molecular hydrogen and interstellar dust in the shape of pillars. Ultraviolet light from nearby stars has eroded away the lighter hydrogen gas, and what is left is relatively dense. EGGs, or "evaporating gaseous globules," are denser patches within the pillars where the material is collapsing even further to form new stars. As the lighter gas is eroded away around them, the embryonic stars cease growing and eventually emerge from the gas and dust clouds.

child has been reborn.

**Ikeda:** I also feel certain that is the case. Buddhism teaches the principle of the oneness of parent and child. You are giving many people hope by discussing the Lotus Sutra and sharing

your personal perspective on the eternity of life. In your efforts in faith, the life of your deceased son is at one with your own. Whether he is presently in the phase of life or the phase of death, your son, because of the oneness of parent and child, fully shares the benefit of your efforts.

**Endo:** Yes. Thank you very much.

**Ikeda:** Life is long. And it is not all clear skies. There are rainy days and days of fierce wind. But no matter what happens, as long as we maintain our faith, in the end everything that happens will turn into benefit. President Toda would say: "As long as you have faith, everything will be your benefit. On the other hand if you lose faith and have doubts, everything will be punishment."<sup>11</sup>

We have to live out our lives with firm belief in the eternity of life. Through our victory in this life, we show proof of life's eternity. This is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, and of the "Life Span" chapter. No matter what happens, we have to continue living, we have to survive; this is the spirit of the "Life Span" chapter.

**Saito:** The "Life Span" chapter teaches life's eternity not simply as words or as a philosophical concept, but as a reality that we can directly experience. This is its essence.

### **We Can Manifest the Eternal Life of the Universe**

**Ikeda:** It is to live with great vitality. The "Life Span" chapter reveals the boundlessness of life, which is eternal and as vast as the universe. And the practice of the "Life Span" chapter is to manifest that immense life in the reality of our own lives. The unabbreviated title of the chapter (Jp. Nyorai Juryo) means "fathom the life span of the Thus Come One." The practice, in other words, is to cause the great and eternal life force of the Buddha to well forth in one's own being.

The "eternal life" described in the "Life Span" chapter is the life of the universe, endowed with infinite vitality, wisdom and compassion, that sustains all living beings. The "Life Span" chapter clarifies that this life is itself Shakyamuni's true identity, and the true entity of all Buddhas. This is consistent with President Toda's realization that the Buddha is life.

This eternal life is also the Mystic Law, the Thus Come One, the essential nature of the Law, and the true entity. It is the fundamental Law of the universe that pervades all phenomena in the ten worlds and the three thousand realms. The Daishonin identified this eternal life as Nam-

myoho-renge-kyo.

Life and death are the mysterious functions, the innate rhythm, of this eternal life of the universe. Viewed solely in terms of the phenomena of life and death, life is impermanent. These "sufferings of life and death" and "sufferings of impermanence" are the wellspring of all human suffering. Shakyamuni worked exhaustively to teach people this.

This is certainly not just some kind of old wives' tale. The sufferings of life and death lie at the foundation of all the sufferings of modern society. The "Life Span" chapter's teaching of "eternal life" is the good medicine to cure these sufferings of life and death.

**Saito:** Yes. Nichiren Daishonin states that the essential teaching for solving the sufferings of life and death is to be found only in the "Life Span" chapter (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1022).

**Ikeda:** I think there are many people who have studied the "Life Span" chapter many times already. For that matter, we're all reciting it each day during gongyo. But to confirm the basics, why don't we begin by going over the outline of the chapter?

### **The Teaching of Shakyamuni's Enlightenment in the Remote Past Overturns All Earlier Teachings**

**Suda:** Okay. The "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter describes the appearance of countless splendid bodhisattvas from within the ground. Bodhisattva Maitreya asks Shakyamuni to explain just when and where he instructed these myriad bodhisattvas. In response, Shakyamuni begins expounding the "Life Span" chapter.

**Endo:** Just a few decades had passed since Shakyamuni attained enlightenment beneath the Bodhi tree. Thus it would have been impossible for him, in such a short time, to have instructed such a vast number of bodhisattvas to the point of their being practically on a par with the Buddha himself in level of attainment. This is the substance of Maitreya's question.

**Ikeda:** Seeing the wonderful appearance of these

disciples, Maitreya must have wondered: “Just what kind of being is my mentor? He must be a person of far greater attainment than I had previously imagined.”

**Saito:** That’s right. And Shakyamuni’s response takes the form of his revelation at the outset of the “Life Span” chapter that he in fact attained enlightenment in the remote past. In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the first half (or theoretical teaching) of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni had taught that he first attained enlightenment during his present lifetime in India. But here he completely overturns this teaching, revealing that “it has been immeasurable, boundless ... kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.”

**Ikedā:** In other words, Shakyamuni did not become a Buddha for the first time in his present existence. Rather, he had been a Buddha all along.

**Endo:** Everyone must have been very surprised. After all, this is exactly the opposite of what he had said previously.

**Suda:** Some may well have reacted with alarm, thinking: “What! Have I been deceived all this time!”

**Saito:** Shakyamuni discards his provisional status as the Buddha who attained enlightenment for the first time in his present existence and reveals his true identity as the Buddha enlightened since the remote past. This is termed “casting off the transient and revealing the true.” I think it might be a good idea for us to go over the meaning of this concept in depth on another occasion.

**Ikedā:** I agree. It is a very profound doctrine. Also, it relates to the matter of time without beginning, or *kuon ganjo*. I propose we discuss it later in light of the overall flow of the “Life Span” chapter.

**Suda:** *Gohyaku-jintengo* is a metaphor used to indicate the extremely distant time in the past when Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood. It is described as follows:

Suppose a person were to take five hundred, a thou-

sand, ten thousand, a million *nayuta asamkhya* thousand-millionfold worlds and grind them to dust. Then, moving eastward, each time he passes five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million *nayuta asamkhya* worlds he drops a particle of dust. (LS16, 225)

We might imagine the person to be traveling in a rocket ship or something. In any event, he continues to the east in this manner until he has dropped every particle of dust.

The purpose of the “Life Span” chapter is to explain that all living beings, not just Shakyamuni, have in fact been Buddhas since the remote past; and to cause people to become aware of this.

**Endo:** *Nayuta* and *asogi* are ancient Indian numerical units; they are both enormous numbers of ten to numerous tens of powers. According to one source, a *nayuta* is equal to the number one followed by eleven zeros (a hundred billion), and an *asogi* is equal to one followed by fifty-one zeros.

The thousand-millionfold world indicates the universe as conceived in the worldview of the day. The number of lands passed in the manner that you described is utterly beyond calculation; one cannot even begin to imagine such an enormous number.

**Suda:** That’s right. But we’re not done yet. Surprisingly, it says that if all the worlds that have

been passed so far, whether they received a particle or not, are then ground to dust, and that each of these particles of dust represents one aeon. An aeon is an extremely long period of time; according to one explanation, it is equal to about 16 million years.

The time since Shakyamuni attained enlightenment is said to surpass even the utterly incalculable period of time represented by all these particles of dust, by “a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million *nayuta asamkhya kalpas*” (LS16, 225). This total period of time since his enlightenment is termed *gohyaku-jintengo*.

**Endo:** It truly boggles the mind.

**Suda:** Shakyamuni’s having attained enlightenment at such a remote time in the past is termed his actual attainment in the remote past.

**Saito:** Since he explains that he actually attained enlightenment at that particular time in the remote past, we get the sense that there was a point of beginning. On one level, therefore, *gohyaku-jintengo* may be thought of as representing a limited period of time, albeit a very long one. In substance, however, it seems that Shakyamuni is here trying to describe an infinite period of time.

**Ikeda:** He’s trying to somehow express the idea of the eternal.

### The Eternal Buddha Exists Here and Now

**Suda:** This teaching of his enlightenment in the remote past alone would have been enough to, as the saying goes, “startle the heavens and shake the earth.” But Shakyamuni follows this up by making a declaration that overturns what had until that time been the prevailing common wisdom. Namely, he explains that ever since he attained Buddhahood at that remote time in the past, he has been constantly in this *saha* world expounding the Law and instructing people.

**Endo:** In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, he had explained that the *saha* world was an impure land defiled with earthly desires, and that the Buddha dwells in a pure land located elsewhere.

The Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the west or the Emerald Land to the east are well-known examples.

But in the “Life Span” chapter, he says that this *saha* world is the pure land where the Buddha, enlightened since the remote past, dwells eternally. A pure land is also called a Land of Tranquil Light. The principle that the *saha* world is itself the Land of Tranquil Light is another landmark teaching of the “Life Span” chapter.

**Saito:** The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China calls this the “mystic principle of the True Land.”

**Suda:** More mysterious still, Shakyamuni explains that he has been teaching people not only in this world, but in countless other lands.

**Endo:** We can only imagine the Buddha enlightened since the remote past as in some sense pervading the entire universe.

**Ikeda:** That’s right. He can be thought of as a Buddha who dwells anywhere in the entire universe and who may appear anywhere to lead beings to enlightenment. For precisely that reason, we can say that the *saha* world—the place we live here and now—is the pure land where the Buddha, enlightened since the remote past, dwells eternally.

**Suda:** The mysterious preaching continues. Shakyamuni, as the Buddha enlightened since the remote past, explains that the discussions he held in the past where he mentioned other Buddhas with various names living at different times had been merely an expedient means that he employed to lead people to enlightenment.

**Endo:** Shakyamuni explains that those Buddhas were all provisional Buddhas.

**Suda:** “Provisional Buddha” means a Buddha who exists as the shadow of the true Buddha. If the true Buddha is like the moon in the sky, a provisional Buddha is like the moon’s reflection in a pond.

**Saito:** Shakyamuni, understood as having attained enlightenment for the first time during



Standing against a backdrop painted to resemble a clock face, dancer Anna Ludmila holds her arms as if they were the clock's hands (March 22, 1930). Shakyamuni's depiction of time and when he attained enlightenment as stated in the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra is a key element of his teachings.

faith. President Toda would often say, "To understand something intellectually is easy; but to grasp it through faith is entirely different."<sup>14</sup> This is certainly true of the eternity of life.

### "Enlightenment" in the Latter Day Means Faith in the Gohonzon

**Suda:** For that matter, regarding President Toda's enlightenment while in prison,<sup>15</sup> there have been inquiries from readers wondering whether they can have the same experience.

**Ikeda:** For many people, the word *enlightenment* seems to have associations with mystical powers, such as the ability to remember past lives or to see into the future. But that is certainly not the case. Those who casually speak of enlightenment in such terms are definitely frauds.

President Toda remarked: "What is enlightenment in the Latter Day of the Law? It is to believe wholeheartedly in the Gohonzon."<sup>16</sup> Not to doubt the Gohonzon no matter what happens, to believe earnestly—this is enlightenment in the Latter Day. Faith in the Gohonzon itself equals enlightenment.

To illustrate, there might be someone who agonizes over his home situation. The person lives in anguish, feeling that he is the most miserable person in the world. He feels resentment toward others and complains constantly. However, as a result of opening his eyes to faith and learning about Buddhism, he comes to understand that the causes of his misery are within his own life. He then strives to carry out his human revolution. As his faith deepens and his state of life expands, he is able to splendidly overcome his sufferings.

Through this experience, the person grasps the truth that when one's frame of mind or spirit changes, everything changes. This is the case of embodying the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, or *ichinen sanzen*. Isn't this an instance of brilliant enlightenment?

his present lifetime in India, is also such a provisional Buddha.

**Ikeda:** The purpose of the "Life Span" chapter is to explain that all living beings, not just Shakyamuni, have in fact been Buddhas since the remote past; and to cause people to become aware of this. Its purpose is to open people's eyes to the great and eternal life of the universe. And it is Nichiren Daishonin's revelation of the implicit teaching of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] that makes it possible on a practical level for people to do so.

President Toda said: "The ultimate purpose of practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism is to awaken to the eternity of life. It is to realize with one's entire being that life is eternal. When we do so, we experience absolute happiness. This happiness continues eternally; it can never be destroyed. We practice faith in order to establish such a state of happiness."<sup>13</sup>

The important thing is that we realize this with our entire being. And the only way to do that is through faith; by polishing and deepening our

**Suda:** Members who have had such experiences are numerous. Indeed, they could well be described as countless.

**Ikeda:** Of course, President Toda possessed a wonderful state of life uniquely his own. But it was inseparable from his absolute, unparalleled confidence in the Gohonzon; no one could match his strength of conviction. His state of life was that of great confidence itself.

### The True Nature of Life and Death

**Endo:** Continuing with our summary of the "Life Span" chapter, Shakyamuni explains that the Buddha enlightened since the remote past is able to manifest various forms and guide people to enlightenment because he "perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is" (LS16, 226).

**Saito:** "Threefold world" means the actual world where beings who have not eradicated illusion dwell.

**Ikeda:** The phrase, "The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is," refers to the wisdom of the Buddha to discern the true aspect of all things. Because he possesses this wisdom, the Buddha can freely expound teachings in accord with people's capacity.

What, then, is the true nature of life and death as seen with the eye of the Buddha? This is described in the next passage.

**Saito:** Yes. Shakyamuni says, "There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction" (LS16, 226). In the threefold world, there is neither birth nor death, there is neither withdrawing from this world nor appearing in it. Accordingly, there is no distinction between those presently in the world and those who have died.

**Suda:** It seems to me that this clarifies the eternal existence of life.

From a common sense standpoint, we can only think of birth as appearing in the world and of death as withdrawing from it. But from the Buddha's perspective, birth and death are only

alternating phases of life, which is itself eternal.

**Ikeda:** That's right. But the statement, "There is no ... birth and death," emphasizes the eternal aspect of life. Then again, if we were only to think of life from that angle, we may fall into abstraction. After all, life and death are realities of existence. To ignore them, therefore, is to engage in theoretical speculation.

Nichiren Daishonin goes one step further in saying, "We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the earth of our intrinsically enlightened nature" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 724). Life and death based on the Mystic Law are themselves dramas on "the earth of our intrinsically enlightened nature," or the eternal stage of the great life of the universe. When we realize that we are in some sense enacting a drama, our existence becomes a source of inexhaustible joy. Life and death are not fraught with suffering; they are filled with joy. This is how we realize the ultimate state of life in which "life is joyful and death is joyful, too."

The Mystic Law is the great beneficial medicine for overcoming the sufferings of life and death. The "Life Span" chapter says, "This is a highly effective medicine" (LS16, 228).

The members of the SGI who day in and day out are unsparingly using their minds and their bodies for the sake of the Law and for the sake of friends are truly advancing along the path of victory in life over eternity.

**Saito:** How noble it is to live out one's life based on faith in the Mystic Law! How truly fortunate we are!

### A Drama in Which Life Is Joyful and Death Is Joyful, Too

**Suda:** There are countless examples in the SGI of people who have enacted this wonderful drama of life and death. I have heard about the experience of the grandmother-in-law of an acquaintance of mine. Her name was Chiyo Nakatani, and she died four years ago [in 1993] at the age of 76. She was survived by eight children and their spouses, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In all, thirty-seven members of her family were there chanting daimoku for her when she passed away. The members of the family are all active at

the ward, headquarters, chapter or district levels of the organization. When they all get together, it's like a chapter general meeting.

**Endo:** Did she have any living siblings or relatives of her own generation?

**Suda:** No. Her parents and siblings died when she was young, and because she had moved away from her native village, it seems she had been without a single living relative.

During and after the war, she lost two husbands, and a number of her children. In 1956, while struggling hard to raise those children who survived, she joined the Soka Gakkai. She reportedly developed strong confidence in faith as a result of having overcome cancer.

The husband of one of her granddaughters is an acquaintance of mine. Everyone in the family would say that she was "like a mountain." She carried through with unswerving faith, not flinching in the least no matter how fiercely the storms of destiny might blow.

If her children would complain about how difficult their life was, she would tell them: "If your stomach were full, you might not be able to practice faith correctly. Isn't it because you have a lot of difficulties that you can earnestly exert yourself in activities? You should be appreciative."

She brought the family business to a certain level of prosperity, and was able to provide a home for each of her children in the Shirogane area of Tokyo's Minato Ward. She reportedly remained active as a district-level leader during her later years, taking particular joy in propagation activities.

She was always citing passages of the Goshō. One of her favorite passages goes: "This body of ours in the end will become nothing more than the soil of the hills and fields. Therefore, it is useless to begrudge your life, for though you may wish to, you cannot cling to it forever. Even people who live a long time rarely live beyond the age of 100. And all the events of a lifetime are like the dream one dreams in a brief nap" (MW-3, 215).

**"I Received My Long Life  
From the Gohonzon"**

**Endo:** I have also heard the experience of Yuki

Katsura of Tokyo's Sugunami Ward. When Mrs. Katsura died last October, reportedly more than 360 people came to attend her funeral, including members of the local senior citizens group and many shopkeepers.

For the funeral of an 84-year-old woman who lived in a block housing complex and did not have any particular status in society, this was quite unusual. It became quite a topic of conversation.

Although she was tough enough to single-handedly raise four daughters, it seems that Mrs. Katsura herself had been born two months pre-

**F**rom the standpoint of eternity, there is hardly any difference between a "long" and a "short" life. Therefore, it's not whether one's life is long or short, but how one lives that is important.

maturely, and that as an adult she had a very slight build, weighing less than eighty-eight pounds. Toward the end of her life, she weighed only sixty-one pounds. Nonetheless, she remained extremely energetic and cheerful.

Mrs. Katsura would often say, "It really shouldn't have been possible for me to live this long. I received my long life from the Gohonzon." Ten years ago her doctor thought that she might have cancer. Throughout the time she was hospitalized, she chanted resolute daimoku, saying, "I entrust everything to the Gohonzon. If I have a mission, I will recover without fail."



Anthony Slazas throws a football in an event for the Ohio Senior Olympics.

After her discharge, she remained active with the local senior citizens' group and took great pleasure in helping others. She did not seem the least fatigued or worn down by her active life.

**Suda:** She must have been well trusted in the community.

**Endo:** She also worked tirelessly as a district leader, and it seems that each month she would get at least one new person to start taking the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper or other publications.

On the day she passed away, she had been planning to go out somewhere for the first time in a long time with her four children. The previous day she had gone to the beauty shop. On the

morning of the appointed day, the members of her family came to her room to find that she had passed away peacefully.

She had apparently been kneeling on her bed, and had fallen forward. Her daughters found her lying there peacefully with her eyes closed. Her skin was lustrous. The physician who came out to the house reportedly remarked that he hoped to die so peacefully himself.

Although the funeral did not take place until nearly a week later, her face still had a pink hue and she seemed to have grown younger by the day. In relating their impressions, it was reported that even many non-members were so impressed by her appearance that they could only attribute it to her faith.



DAN LAMONT/COORBIS

### Develop the State of Buddhahood During This Lifetime

**Ikeda:** I heard reports about both Mrs. Nakatani and Mrs. Katsura. Such people are pillars of the Soka Gakkai. They are true practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. They are most respectable. Their lives are a model for all.

There are countless such people in the SGI. The phrase in the Gosho passage you cited a moment ago, “Even people who live a long time rarely live beyond the age of one hundred,” is really true. President Toda would often remark, “One hundred years from now everyone here will be dead.”

This world is like a “dream one dreams in a brief nap.” From the standpoint of eternity, there is hardly any difference between a “long” and a “short” life. Therefore, it’s not whether one’s life is long or short, but how one lives that is important. It is what we accomplish, the degree to which we develop our state of life, the number of people we help become happy—this is what matters.

Those who firmly establish the state of Buddhahood in their lives will enjoy this state of life eternally. This is what attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime means.

**Saito:** In other words, even if our life is short, we can still use it to establish a state of happiness and fulfillment that continues over eternity.

**Ikeda:** That’s right. That’s a fundamental Buddhist principle. At the same time, I always pray that SGI members will enjoy excellent health and longevity.

The “Life Span” chapter says: “Let us live out our lives!” (LS16, 228). Life span is a matter of life force. Receiving boundless vitality from the Gohonzon, we can live vigorously to the end. This is the “Life Span” chapter’s secret teaching of rejuvenation.

**Saito:** Certainly, there are many people in the SGI who have extended their lives. I know of a woman who had once been sickly and weak, and who, prior to joining the Soka Gakkai, had been told by a physician that she would not live long. However, as a result of taking faith, she became healthy and is now, at more than 100 years of age, still vigorously participating in discussion meetings. Meanwhile, the doctor who told her this has long since passed away.

**Ikeda:** Through faith, with each passing year our hearts become increasingly youthful. We advance vigorously and filled with a sense of boundless hope for the future. This is true health. This is true longevity.

Those who dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu can definitely achieve such a state. That is why we practice faith.

### A Message for People of the Future

**Endo:** Getting back to the outline of the “Life Span” chapter, we have gotten as far as the explanation that the Buddha enlightened since the remote past has been constantly dwelling in this world. Shakyamuni next clarifies that the Buddha will be constantly present in the world throughout the future, too. He says, “Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I

acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed" (LS16, 227).<sup>17</sup>

**Saito:** This is a message to the future. From the standpoint of "saving living beings," the true intention of the "Life Span" chapter lies not so much with the past as with the future. The Daishonin says that the "Life Span" chapter was expounded exclusively for the people in the world after Shakyamuni's passing, and above all for the people of the Latter Day.

I believe the significance of its teaching about the past lies in the elucidation of the original cause of Shakyamuni's enlightenment.

**Ikeda:** That may be so, but from another perspective, it is precisely because the "Life Span" chapter reveals the origin of the Buddha's life (the cause) that it can lead the people of the future who are experiencing the sufferings of birth and death to enlightenment (the effect). It is the passage you just cited, "Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way," that suggests this most fundamental of origins.

**Saito:** In other words, the "original cause of enlightenment" lies in Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past. And when we pursue this original cause, we arrive at the Buddhist Law implicit in the sutra as was revealed by Nichiren Daishonin.

**Suda:** In "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin says, "The doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*, or three thousand realms in a single moment of life, is found in only one place, hidden in the depths of the *Juryo* ['Life Span'] chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-2, 66 [80]). Over the years, various arguments have been made about precisely which passage of the "Life Span" chapter contains this teaching. Nichikan Shonin clearly states that it is contained in the passage, "Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way."

**Ikeda:** That's right. T'ien-t'ai expresses the marvelous state of life of the Buddha awakened to the eternity of life in terms of the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. And the soul of this doctrine lies in the "Life Span" chapter.

But the "Life Span" chapter reveals the eternity of life through the marvelous appearance that Shakyamuni assumes after attaining Buddhahood (i.e., the true effect). This is termed the "mystic principle of true effect." But the real issue is what ordinary people can do to awaken to life's eternity. It is Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of the true cause that explains this. I expect that later on we will have the opportunity to delve into this point more deeply.

### Toward the "Century of the Human Revolution"!

**Suda:** Incidentally, if the Buddha eternally dwells in this world in both the present and the future and is never extinct, then the question arises of why the Buddha enters nirvana.

The Lotus Sutra explains: "If they [people] see that the Thus Come One is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind" (LS16, 227). Therefore, the Buddha explains that he enters extinction as an expedient means. This is the meaning of "as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana" (LS16, 229).

**Saito:** I expect we will have occasion to take up this point again later on. In a word, the "Life Span" chapter is the soul of all sutras. It is the "Life Span" chapter that provides answers to the questions: "What is Buddhism?" and "What does Buddhism teach?"

**Ikeda:** Yes. Nichiren Daishonin states, "If, among all the numerous sutras, this *Juryo* chapter should be lacking, it would be as though there were no sun and moon in the sky, no supreme ruler in the nation, no gems in the mountains and rivers, and no spirit in human beings" (MW-2, 128 [150]). To study the "Life Span" chapter is to study the very essence of Buddhism. It is to deepen one's understanding of the essence of life and of the true nature of the self.

If we fail to understand this, then no matter what we might do our lives would be fundamentally shrouded in darkness. Our lives would be full of

illusion and suffering. We would live in a world of darkness truly “as though there were no sun and moon in the sky.” It is the “Life Span” chapter that causes the “sun of hope” to rise in our lives. This process is called the human revolution.

**Suda:** I see.

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, whom we talked about at the beginning, also writes:

If you want to heal the world it is terribly important to understand that you cannot heal the world without first healing thyself ... it is very important that you heal the world soon, before it is too late: you have to understand that you cannot heal the world without healing yourself first.<sup>18</sup>

**Ikeda:** That’s exactly right. To change the world, we first have to change ourselves. And the fundamental thing that we as members of the human community need to change is our view of existence, our view of life and death, our view of the self. The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra offers fundamental guidelines concerning this issue of life and death.

Generally speaking, belief in something eternal makes people more humane. I think it was Kanzo Uchimura who said, “I think that nothing exalts a person more than having a sound view of the afterlife.”<sup>19</sup>

It seems to me that if we suppose this lifetime to be the be-all and end-all of existence, then we cannot lead a truly profound life. Unless we understand the eternity of life, at bottom our lives will become transitory and uncertain.

It is like trying to swim in shallow water. In the summer, babies will play in a plastic swimming pool. For babies, that may be sufficient. But when people become elementary-school aged and know of the existence of real pools, they will no longer be satisfied with tiny plastic pools. Further, when they become aware of the joy of swimming in the ocean, even a large modern pool that makes artificial waves will prove unsatisfactory. The same is true in life. When we open our eyes to the “ocean of life” that stretches out within our being, we can lead an existence of great and profound fulfillment.

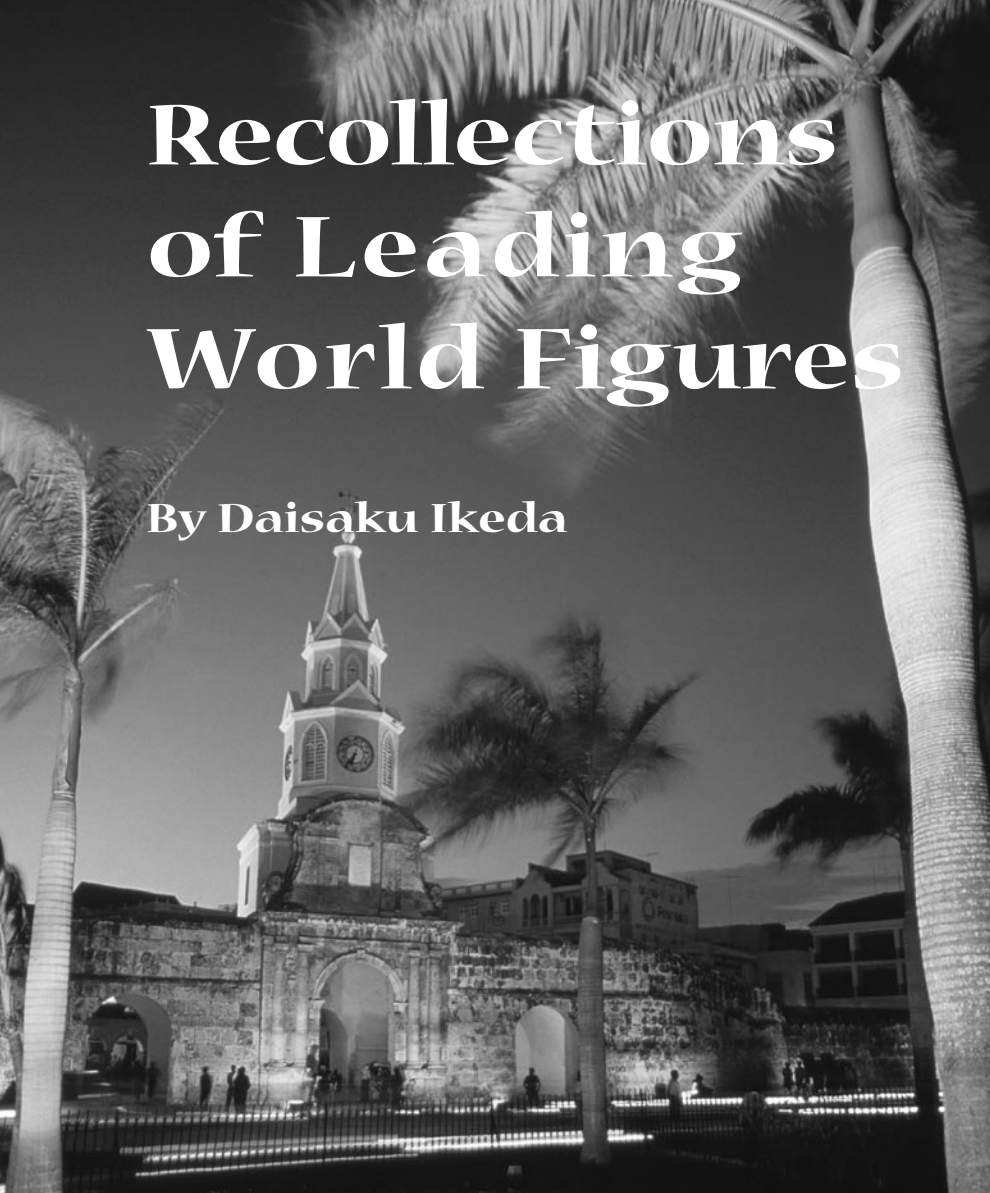
People are now increasingly paying attention to the issue of life and death, and focusing on the human being. This is a sign of the impending dawn of the twenty-first century. The “century of life” will be a “century of the human revolution.” It will be a century when we see an unprecedented blossoming of civilization based on the principle of the eternity of life found in the “Life Span” chapter.

*To be continued*

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1. *Susumu Oda, Seishinkai ga Akasu—Sei to Shi Kokoro no Shinso* (Life and Death, and the Heart’s Inner Reaches Elucidated by a Psychiatrist) (Tokyo: Hamano Shuppan, 1997), pp. 44–58.
  2. The following is excerpted from: Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death Is of Vital Importance: On Life, Death and Life After Death*, ed. Göran Grip (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1995), pp. 56–60.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
  4. Yoshida Shoin (1830–59): One of the most influential figures of the movement to establish the modern Japanese state. A scholar, teacher and writer, he and his followers played a key role in toppling the Tokugawa regime and ushering in the Meiji era.
  5. *Ryukonroku* (Record of an Enduring Soul).
  6. Alain: Pen name of Emile-Auguste Chartier (1868–1951).
  7. *André Maurois, Memoirs* (1885–1967), trans. Denver Lindley (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), p. 35.
  8. *Kenshiro Ohara, Sei to Shi no Kokoromoyo* (Patterns of the Heart in Life and Death) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1991), p. 100.
  9. *Hiroomi Kawano, Gan no Ningengaku* (A Study of Humanism in the Face of Cancer) (Tokyo: Kobundo, 1984), pp. 290–291.
  10. *Josei Toda, Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 174–75.
  11. Daisaku Ikeda, *Ningen Kakumei* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1967), vol. 3, p. 291.
  12. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
  13. *Ningen Kakumei*, *ibid.*, p. 106.
  14. *Ibid.*, p. 290.
  15. Please refer to the discussion in the previous installment of this series.
  16. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 415.
  17. “...the number of years that have already passed”: This refers to the period of *gohyaku-jintengo*.
  18. *Death Is of Vital Importance*, *ibid.*, pp. 117–122.
  19. *Kanzo Uchimura, Kirisutokyo Mondo* (Dialogue on Christianity) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 1905), p. 21.

# Recollections of Leading World Figures

By Daisaku Ikeda



A clock tower surmounts the Puerta del Reloj gateway that leads into the walled inner town of Cartagena, a seaport on the northwest coast of Colombia.

for their lives. Some reporters even left Colombia because they felt it was just too dangerous to remain.

The main purpose of my planned visit to the country was to attend the opening of the “Eternal Treasures of Japan” exhibition at the Colombian National Museum. [The exhibition featured works of art on loan from the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum and was scheduled to open on February 8, 1993].

As a matter of fact, at the early planning stages of this project, some in Japan voiced fears about the safety of the 120-or-so works of art that would be loaned to the South American museum. That was, in some ways, a very practical concern. But I had a different viewpoint. The exhibition, I felt, was a sign of our friendship with Colombia. Friendship is irreplaceable; it is more important than the most valuable material objects. Whatever difficulties there might be, I wanted to act in good faith. That, I insisted, is the true meaning of culture.

Earlier, Colombia had loaned some 500 priceless national treasures, including a 1,700-carat uncut emerald shown outside of Colombia for the first time, for the “Great Cultural Exhibition of Colombia” [held at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in 1990]. The “Eternal Treasures of Japan” exhibition was conceived in part, as an expression of gratitude and reciprocity. I was firmly convinced of the importance of

## César Gaviria Trujillo and Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, Former President and First Lady of Colombia—Leaders of a New Generation

I WAS in Miami when I received a message from the office of the president of the Republic of Colombia: “Will SGI President Ikeda be going ahead with his visit to Colombia?” This was immediately before my scheduled visit to the South American country in early February 1993, and just after there had been a large terrorist bomb blast in the capital, Santa Fe de Bogotá.

The last part of January had seen a succession of terrorist

acts instigated by one of Colombia’s powerful drug cartels. While government buildings and facilities had frequently been targeted in the past, this latest blast killed and injured many innocent civilians. The terrorist attack was widely reported on U.S. television and around the world.

A scheduled international conference in the Colombian capital had to be canceled after its overseas participants pulled out one after another, fearing

DIEGO LEZAMA OREZOLICORRIS



Colombia's Order of Boyaca in the Grade of Grand Cross is presented to SGI President Ikeda by Colombian President César Gaviria Trujillo at Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, February 1994.

holding the exhibition at this time, and preparations thus went ahead.

It is important to repay sincerity with even greater sincerity, and friendship with friendship when it is needed most. This is even more true in the realm of cultural exchange, which is an endeavor of the spirit.

From Miami, I informed the office of the Colombian president that I intended to visit the South American country exactly as scheduled, adding that I would exert myself as a courageous fellow Colombian.

### Visiting Colombia

**S**ANTA Fe de Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, is 2,600 meters above sea level. "How close the airport seems to the sky," I said softly. I remembered a night more than thirty years ago. On my first visit to South America [in October 1960], the plane stopped at Colombia's El

Dorado International Airport to refuel. Bright constellations filled the night sky. I vividly recalled the silver stars and their shimmering silver light.

Two days after my arrival in Colombia in February 1993, I paid an official visit to the House of Nariño, the presidential building [on February 8]. Colombian President César Gaviria Trujillo and First Lady Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria welcomed me with smiles. This was my second meeting with Mrs. Gaviria, as we had met earlier in Tokyo [in May 1992]. I was deeply aware and appreciative of the great efforts undertaken by the president and the first lady to make me feel welcome in their country from the moment of my arrival.

At the time, Mr. Gaviria was said to be one of three heads of state in the world who were still only in their 40s. He assumed the office of Colombian president, which has been reputed to be one of the most dangerous

jobs in the world, when he was 43. Youth and aspiration emanated from his resolute presence. The Nobel Prize-winning Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez called President Gaviria a symbol of the change in political generations.

### The Success of a Policy of Openness

**A**S we talked, Mr. Gaviria remarked that he would like the leaders, people and intellectuals of Japan to understand that Colombia is a land of great variety and diversity. It is unfair and unbalanced to think of the country solely in terms of the drug problem.

Soon after beginning his term in office [in 1990], President Gaviria made sweeping revisions to the country's laws so that more Colombians could participate in the government of their country. He promoted a policy of openness, liberalizing trade, privatizing national

industries and inviting foreign investment. As a result, Colombia achieved the most stable economic growth of all Latin American countries. Mr. Gaviria proudly noted that while other countries in Latin America were having difficulties paying back their international loans, Colombia's payments were on schedule, and the nation's per capita income was also rising. The president spoke with an urgent wish that the Japanese know the truth about his country.

### **Viewing Others With Goodwill**

**A**DMIRING the intensity of his commitment, I said: "Every country has its problems. No nation, no group, is completely without them. There can be no mutual understanding, and no peace, as long as we focus on those facets alone and regard them as the total picture. Instead of looking only at the surface, we need to stand in the other person's shoes and confirm things with our own eyes. We need to have a perspective and actions that begin with the question: 'What can we do to make the most of Colombia's rich potential?' Especially in an age of increasing globalization, concrete efforts to improve mutual understanding are needed."

The same is true of relations between individuals. We do not always apprehend the truth about a person by taking a cool, objective view. In fact, in many cases, the quickest way to getting to know another person is to interact with him or her in a spirit of warm goodwill.

### **Standing on the Side of the Weak**

**W**HEN Mr. Gaviria was still young, his father died, leaving him to shoulder the responsibility of being head of his family. He also became president of Colombia after the leading presidential candidate was struck down by an assassin's bullet; being hastily nominated as his replacement in the election campaign.

I also assumed heavy responsibilities while still young, so I empathize with the great trials and hardships this young pillar of the Colombian nation no doubt has had to endure. In an interview, Mr. Gaviria once remarked that it pained him deeply to have to spend so much of his time and energy on fighting against violence, injustice and the drug trade. Why? Because the time and resources consumed in this battle could be relocated to the problems of the weakest in society—especially children—who should be the main concern of a nation's president. He voiced his hope that the problem of violence could be solved, so that the president of Colombia could devote more time to helping society's weak and disadvantaged.

Mrs. Gaviria shares her husband's strong convictions. Declaring children to be the nation's top priority, she has sponsored a music program for underprivileged children and youth from the ages of 5 to 25. During our meeting at the Nagano Training Center in Japan in August 1993, she informed me that more than 3,000 young people participate in the program, which has grown to

include seventeen orchestras, sixty-three music groups, and twenty-two choral groups. She also described what a moving sight it had been to behold young people, who had never before held a musical instrument in their hands and who had been deprived of opportunities for education and self-development, giving beautiful musical performances at the presidential house.

When I first met Mrs. Gaviria in May 1992, I was impressed by how strongly she believed in the power of culture. She shared her belief that culture develops and improves people, and has the power to put an end to violence.

### **Developing Mutual Understanding**

**F**ORTUNATELY, the Colombian showing of the "Eternal Treasures of Japan" exhibition, which owes much to Mrs. Gaviria's generous support and efforts as honorary president of the exhibit's steering committee, was a great success. It was the first full-fledged exhibition of Japanese art shown in Colombia since the country was founded. Until then, the image of Japan was that of a country of technology and karate, and some Colombians didn't even know where Japan was located on the map. The exhibition gave many their first encounter with the spirit of the "land of cherry blossoms." In their excitement, the people of the "land of the orchid," as Colombia is known, clamored for a second exhibition of Japanese art, and this summer "The Spirit and Beauty of Japan" exhibition [also co-sponsored by the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum] was



Children sit on a fence outside housing, Quibo, Choco, Colombia.

held. This made me very happy. At last two neighbors bound together by the Pacific Ocean had begun to understand and know each other a little better.

Nothing can be accomplished without such heart-to-heart communication. If we don't understand each other's hearts, what do we understand?

In February this year, Mr. and Mrs. Gaviria visited Soka University. The Colombian president's speech on that occasion made a deep impression on the young minds of the students. He stated his conviction that politics is the art of making the impossible possible. What kind of a world would it be, he asked, without people possessed of ideals and vision who dedicate their vital energies to working for something that seems impossible? He also acknowledged my efforts in the cause of peace, dating back long before the end of the Cold War, when peace still seemed an improbable goal. It is

his firm belief that peace and the eradication of poverty are indeed achievable.

He also noted that during the Cold War, there was no end to external resources available to developing nations to keep wars going. But now that the Cold War is over, he said, the international community is sidestepping its responsibility to provide these same nations with aid to support democracy and eliminate poverty. We must not forget the poor, he insisted. Mr. Gaviria's words ring with painful truth.

#### **The World's Problems Are Our Problems**

**H**ERE is a youthful leader who risks his life to fight for the people. Poverty and violence are problems for the entire human race. They are not other people's problems; they concern us all. People are suffering here and now, in our

world, in our time.

We might say that Mr. and Mrs. Gaviria represent the entire human race as they continue to struggle against great odds in Colombia. If we Japanese consider ourselves global citizens, then surely we should offer them our deepest appreciation and respect for their courageous efforts and fight alongside them. I am deeply concerned about the fact that Japan is regarded as one of the most spiritually impoverished nations that cares only for its own short-term profit.

After Mr. Gaviria's term as Colombian president ended this summer, he became secretary-general of the Organization of American States (OAS). There are high hopes for this leader of a new era in Latin America.

#### **True Leaders Give People Hope**

**F**IDEL Duque Ramirez, former Colombian ambassador to Japan, once said to me that the lack of true leaders was one of the biggest problems the world faced. Leaders, he said, are those who can generate hope. In a world shrouded in darkness and lacking direction, they bring light and point the way forward.

A "way forward" can only be blazed through one's own actions, while "light" is created by one's own burning commitment.

Having formed this friendship with Colombia, I am determined to devote myself to the prosperity and happiness of that country for the rest of my life, counting myself as a compatriot of the courageous Colombian people. □

# GLOBAL FRIENDSHIPS FOR PEACE

## SGI ACTIVITIES REPORT: AFRICA

THE future of the African continent looks bright, as members from Zambia, Kenya and Togo do their part in creating value in their respective countries. Whether in society or at SGI activities, members unite joyously as they work toward revolutionizing their continent.

Matrina Bbuku is a lawyer associated with the Zambian Justice Ministry and an SGI chapter women's division chief. She has been assigned to an NGO (non-governmental organization of the United Nations) project called "Women and Law," which strives to improve women's social condition. As the NGO's representative in Zambia, Matrina conducts research and organizes international conferences, visiting six southern African countries including Zimbabwe and Botswana. During childhood, her father abandoned her mother and siblings. This experience spurred her on to take up the legal profession to improve women's status in society. In 1984, she was introduced to Buddhism by an SGI member,

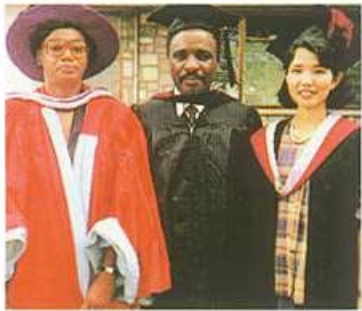
who told her that the human revolution of a single person leads to the betterment of a community, a nation and humanity as a whole. She felt she found what she had been seeking, and decided to practice, joining SGI activities in Zambia during its pioneering stage. Today people praise her contributions and activities both at work and in the local SGI organization.

Masumi Hashimoto Odari, originally a native of Japan, is one among many SGI members contributing to their new communities. After graduating from Soka University in 1986, she pursued her master's degree at the University of Nairobi. In 1990, she began to teach at the school. She has had to face various problems living in a new country for a decade, but now she enjoys her teaching position and being able to contribute to Kenyan society. Kenya's SGI organization has developed to the extent that some 200 members regularly participate in various meetings. Masumi's family consists

of her husband, Kesa Odari, a civil servant at the presidential offices, and three children. "Regardless of nationality, I want to advance with the Kenyan people by developing my personality as a world citizen," Masumi said.

Togo, located in West Africa facing the Gulf of Guinea, occupies a narrow strip from north to south. In this tropical environment, the majority of the people are in agriculture, producing cocoa, cotton and coffee. Members of some families live separately in French-speaking Togo and English-speaking Ghana. However, there is no border for SGI members who established the organization more than a decade ago. Ghanaian members have lent their support to the SGI organization in Togo. In August 1995, a general meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Togo Chapter was held. The members are eager to welcome SGI President Ikeda to Africa as soon as possible. □

*Compiled from SGI Graphic*



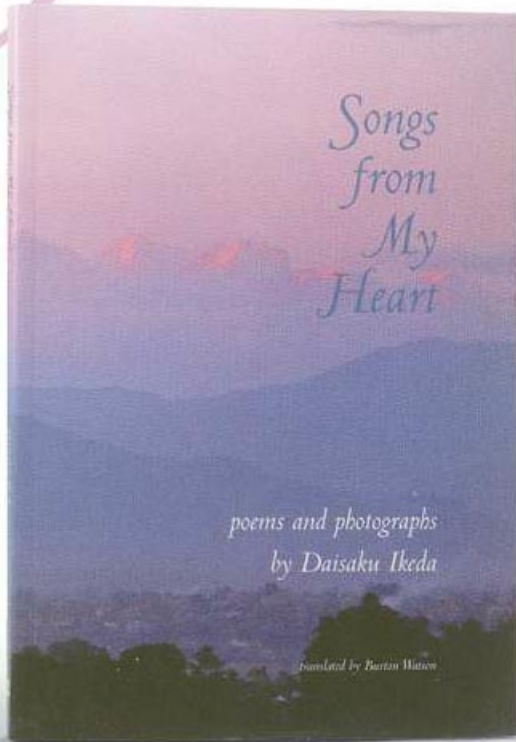
Masumi Hashimoto Odari (above, right) at the commencement ceremony at the University of Nairobi in Kenya.

Matrina Bbuku (far right in top photo) with a music group in Zambia and with students (right) at the University of Zambia.



*Photos courtesy of SGI Graphic*

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## BUDDHISM

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**A CONVERSATION: FINDING JOY IN FAMILY LIFE**  
**PHOTO ESSAY: TRAVELS WITH AUNT JEAN**

## Ghana Community Center



**L**OCATED in the suburbs of Accra, the capital of Ghana, the Ghana Community Center was completed in 1984 through the efforts of thousands of members who participated in construction work on Saturdays and Sundays. The two-story ferroconcrete building has conference rooms, reception rooms and office and a hall that accommodates approximately 400 people.

On August 29, 1996, the University of Ghana conferred an honorary doctorate of law upon SGI President Ikeda, the founder of

Soka University, in recognition of his contributions to education and his efforts in fostering international cooperation and understanding.

The SGI president held a discussion with Ghana President Jerry John Rawlings and first lady Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings on December 1, 1997, after they attended the opening of an exhibit commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Ghana's independence at the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo and received honors from Soka University and Soka Women's College.