

# living BUDDHISM

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

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## FROM OUR READERS

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

### SHIJO KINGO BROUGHT TO LIFE

FAY Hovey's story, "Nichigen-nyo: My Story," in the June *Living Buddhism* reminded me that I never thanked her for "Shijo Kingo: My Story."

"Shijo Kingo: My Story" brought him to life and inspired me—with the approval of the other members of the kosen-rufu gongyo committee—to write a radio script for presentation at our April world peace gongyo meeting. We did not literally have it on the radio, just several people standing on the stage in front of microphones.

We got more positive comments than any other presentation in a long time, so the next month we did it again using another article.

The members of the kosen-rufu committee change every three months so I am not on it now, but I bet someone will

want to turn "Nichigen-nyo: My Story" into a script.

LARRY MARGOLIS  
Portland, Oregon

### MOVED TO TEARS

THERE are certain times when reading our publications that I am moved to tears. Such was the case when Mr. Zaitzu shared his treasure from the heart when he first met SGI President Ikeda.

*A hand shake  
a few words  
the spirit of master-disciple  
crystallized in a moment.*

Thank you for all the effort that goes into bringing me this wonderful tool, *Living Buddhism*, that fosters that bond in my own life.

LEAETTA WACKER  
Wilderville, Oregon

**Corrections in the June issue:** Page 13, col. 1, line 17—"impetuous," not "impetus." Page 15, col. 3, last line—"to light," not "tonight."

**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. 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 Daishonin, 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, (310) 451-8811. Check out our Web page at: <http://www.sgi-usa.org>

# CELEBRATING YOUTH

**A**MONG my greatest joys are my frequent opportunities to interact with young people throughout the SGI-USA. I find their refreshing enthusiasm and unbridled optimism awe inspiring. What energy they have! I think of when I was in my teens and early 20s. Of course, I wanted to stay young forever. I thought that if I ever reached 40 or 50 years of age, it would be the end of my life. I was sure there could be no happiness associated with such an age. But now, quicker than I could have ever imagined, 50 is behind me. What happened to the time? I joined the Soka Gakkai thirty-six years ago. But it seems like only yesterday.

As I think about those years, I realize that the foundation for my life was established then—in the young men's and student divisions. It has been said that eighty percent of what you experience during your youth is what makes up your life; like putting up a fine wine. Wine makers start with young grapes full of potential. Once it's put up, a fine wine can age for years and years. The wonderful taste you enjoy years later is not because something new has to be added to the wine; it is made up of nothing more than what was put in the bottle in the first place. But the grapes had to survive the rigors of climate and terrain before they're good enough to be made into wine.

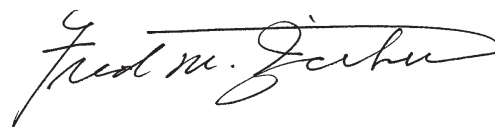
I remember when I had been a member for about a year. I was asked to give a lecture to my district, which meant talking in front of about a hundred people. I still remember that it was on the life of Shijo Kingo. I was terrified. How could I give a lecture? I didn't understand a thing. I was sure they could find someone far more capable. What I realized later is that my leaders hadn't expected me to be an expert. Rather they had given me an opportunity to grow.

But how do we maintain our youthful spirit as we age? I started this essay saying it seems like only yesterday when I was twenty. That's what my mind says. My body knows exactly what

time it is. That's the reality of our physiology. But if we allow our spirit to age with our body, that's when we get in trouble. The point is, whether we are physically young or old, the life-condition of Buddhahood is eternally youthful. It finds expression in the compassion we have for others. The determination to never give up, always facing the next challenge with optimism. That was the life-condition displayed by Nichiren Dai-shonin, when he retired to Mount Minobu well into his 50s.

**I**'VE noticed that the older SGI President Ikeda gets, the more active he is. Now 70, he is a model of what one can achieve with a youthful spirit. Last month I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Rosa Parks when she attended a youth gathering at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium in Santa Monica. What a wonderful example of youthfulness. Though she is already 80 and has a difficult time getting around physically, she has the spirit of a teenager. She told me that the secret to her youthful spirit is that she always tries to meet and talk with young people.

When all is said and done, Buddhahood knows no physical age. Our practice of faith offers a lifetime of youth. The fountain of youth that writers have romanticized and adventurers searched for can be found right here in the heart of the person who embraces the Buddhism of Nichiren Dai-shonin. Once we've discovered it, all we need do is nurture it through our heartfelt practice for ourselves and for others.



Fred M. Zaitso  
SGI-USA General Director

## Study Material for July • August

# “Letter to Ko-ama Gozen”

*(The following passage is taken from the book Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, pp. 107–21, and can also be found in The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 4, pp. 140–43.)*

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### A Buddhist Is a Friend to Those Suffering

**B**UDDHISM comes to the aid of those suffering. A Buddhist is the foremost ally of people who are destitute or whose lives are filled with sorrow; those who are worn out from their earnest struggles in life; who are suffering.

The SGI is strong because it is uncompromising on this point. Though we may encounter a succession of great difficulties, as long as we maintain this spirit, the SGI will always be victorious.

Nichiren Daishonin certainly didn't triumph in his struggles because he had allied himself with the powerful. Exactly the opposite was true. He loved the people, became their ally and exerted himself on their behalf. As a result, he realized victory amid great persecution.

I, Nichiren, am the most extraordinary person in Japan. The reason I say so is this. The seven reigns of heavenly gods I will set aside, and the five reigns of earthly gods<sup>1</sup> are beyond my knowledge, but throughout the ninety reigns from the time of the first human emperor Jimmu until the present, or during the more than seven hundred years since the reign of Emperor Kimmei [when Buddhism was introduced to this country], no one has ever been so universally hated as Nichiren on account of either secular or Buddhist matters. Mononobe no Moriya<sup>2</sup> burnt down temples and pagodas, and Kiyomori Nyudo<sup>3</sup> had Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples destroyed, but the people

of their clans did not harbor hatred toward them. Masakado<sup>4</sup> and Sadato<sup>5</sup> rebelled against the imperial court, and the Great Teacher Dengyo incurred antagonism from the priests of the seven major temples of Nara,<sup>6</sup> but these men were not hated by priests, nuns, laymen and laywomen throughout the whole of Japan. In my case, however, parents, brothers, teachers and fellow priests—every single person from the ruler on down to the common people—treat me as if I were their parents' enemy, and show me more hostility than if I were a rebel or a robber.

Thus, at times I have been vilified by several hundred people; and at other times, besieged by several thou-

The Daishonin deliberately sought out extreme hardship for the sake of his followers in later generations. By summoning difficulties and then overcoming them, he established the eternal prime point for the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

sands, I have been attacked with swords and staves. I have been driven from my residence and banished from my province. Finally I twice incurred the regent's displeasure, being exiled once to Izu Province and again to Sado Island. When I was banished to Sado in the northern sea, I had neither provisions to sustain me nor even clothes as coarse as those made of wisteria vines to cover my body. The people there, both priests and laity, hated me even more than did the men and women of Sagami Province.<sup>7</sup> Abandoned in the wilderness and exposed to the snow, I sustained my life by eating grass.

I felt as though I were personally experiencing the sufferings of Su Wu,<sup>8</sup> who survived by eating snow while living in captivity in the land of the northern barbarians for nineteen years, or of Li Ling,<sup>9</sup> who was imprisoned in a rocky cave on the shore of the

northern sea for six years. I underwent this ordeal not because of any fault of my own but solely because of my desire to save all the people of Japan. (MW-4, 140–42)

JOSEI Toda often said, "Compared to the Daishonin's suffering on Sado, our own difficulties, no matter how great they might seem, are nothing." And Tsunesaburo Makiguchi stoically endured the harrowing conditions of prison life, saying, "While it might seem that a calamity has befallen us, it is hardly a fraction of what the Daishonin underwent."

The Daishonin deliberately sought out extreme hardship for the sake of his followers in later generations. By summoning difficulties and then overcoming them, he established the eternal prime point for the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

It is said that good medicine tastes bitter. The "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra

relates the parable of the excellent physician and his sick children. This parable describes how an excellent physician (the Buddha) tries to cure his children (all people) who have mistakenly drunk poison by giving them good medicine (the Mystic Law). But because the poison has deeply penetrated their bodies, the children, in their deluded state, do not want to take the good medicine that will effect their cure.

Although Nichiren Daishonin strove to "save all the people of Japan," not only did people, including the arrogant authorities, refuse to take the good medicine that he proffered, but they persecuted and tried to do away with him. It was truly a case of "the poison [having] penetrated deeply" (LS16, 228).

"I, Nichiren, am the most extraordinary person in Japan," the Daishonin says. He means that for having propagated the Mystic Law, he has acquired ill repute second to none.

We, the members of the SGI, are creating a global foundation for kosen-rufu in the Latter Day. We are conducting activities not for the short term but with a view toward the next ten thousand years and more.

In this passage he describes his sadness and indignation at the deluded state of the country, and at the same time his immense compassion—not diminished in the least by the hardships he has endured—to lead all people to happiness. We also see the Daishonin's great and imperturbable confidence in kosen-rufu in the future. In addition, these words convey his pride in being the true votary of the Lotus Sutra and in having encountered the great persecutions that the sutra predicts will befall its votary in the Latter Day of the Law.

The Daishonin views himself with an objective gaze, using expressions that suggest a sense of detachment. In this we can sense the Daishonin's state of life. It is as though he is laughing heartily, from high above, at the storm of persecution unfolding beneath him. We can almost hear the Daishonin declare: "To undergo persecution for the Lotus Sutra is the greatest honor. I have won!"

**However, while I was in exile there, you and your husband**

**Ko Nyudo, avoiding the eyes of others, brought me food by night. You were both ready to give your lives for my sake without fearing punishment from the provincial officials. (MW-4, 142)**

WHEN the Daishonin first arrived at Sanmai-do<sup>10</sup> in Tsukahara, Sado Island, on November 1, 1271, he was accompanied by a number of disciples. But several weeks later, he sent most of them back to the mainland. This is indicative of just how short they were on food.

Even after the Daishonin went to live in relative comfort at Ichinosawa (also on Sado), he was allowed only a meager ration, barely enough to sustain him and his disciples.

Under such circumstances, out of their sincere concern for the Daishonin, Abutsu-bo and Ko Nyudo secretly brought him food in the middle of the night. Had they been observed by the Nembutsu followers or officials who kept watch on the Daishonin's crude hut day and night, it would have been calamitous for them. Being caught supplying the Dai-

shonin with food would have meant banishment or imprisonment.

In fact, on three occasions documents were fabricated, purporting to convey government orders. These stated, for example, that any person supporting the Daishonin "should be driven out of the province or imprisoned" (MW-1, 191–92).

Some were jailed simply because they had passed in front of the Daishonin's hut; others were banished or their spouses and children arrested because they had given the Daishonin something. Abutsu-bo and his wife Sennichi-ama were fined and driven from their place of residence, which was confiscated (MW-6, 256).

Even so, Abutsu-bo and Sennichi-ama, and Ko Nyudo and Ko-ama were not afraid. The Daishonin says that at one point they were even ready to die in his place. Mentor and disciple should support each other with a willingness to face hardship.

"How can we allow our mentor to suffer alone? Let us face difficulties to lighten the burden of our mentor" That was their spirit. What won-

drous people! The Daishonin says that he will never forget them in any life to come (MW-6, 258). The honor due Ko Nyudo and the Daishonin's other followers is eternal. People will sing their praises for ten thousand years, for all eternity. The Daishonin's followers will never be forgotten.

We, the members of the SGI, are creating a global foundation for kosen-rufu in the Latter Day. We are conducting activities not for the short term but with a view toward the next ten thousand years and more.

Those who struggle to the full extent of their abilities now, at this time, will also gain eternal honor. We can imagine 100 or 200 years hence, when our descendants proudly say, "Think of it, my ancestors devoted their lives to kosen-rufu in this area."

**Therefore, although life on Sado was harsh, I was loath to leave, feeling as if my heart were being left behind, and I seemed to be pulled back with each step I took. (MW-4, 142)**

**I**N another Goshō, the Daishonin says: "Though water may be muddied, it will become clear again. Though the moon may hide behind the clouds, it will surely reappear" (MW-5, 296).

On March 8, 1274, a letter of pardon from the government reached the Daishonin in his place of exile. The charges against him had been proven groundless.

It was springtime, and the seasonal flowers were racing into bloom. While the danger to the Daishonin naturally had

not disappeared, for the disciples accompanying him, the journey back to Kamakura must have seemed like a proud and triumphant return.

But it pained the Daishonin to part with the people of Sado. These were friends who had joined him in life-or-death struggles, and they might never meet again. For his followers in Sado as well, with each passing day their delight at his being pardoned must have been increasingly tempered by the sadness of separation.

Of course they were overjoyed. No longer was it necessary for them to worry about officials watching them. Joining hands with the Daishonin and his disciples, they rejoiced at his vindication. At the same time, though, they shed tears of sorrow for his departure. Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin must have been deeply touched.

On March 13, the Daishonin left Ichinosawa. His followers probably wanted to accompany him as far as they could. The Daishonin may have had to tell them time and again, "Thank you for accompanying us, but you've really come far enough," urging them not to go any further.

With each few steps, the Daishonin and his disciples may have stopped and turned around to bid farewell to their Sado friends who, in turn, continued to wave until the Daishonin and his party were no longer in sight. You can easily imagine such a scene.

There is an expression in Japanese to "feel as if one's hair is being pulled from behind," which indicates a great reluc-

tance to leave a person or place behind. The Daishonin remarks that though his head was shaven, he still felt drawn back.

He says,<sup>11</sup> "Although life on Sado was harsh, I was loath to leave, feeling as if my hair, though shorn, was being pulled from behind, and I seemed to be pulled back with each step I took." This brief passage is imbued with Nichiren Daishonin's irrepressible sentiments. As they listened to this letter being read, the hearts of Ko-ama and the others must have swelled with fond memories of that day.

The Daishonin sounds like someone who has left his home. Far from expressing resentment or complaints about his exile, he regrets having had to leave Sado. Nichiren Daishonin had changed his harsh place of exile into a blissful pure land of heart-to-heart friendships.

#### Persecutions Are an Honor

**I wonder what karmic bonds we formed in the past. Just when I was thinking how mysterious it was, you sent your most precious husband as your messenger to this distant place. I thought it must be a dream or an illusion. Even though I cannot see you, I am convinced that your heart remains here with me. (MW-4, 142-43)**

The followers on Sado had carried on their faith in the midst of great persecution. Therefore, there was nothing false or fickle in their attitude. The Daishonin placed the

It was not authority that united the Daishonin and his followers; nor was it their concern for profit. They were united by the heart. For this reason, their lives overflowed with benefit and their connection was lofty and eternal.

greatest trust in them. In one passage, he goes so far as to suggest that Abutsu-bo is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Pure Practices (Jpn. Jyogyo), one of the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Even after the Daishonin went to live at Mount Minobu, his followers in Sado made the long journey to visit him. He was visited not only by Abutsu-bo and Ko Nyudo, but also by Abutsu-bo's son, Tokuro Moritsuna, and by Nakaoki Nyudo.<sup>12</sup> Longing to see the Daishonin, they undertook the arduous journey to Mount Minobu—difficult to make even once—a number of times. In modern terms, this would probably be comparable to going from Japan to South America. And relatively speaking, it was even further, an even more difficult trip.

The Goshō “Letter to Zenichi-ama” describes how a follower from Sado spent an entire month serving the Daishonin at Mount Minobu, foraging, carrying water and gathering firewood for him (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 1335).

The Daishonin and his followers shared heart-to-heart bonds. Once during a wide-

spread epidemic, the Daishonin became deeply concerned about the Sado people. As soon as he saw the face of Abutsu-bo, who paid him a visit at that time, the Daishonin asked: “Is your wife, Sennichijima, OK? How is Ko Nyudo?” On learning that they were safe and well, he breathed a sigh of relief (MW-6, 257–58).

#### **Those Who Undergo Great Persecution Together Forge Eternal Bonds**

**Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun which rises in the morning and the moon which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon. In the next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak. Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō.**

#### **Nichiren**

**The sixteenth day of the sixth month (MW-4, 143)**

Whenever one of the husbands departed from Mount Minobu, the Daishonin wrote a letter for him to take back to his wife. The Daishonin did this to

praise the faith of the wife who had sent her husband on the journey. Above all, the Daishonin was keenly aware of the sadness that these elderly women must have felt knowing that they could never again meet him face to face.

“Even though you are in Sado, your heart has come here to Mount Minobu,” he says warmly. “It is the same as if we had met.” “Let us look forward to our meeting at Eagle Peak.” “Whenever you look upon the sun or moon, your thoughts are with me.”

The sun and moon can be seen from anywhere. “When you long for me,” he says, “look at the sun, look at the moon. And I will be there.” So great was his concern for these pure-minded followers. These words express his immense state of life. For him, it was as though the entire universe was his backyard.

The two women then, whenever they looked up at the sky—morning, midday, evening or night—probably sensed that they were gazing up at the Daishonin’s merciful countenance.

Even if someone is close by, their heart may be far away. On

the other hand, even if someone is far away, if there is a heart-to-heart bond, they could not be closer. The heart is what counts. In the world of the heart, there is no separation. And chanting daimoku erases distance.

President Toda, in a letter from prison to his son, who had been evacuated from Tokyo to avoid the air raids, wrote:

I cannot see you for a while yet, but I want us to promise each other something. Sometime in the morning, whenever it is convenient for you, face the Gohonzon and chant daimoku 100 times. At the same time, I'll chant 100 daimoku, too.

In this way we can communicate through the heart, just like through a wireless. We can talk with each other. We will create an alliance of father and son. Or we can include

your mother, or grandfather and grandmother, too, if you like.

Someone who embraces faith is never isolated. The heart can communicate without fail.

The same is true of education in the home. You are busy doing activities for kosen-rufu. It may be that you cannot always be with your children. But spending a lot of time together with them is no guarantee that they will develop into fine men and women—that is another matter entirely. In fact, it sometimes happens that children whose parents spend a great deal of time with them become overly dependent and fail to develop a spirit of self-reliance.

The most noble thing is for parents to proudly teach their children a way of life of altruism and dedication to Buddhism, conveying this spirit through their lives.

Forming a strong heart-to-heart bond with your children is the key to education in the home that produces outstanding individuals.

Of course, every home is different. We cannot make sweeping generalizations based on other people's situations. Spending quality time with your children is very important—but the most crucial ingredient in education is a genuine heart-to-heart bond. This is the essence.

The basis for such a bond is deep prayer. It is important to make concrete efforts to communicate your feelings and convictions to your children whenever the chance arises.

It was not authority that united the Daishonin and his followers; nor was it their concern for profit. They were united by the heart. For this reason, their bond was indestructible. For this reason, their lives overflowed with benefit and their connection was lofty and eternal. □

1. Seven reigns of heavenly gods and five reigns of earthly gods: Native deities said to have ruled Japan before the time of the first emperor Jimmu.
2. Mononobe no Moriya (d. 587): An official who opposed the adoption of Buddhism. When an epidemic broke out, he declared that it was because of the new religion, and attempted to halt all Buddhist practice.
3. Kiyomori Nyudo (1118–81): Taira no Kiyomori, leader of the Taira clan. In 1177, he uncovered a plot against his clan in Nara and had Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples razed in punishment for their support of the conspirators.
4. Masakado (d. 940): Taira no Masakado, a warrior who wielded power in eastern Japan. In 939, he rebelled against the imperial court by proclaiming himself the new emperor. However, he was killed and his rebellion crushed.
5. Sadato (1019–62): Abe no Sadato, the head of a powerful family in eastern Japan. He sought independence from imperial rule but was killed in battle.
6. Seven major temples of Nara: The principal Buddhist temples in Nara, Japan's capital during the Nara period (710–94), including Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji.
7. Sagami Province: Where Kamakura, the seat of the military government, was located.
8. Su Wu (140–60 B.C.E.): A minister of the Former Han dynasty. In 100 B.C.E., Emperor Wu sent Su Wu to the land of the nomadic Hsiung-nu tribes to demand that they acknowledge fealty to him. Their chieftain rejected the demand and had Su Wu imprisoned in a cave. He endured many hardships before being able to return to the Han.
9. Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.E.): A military commander during the Former Han dynasty. During one battle, he was captured by the Hsiung-un tribes and imprisoned. When news of his defeat reached the court, Emperor Wu mistakenly believed that he had revolted against the Han, and had all the members of his family killed. Later, the emperor repented, offering to secure his return. But Li Ling refused, dying in the land of the Hsiung-nu.
10. Sanmai-do: A dilapidated shrine in the middle of a graveyard where the Daishonin passed his first winter in exile on Sado.
11. The following is a literal translation of the Goshō passage quoted earlier.
12. Nakaoki Nyudo: A follower of Nichiren Daishonin who lived at Nakaoki on Sado Island. Even after the Daishonin was pardoned and went to live at Minobu, Nakaoki Nyudo sent him letters and sought his guidance.

# Striving To Be a Votary of the Lotus Sutra: Nichiren Daishonin's Self-identity

IN "Letter to Ko-ama Gozen," Nichiren Daishonin identifies himself as "a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 139). Identifying himself in this way was important because it directly led to how he lived his life. Our self-image influences our action. Depending on his relationships within society, the Daishonin, as we all do, assumed different identities—a man, subject of the shogunate government, priest, teacher, son and so on. Throughout his writings, however, he sees himself most as a votary of the Lotus Sutra.

If we examine the Daishonin's image of a votary of the Lotus Sutra, it can provide a meaningful guide on how to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism, as well as how we view ourselves.

The Daishonin views a votary of the Lotus Sutra as someone who fulfills the Buddha's prophecy, that is, the widespread

propagation of the Lotus Sutra. In the form of a pledge by Shakyamuni's disciples, the Lotus Sutra foretells the spread of its teachings: "After the Buddha has passed into extinction, /in an age of fear and evil/we will preach far and wide" (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, chap. 13, p. 193). In the sutra, Shakyamuni also instructs the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower: "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five hundred year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off" (LS-23, 288).

The Daishonin rhetorically asks: "Who, then, in this present age will be the votary of the Lotus Sutra and fulfill the prophecy of the Buddha?" (MW-2, 195). The foremost qualification of a votary of the sutra is his or her devotion to the spread of the humanistic ideals expounded in the Lotus Sutra—the sanctity, equality and freedom of all lives. The

Daishonin sees a votary of the Lotus Sutra as someone who actualizes the sutra's ideals.

Furthermore, the Daishonin explains that votaries of the sutra undergo various difficulties on account of their efforts to spread the sutra's teachings. He states: "If there exists a votary of the Lotus Sutra, then the three types of enemies are bound to exist as well" (MW-2, 195). Here "the three types of enemies" refer to verbal and physical abuses from lay people ignorant of the sutra, attacks by arrogant priests, and finally government persecutions incited by religious authorities (LS-13, 193–95).

The Daishonin explains that since the votaries of the sutra uphold and spread the sutra's ideals, which are alien to many and threatening to those in power, they are bound to experience those difficulties. He describes his reaction when he hears of imminent persecutions: "Hearing of this, I rejoiced, saying that I had long

expected it to come to this" (MW-1, 175). Because he saw himself as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, his difficulties—even a failed execution attempt and exile to a remote island—became a source of joy and pride. The Daishonin's self-awareness and action as a votary of the Lotus Sutra enabled him to attain Buddhahood.

The Daishonin's life is also an example for his disciples to follow. The Daishonin in fact teaches that those who share his desire for the sutra's widespread propagation and act in the same way he does are also votaries of the Lotus Sutra. He explains: "No matter what, maintain your faith as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and forever exert yourself as Nichiren's disciple. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (MW-1, 93). Here the Daishonin views faith as one's confidence in his or her identity as a votary of the Lotus Sutra. He also equates a votary of the Lotus Sutra with a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

It is interesting to note that the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth that appear in the Lotus Sutra are symbolic of Buddhist practice. They are bodhisattvas Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure

Practices, and Firmly Established Practices. A votary, in other words, is a person of practice, of action. According to the Daishonin, those four bodhisattvas also respectively represent the four virtues of a Buddha: true self, eternity, purity and happiness. Put another way, a votary of the Lotus Sutra is a Buddha in action.

Although the Daishonin often emphasizes the fearless practice of a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the midst of difficulties, we must not overlook his or her warm humanistic side, as the Daishonin demonstrates in "Letter to Ko-ama Gozen." In this letter, the Daishonin writes to an elderly woman who would probably never see her dear teacher again: "Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun which rises in the morning and the moon which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon. In the next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak" (MW-4, 143). Here the Daishonin teaches that neither distance nor time presents an obstacle in the realm of faith. He reassures us that the bond between mentor and disciple in Buddhism transcends time and space. In this regard, SGI President Ikeda states: "It was not authority that united the

Daishonin and his followers; nor was it their concern for profit. They were united by the heart. For this reason, their bond was indestructible. For this reason, their lives overflowed with benefit and their connection was lofty and eternal" (*Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 118–19).

Through the care and concerns that he extends to his disciples, the Daishonin demonstrates that being a votary of the Lotus Sutra is to be someone who appreciates human relationships, someone who understands the hearts of others. Compassion is the spiritual foundation for a votary of the Lotus Sutra.

We fulfill many roles in our lives—husband, wife, student, employee, friend, etc.—including practitioners of Buddhism. But which self-image is our fundamental identity? Which self-awareness will lead us to Buddhahood? Since how we view ourselves affects how we behave, our self-image can determine the quality of our lives. The Daishonin's life, based on his confident self-awareness as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, guides us in our search for our own fundamental identity. □

*By SGI-USA Study Department*

# Ko-ama Gozen: “My Story”

By Fay Hovey, Maui, Hawaii

*The following article presents Fay Hovey’s fictionalized, first-person account of Ko-ama Gozen’s thoughts. There are only two extant letters addressed to Ko-ama and her husband, Ko Nyudo, and very few clues remain about what sort of people they were. Because they lived in the town where the government of Sado Province was located, the husband was known as Ko Nyudo—the lay priest (nyudo) who lives in the seat of the provincial government (ko). During the Daishonin’s exile, the elderly couple protected him and presented him with offerings, even though by doing so they were putting themselves at risk with the local authorities.*

FOR weeks we heard that a dangerous man would be arriving on Sado to live out his life in exile. A priest. A dangerous priest with evil ways. Rumors flew around the village and across the countryside. This man could turn you into an animal just by looking at you. He had vile ways and a terrifying face. He could cause crops to die, when passing your house. We were told by authorities that we were not to have any contact

with him under threat of punishment.

Now, there is one thing a person can claim for having lived a long time and that is: Things are never what they appear to be on first measure. My husband, who was steward of our village, worried about the effect of having such a man around and for my part, I thought, “Let me see this monster myself before I make anything of it.” My face wasn’t covered with wrinkles for nothing. I’d seen

enough of life and the cruelty of humankind. “Don’t worry so much, Husband,” I chided him. “What harm can a mere priest be?”

Men were tossed upon our shore like so much offal. Many of us were moved to pity by the sight of them, covered in leaves, eating bark. Little better off than dogs, stealing dried fish from the racks along the shoreline. Were these not men, human beings, however, misbegotten? I, for one, could never turn a beg-

gar down. I would lock my door after placing a bowl or parcel on the step and watch carefully while they ate furtively, eyes darting in their skulls, like so many ghosts. So I chanted the Nembutsu daily, asking Amida Buddha to take these poor souls away quickly to the Pure Land. They died of disease, dysentery, grief, loneliness, neglect. In the winter, their frozen bodies, covered in snow, dotted the landscape until the spring when they could be properly disposed of.

When the priest Nichiren arrived, there was a

great commotion by the landing. We were surprised at their arrival—the seas were still rough for crossing over from the mainland. Using my walking stick, I managed my way to the edge of the crowd and peered through jostling shoulders to where the party disembarked. There were several young priests as well as the notorious man we had been warned about. They were roughly pushed down the main street through the village. Whenever the priests fell, weakened by sea sickness and hunger, the soldiers would kick them and force them to

move, finally, to the edge of the village where the wild country began. The villagers crowded at them, “Welcome to Sado, welcome to Hell!” I was very close to them when they walked by, dignified despite their suffering. I looked into the eyes of Nichiren as he looked into mine—a brief moment of time. And I saw no beast there.

For some time, I could not get this priest out of my mind. Late one night, before retiring, I said: “Husband, I am going to take them food and some clothing. It is not in me to stand by and do nothing.”



"You are a foolish, stubborn woman and I wonder why I married you, for you have your own mind in things and have never learned to follow my orders. Even at 80 years or more, you are as stubborn as you were as a young girl. Do you know what will happen to us if we help these people? They may not survive the night. There are enough criminals outside the walls of this village to do them in!"

"So, I'll go alone then. They are not animals, they are men. I have seen him and there is no evil there."

My husband pulled on his warm coat, muttering something to himself about the ways of women, and accompa-

nied me as we crept stealthily through the village in the dark. We found them not far, just inside the forest a few yards, sitting together, wrapped in pine boughs and leaves, quietly chanting words we didn't recognize. Without light, we couldn't see their faces, but we felt them bow low before us and heard their polite words of appreciation. "Please do not expose yourselves to unnecessary danger by helping us," Nichiren said. "Please be careful."

I never felt better about doing something in my whole life. What kind of man was this, who, in the face of hunger and exposure, would display compassionate concern for us? This was unlike most

priests of my acquaintance who seemed more occupied with the accumulation of contributions and the embroidery on their robes. That night, I vowed these men would not starve if I could help it. They had settled into the broken-down shrine called Sanmai-do in the middle of a graveyard. This is where they would have passed the winter together. Nichiren sent most of them back to the mainland even though they were prepared to remain and die with him on Sado. There simply wasn't enough food to go around. Imagine our surprise one night when we encountered two other figures carrying baskets on the trail to the graveyard! It was Abutsu-bo



and his wife, Sennichi-ama, another elderly couple like ourselves, taking rice, miso and skewers of dried persimmons. Abutsu-bo had first confronted the priest in anger, determined to kill him and do away with this nuisance once and for all! It took one visit for Abutsu-bo to see there was something more to this priest with his chief disciple in residence at Sanmai-do.

Nichiren told us we had formed karmic bonds in the distant past and we were reunited on Sado once again. My husband and I both embraced the Lotus Sutra and the chanting of Nam-myohorenge-kyo, knowing fully we might die because of

our new faith.

"Husband," I said, "we must die of something. Let us die for something we believe in. We've come too far to turn back." And so it was that we enjoyed precious time with this priest with his straightforward ways and penetrating words. "Since you have no children, I'll be your son," he said. Nothing he said could've touched us more deeply. All my life I had wanted children of my own. He had seen directly into my heart. Just imagine the joy we felt.

All of us who helped Nichiren and his disciple, Nikko, to survive their privations on Sado were deeply reluctant to see them both go when the

pardon was delivered. We knew that it was time and, like all old people, my husband and I know nothing lasts for long. But oh, how our hearts ached when he left. "Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun, which appears in the morning, and the moon, which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon," he gently said before he left.

As I move about my garden now, I feel the sun on my shoulder as if he were standing nearby. "How mysterious life is," I think. "What if I had never looked into his eyes?" And then I bend to gather some vegetables for dinner. □



Illustrations by Ed Lee

# The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (5)

*This series is based on The Dark History of the Fuji School: Revealing the Origin of the Nikken Sect (Ankoku no Fuji Shumonshi: Nikken Shu no Engen o Kiru) by Hajime Kawai, a vice senior advisor of the Soka Gakkai Study Department. The previous installment chronicled the efforts of the ninth high priest, Nichiu, to combat corruption within the priesthood.*

## Chapter 5: Doctrine of high priest's infallibility emerges during tenure of "child high priest"

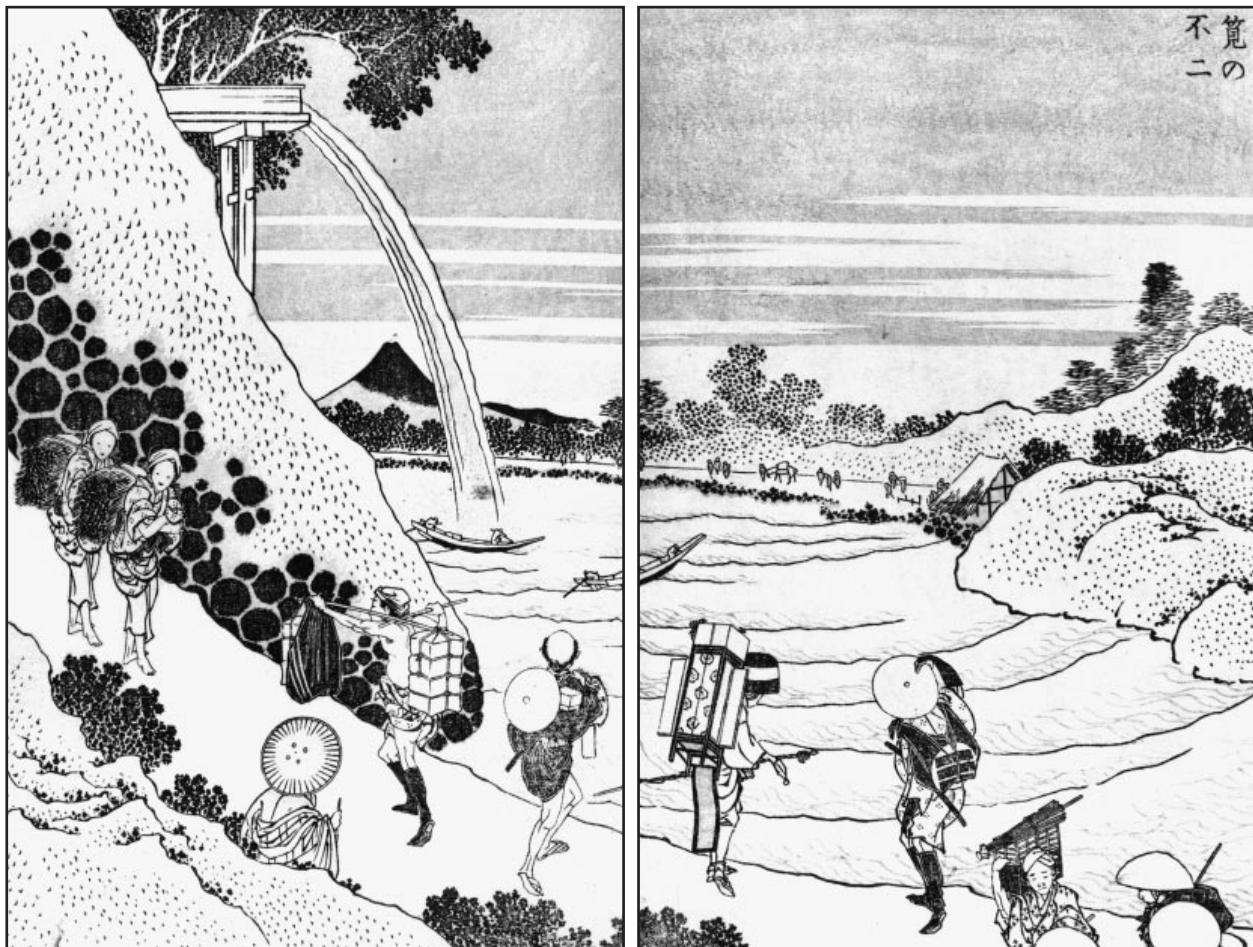


### 1) Sakyo Nikkyo's new doctrine to protect a 13-year- old's position as high priest

**N**ICHIU'S tenure as the ninth high priest spanned some forty-eight years until he retired and transferred the office to Nichijo, the tenth high priest in 1467. Nichiu moved to Sugiyama in Kai Province and had a temple built there. In 1470, Nichijo transferred the office to Nittei, the eleventh high priest. However, both Nichijo and Nittei died

in 1472, and Nichiu came out of retirement to assume the office of high priest once again.

According to *The Chronology of the Fuji School*, Nichiu transferred the lineage to 13-year-old Nitchin, the twelfth high priest in 1482, but the exact date is unknown (vol. 1, p. 87). Since Nitchin took the office at such a young age, he was known as the "child high priest." In 1526, Nitchin appointed 8-year-old Nichiin as his successor. The following year Nitchin died and Nichiin became the thirteenth high priest at 9.



A nineteenth-century print of Mount Fuji and the area around the head temple, Taiseki-ji.

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Japan, feudal lords often inherited their family estates when they were very young, and family stewards were entrusted with their education and care until they were old enough to assume the administrative responsibilities as the heads of families. Following this secular custom, the priesthood at Taiseki-ji began appointing the children of powerful feudal lords as successors to the office of high priest. The appointment of children as high priests indicates both the shortage of capable candidates and the influence of family lineage.

Many priests and members of the head temple's parish expressed deep concern about the ability of these children, especially in their understanding of Buddhist doctrine. When Nitchin became high priest at 13, his patron priest, Sakyo Nikkyo, propounded a new doctrine to silence this criticism—the infallibility of the high priest. Sakyo Nikkyo writes: "To have an audience with the high priest, who is a reincarnation of the Sage [Nichiren], is to meet and form a relationship with the living Sage [Nichiren]" (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 2, p. 309);

“When those who embrace the [Lotus] Sutra have an audience with the current high priest, they meet with the original Buddha” (ibid., vol. 2, p. 329); and “Each successive high priest who received the transmission of the heritage of the Law is the Gohonzon as Sage Nichiren” (ibid., vol. 4, p. 29).

Sakyo Nikkyo defined Nichiren Daishonin as the “original Buddha,” a view that elevated him beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. He then equated the Daishonin with the current high priest by linking the two through the erroneous notion of the transmission of the heritage of the Law. Simply put, Sakyo Nikkyo invoked the Daishonin’s name to deify the high priest, but he cites no doctrinal basis from the Daishonin’s writings. In the history of the Fuji School, the concept of the high priest’s infallibility was put forth only when his ability and authority were in question and needed doctrinal support.

According to records kept by Nichiji, the sixth high priest, Nikko Shonin is said to have stated that if he grows old and senile and starts invoking the name of Amida Buddha, he must be abandoned (*The Record of Taiseki-ji*). Nikko Shonin also states: “Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha’s Law and propounds his own views” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618). It was with full awareness of the possibility of an aberrant high priest that Nikko Shonin made these statements. He clearly did not espouse the doctrine of the high priest’s infallibility. Furthermore, the documented history of the Fuji school with a host of misguided high priests refutes such an idea.



**(2) Transfer documents lost in feud between two offshoots of the Fuji School**

SOME of the most important transfer documents that the Daishonin wrote

to Nikko Shonin were lost in the late sixteenth century due to a feud between two offshoot branches of the Fuji School: the Kitayama Hon’mon-ji school and the Nishiyama Hon’mon-ji school. Nichidai was appointed by Nikko Shonin as the chief priest of the Omosu seminary (later Kitayama Hon’mon-ji). But he was later rejected by the priests at the seminary and forced to leave his post. Nichidai eventually moved to Nishiyama and had a temple built, thus founding the Nishiyama Hon’mon-ji school, which continued to assert its orthodoxy over Kitayama Hon’mon-ji through its connection to the lineage of Nikko Shonin. The two branches of the Fuji School, which evolved out of Nikko Shonin’s Omosu seminary, carried on an intense rivalry. The Nishiyama school, for example, filed a suit against the Kitayama school to reclaim the right of the seminary and the Daishonin’s statue that was kept there.

After Nichidai left, Nichimyo became the chief priest of the Omosu seminary, which gradually distanced itself from Taiseki-ji and renamed itself Hon’mon-ji—“temple of the true teaching.” This was the name that was said to be assumed by the temple upholding the Daishonin’s teachings at the time of kosen-rufu. In response, Nishiyama also renamed itself Hon’mon-ji.

On March 17, 1581, some priests from Nishiyama escorted by soldiers of Masuyama Gon’uemon, a retainer of Takeda Katsuyori, the governor of Kai Province, went to Kitayama and took its “treasure box.” This box was said to contain many Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin, some originals of the Daishonin’s writings such as “On the Three Great Secret Laws” as well as some transfer documents, including the two transfer documents in which Nichiren Daishonin entrusted Nikko Shonin as his successor. Other works believed to have been in the treasure box include: “On the Birth of the

**The appointment of children as high priests  
indicates both the shortage of capable candidates  
and the influence of prestigious families.**

Original Buddha"; "Seven Articles on the Object of Worship"; "One-hundred and Six Comparisons"; and "On the Buddhism of the True Cause."

According to one record, Nisshun, the chief priest of Nishiyama Hon'mon-ji, lodged a suit with Takeda Katsuyori and obtained permission to search Kitayama. Escorted by approximately one hundred soldiers, Nisshun went to Kitayama and demanded to inspect the contents of its treasure box, claiming that some important treasures had recently been lost from Kuon-ji, a temple at Mount Minobu. When Nichiden, the chief priest of Kitayama, reluctantly brought out the box, Nisshun took it back to the estate of the Takeda clan in Kai Province, claiming that the contents would need further investigation (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 9, p. 22).

Nichiden immediately went to Kofu, the seat of the provincial government in Kai Province, and demanded that the Takeda clan return Kitayama's property. His appeal, however, fell on deaf ears. In protest Nichiden went on a hunger strike and died in February 1582. The following month, however, the forces of the neighboring lord, Oda Nobunaga, defeated Takeda Katsuyori's army. During the confusion surrounding the defeat of the Takeda clan, much of the contents of Kitayama's treasure box were lost.

Later Honda Sakuzaemon, a retainer of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate government, recovered some of the lost items and donated them to Nishiyama. Nisshutsu, the chief priest of Kitayama, however, lodged a complaint with Tokugawa Ieyasu to reclaim its lost property. Acknowledging the merit of Nisshutsu's complaint, Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered the return of the remaining sixty-four items to Kitayama.

Due to this incident, many important documents and Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin were lost. The rivalry between the Kitayama Hon'mon-ji school and the Nishiyama Hon'mon-ji school escalated to where it resulted in the tragic loss of important archives and artifacts of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Later some scholars denied the Daishonin's transfer of his lineage to Nikko Shonin, claiming that the two transfer documents and "On the Three Great Secret Laws" were forged now that the originals were lost. However, copies that had been made before the loss of the originals were extant, and the background of the incident, which resulted in the loss of the originals, was documented. So their claim to deny Nikko Shonin's legitimacy could not be substantiated.

*(To be continued)*

# DIALOGUE

on the *Lotus Sutra*

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

*This is the thirtieth 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 July 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*In this discussion, their fifth on the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, they continue to discuss the Ten Worlds, focusing on the worlds of Anger and Humanity. Buddhism teaches that people’s lives and society are inseparable. From this standpoint, the distortions in the age and in society reflect distortions in people’s lives. The doctrine of the Ten Worlds can be understood as a “mirror” for observing and channeling the negative tendencies in life in a positive direction.*

## **30** Turning a Society of Anger Into a Society of Humanism—The Doctrine of the Ten Worlds

**Katsuji Saito:** Shall we continue our discussion of the Ten Worlds? Last time we talked about the three evil paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality. Today let’s start with the world of Anger.

**Daisaku Ikeda:** I hope we can really study this in earnest. The purpose of Buddhist study after all is to expand one’s state of life. And the doctrine of the Ten Worlds is like a mirror. As we gaze into it, we can see the true aspect of our own lives. It also enables us to perceive correctly the lives of others and society, and understand what we can do to contribute to others’ well-being.

**Haruo Suda:** Yes. In contrast to the three evil paths, the worlds of Anger, Humanity and Heaven (or Rapture) are termed the three good paths. Together these make up the six paths.

**Takanori Endo:** What seems odd to me is that while the world of Anger is considered one of the four evil

SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda visit the Eiji Yoshikawa Memorial Hall in Tokyo. Japanese novelist Eiji Yoshikawa (1892–1962) decided to look at history anew through the eyes of the ordinary person following the trauma of Japan's defeat in 1945. The product of this reassessment was what proved to be his lifework, *New Tales of the Heike*.



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paths when grouped together with Hell, Hunger and Animality, it is also considered as one of the three good paths. How can it be both good and evil?

**Ikeda:** We will need to give that some thought. Perhaps we can begin by considering the fundamental meaning of these terms.

### Anger—The Arrogance To Look Down on Others

**Endo:** “Anger” (Jp. *shura*), in the “world of Anger,” derives from the Sanskrit term *asura*. In ancient India, *asura* originally represented a class of benevolent deities. But in later mythology, they came to be regarded as contentious demons who ceaselessly fight with gods.

**Suda:** Nichiren Daishonin explains that the world of Anger is characterized by “perversity,” meaning a mind that is fawning and crooked (MW-1, 52). An example of perversity can be seen in the case of a disloyal person who hides his or her true feelings while making a show of loyalty. Such behavior is certainly “fawning and crooked.”

**Endo:** The word *anger* calls to mind the image of someone standing with a proud and confident air—certainly the opposite of fawning.

So it can also be said that, at first glance, someone in the world of Anger might even appear to be humble.

**Ikeda:** Indeed, and therein lies a problem. Anger is fundamentally an arrogant state of life.

But arrogance can be understood in any number of ways; Buddhist tradition, for example, identifies seven or nine types of arrogance. Nonetheless Anger, in essence, indicates one’s attachment to the illusory assumption that they are better than others.

Those in the world of Anger think of themselves as the most wonderful people. The energy of the world of Anger is directed toward sustaining and enhancing this image. To ensure that others think of them in similarly glowing terms, they can never reveal their true feelings, but act in a fawning, obsequious manner.

**Endo:** In other words, the person’s inner feelings and outward appearance are out of accord. As a

result, the person says things that are not in his heart. This is a tendency we do not find in people in the three evil paths. It is a fairly sophisticated, even intellectual, operation.

**Saito:** In the *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight) the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China says of those in the world of Anger that there is a discrepancy between what is in their hearts and how they appear outwardly. He comments:

Since those in the world of Anger desire in every instance to be superior to everyone else and cannot bear to be inferior to anyone, they belittle and despise others and exalt themselves, like a hawk flying high and looking down on the world. At the same time, outwardly they seek to display the virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. While manifesting a mind of minor goodness, they follow the path of Anger.<sup>1</sup>

In their hearts, they cannot tolerate the existence of someone more capable or more respectable than themselves. They cannot truly respect others, because they believe that they alone are worthy of respect. A burning desire to surpass all others is their exclusive focus.

Outwardly, however, they do not give the least hint of such an obsession. They conduct themselves as virtuous people of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. By so doing, they try to convince others that these are their true qualities, and may even come to believe this themselves.

**Endo:** They may even delude themselves into believing they are better than others because they are "so humble."

**Suda:** There is clearly a great disparity between what is in their hearts and what we see. Fundamentally, people in the world of Anger are dishonest.

**Ikeda:** Those who abandoned their faith and betrayed the Soka Gakkai, turning against their fellow members, were all people whose lives were entirely consumed by such a state of Anger. We must never allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances.

**Saito:** As the phrase *fawning and crooked* suggests, their hearts are genuinely twisted.

**Ikeda:** That's right. Since their hearts are crooked, they can see neither themselves nor others correctly. Looking at things through the "distorted lens" of arrogance, they think they are larger than life. As a result, they neither desire to learn from others nor are they capable of honest self-reflection, both of which are the means to grow as human beings.

In the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings), Nichiren Daishonin cites a passage from the *Hokke Mongu Ki* (Annotations on the Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra) regarding the difference between "arrogance" and "self-importance": "'Because they conceal their failings, flaunt their virtues,' refers to arrogance. 'Incapable of self-reflection' refers to self-importance" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 718).

**Saito:** Hiding one's own faults while advertising one's virtues is "arrogance." Arrogant people haughtily suppose that they have attained the effects of Buddhist practice when they have not. Such attachment to one's own arbitrary views and the inability to self-reflect is certainly "self-importance."

**Ikeda:** The "Expedient Means" (second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra says that the people of an impure age are "arrogant and puffed up with self-importance, fawning and devious, insincere in mind" (LS2, 37).<sup>2</sup> In other words, while having a strong sense of self-importance and inflated pride, their minds are crooked. And they are dishonest and insincere. This well describes the state of affairs in society.

**Suda:** In modern Japanese, the term originally meaning "self-importance" has an entirely different connotation. For example, mothers often scold their children by saying what literally translates as, "Show some self-importance!" by which they really mean, "Be patient!" This is a remarkable change of meaning. The intention is certainly not to encourage children to develop an overweening sense of self-importance.

### Fear of Exposure

**Ikeda:** At some point, the term *self-importance* came to mean "suppressing self-importance," or

“persevering.” I wonder why that happened. Perhaps it has to do with the way arrogant people can summon forth a tremendous amount of energy or will power to protect their inflated self-image.

**Saito:** It would be wonderful if such people could channel that energy into self-improvement. But unfortunately they use it merely to protect the “illusory image” to which they are so attached.

**Ikeda:** That is the misery of the world of Anger. The hearts of those in this state are always filled with fear—fear that their true nature will be exposed. In the “Letter from Sado,” Nichiren Daishonin says: “An arrogant man will be overcome with fear when he meets a strong enemy, just like the haughty ashura who shrank and hid himself in a lotus flower blossoming in Munetchi Lake when reproached by Taishaku” (MW-1, 35).

On the other hand, one with the heart of a lion king is totally fearless. That’s because such a person is concerned not with protecting himself, but with protecting the Law and the people.

**Endo:** Someone in the state of Anger has a sense of self that assumes gargantuan proportions: “An ashura stands 84,000 *yojana*<sup>3</sup> in height, and water of the four oceans comes no higher than his knees.”<sup>4</sup> While so enormous in size that even standing in the ocean, the water only comes up to its knees, this is still only its subjective sense of self, not its true form.

**Suda:** An arrogant person labors under illusions of personal grandeur. But when the person’s arrogant illusions are shattered by the presence of someone possessing genuine strength—such as the god Taishaku, in the above example—the person becomes so small that he can even conceal himself in a lotus flower on a pond.

**Endo:** A person in such a state is like a punctured balloon.

**Saito:** Looking at things in this way, the *ashura* would seem to embody characteristics found in a great many people today. I am struck in particular by the strong similarities between Buddhism’s depiction of the world of Anger and Dr. M. Scott

Peck’s analysis of “evil” in his book *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*.

**Endo:** I’ve read that, too. His main point is that the corrupt individual who casually tells lies is definitely not an exception, but appears in all walks of life.

**Saito:** That’s right. The characteristic of such people, according to Peck, is that “deep down, [they] feel themselves to be faultless.”<sup>5</sup> He also says:

**A**n arrogant person labors under illusions of personal grandeur. But when the person’s arrogant illusions are shattered by the presence of someone possessing genuine strength ... the person becomes so small that he can even conceal himself in a lotus flower on a pond.

Utterly dedicated to preserving their self-image of perfection, they are unceasingly engaged in the effort to maintain the appearance of moral purity. They worry about this a great deal.... While they seem to lack any motivation to be good, they intensely desire to appear good. Their “goodness” is all on a level of pretense.<sup>6</sup>

**Suda:** In other words, outwardly they display a mind of minor goodness.

**Endo:** A little earlier we discussed the energy of “self-importance.” In this connection, Peck writes that one is “struck by the extraordinary willfulness of evil people.”<sup>7</sup> He also says: “They are likely to

exert themselves more than most in their continuing effort to obtain and maintain an image of high respectability. They may willingly, even eagerly, undergo great hardships in their search for status.”<sup>8</sup>

**Ikeda:** The problem is that such efforts all emerge from their egoistic hearts. Buddhism teaches that the heart is most important. Even if two people are making comparable efforts, the resulting effects will differ greatly if one person is motivated by some value transcending the self, such as good or beauty, or the well-being of others, while the other is solely motivated by ego.

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From our standpoint, faith means determining that one’s fundamental objective in life is to advance kosen-rufu, and then thoroughly dedicating oneself to that cause.

By contrast, those whom I mentioned earlier who abandoned their faith and actually betrayed the Soka Gakkai had succumbed to the mistaken notion that the organization for kosen-rufu somehow exists to help them further their own private interests. Full of arrogance and unable to respect their fellow

members, such people have used the organization, used their positions, and used me personally in an attempt to flaunt their supposed greatness.

**Saito:** And when you have seen through their pretenses, President Ikeda, the tendency of these people has been to react with strong personal animosity toward you.

**Suda:** They ought to have sincerely self-reflected, but instead they began attacking you out of bitter resentment.

**Endo:** Doesn’t that psychology also spring from the desire to protect a self-image that is based on illusion? In the book that I mentioned a moment ago, Dr. Peck says, “The evil attack others instead of facing their own failures.... Instead of destroying others they should be destroying the sickness within themselves.”<sup>9</sup> Such people, he says, “are characterized by their absolute refusal to tolerate the sense of their own sinfulness.”<sup>10</sup>

**Suda:** That certainly is the image of someone who cannot self-reflect. As a result of this inability, the person feels deep resentment toward others.

**Saito:** Up to now, we have tended to identify anger with a strong desire to prove oneself better than others. This may actually offer a profound insight into human nature. Could it be that anger is some fateful side of human nature that is directly linked with self-awareness?

The three evil paths are states of life in which people are completely overwhelmed by their environment. But those in the world of Anger have one foot free; they have a self that is in some degree sheltered from the influence of their environment or immediate circumstances.

**Suda:** That’s probably why Anger is not counted as one of the three evil paths.

**Saito:** But there is a strong tendency for people, the moment they gain such subjective self-awareness, to become dominated by the desire to be better than others.

**Ikeda:** How can this tendency be overcome? That is the jumping-off point for entering the world of



The Parthenon on the Acropolis. The Parthenon, built in the fifth century B.C.E., was the temple of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, skills and warfare in Greek mythology.

Humanity. Ultimately, it is when we learn to channel the energy that had formerly been directed toward winning over others into winning over ourselves that we enter the world of Humanity.

But before we begin discussing the world of Humanity, why don't we give some thought to the state of envy that is a great hallmark of the world of Anger?

### A "Society of Envy" Will Decline

Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?

Medicine King, you should know that after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, if there are those who can copy, uphold, read and recite this sutra, offer alms to it and expound it for others, then the Thus Come One will cover them with his robe, and they will also be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas who are now present in other regions. Such persons possess the power of great faith, the power of aspiration, the power of good

roots. You should know that such persons lodge in the same place as the Thus Come One, and the Thus Come One pats them on the head with his hand. (LS10, 164–65)

**Ikeda:** Nichiren Daishonin, describing his contemporaries [in thirteenth-century Japan], says, "their thoughts [are] filled with jealousy" (MW-6, 177). Indeed, the same could be said of people today.

A country that is dominated by envy—and this does not only apply to Japan—is sure to decline. That's because people in such a society, rather than respecting those who have achieved some measure of success or attainment, desire only to drag them down. The ancient Greek city-state of Athens offers a good example.

**Endo:** The practice of ostracism well illustrates the deep-seated envy and jealousy that permeated Athenian society, and the destruction that it wrought. In the name of constraining tyranny, there was a system in which people could vote to determine that someone was a potential tyrant and have that person banished from the city.

**Suda:** In fact, President Ikeda, you once introduced a passage from Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks*, that explained what a nefarious system this was.

In one instance, an illiterate man approached Aristides, a person of exemplary virtue. The man, unable to write and not realizing to whom he was talking, asked Aristides to write the name *Aristides* on the sherd, naming him as the person he wished to have banished. Aristides asked the man if Aristides had ever done him any injury. "None at all," the man replied, "Neither know I the man; but I am tired of hearing him everywhere called the Just."<sup>11</sup> Upon hearing this, Aristides, saying nothing, returned the sherd with his own name on it. And he was banished.

Plutarch writes:

The spirit of the people, now grown high, and confident with their late victory, naturally entertained feelings of dislike to all of more than common fame and reputation. Coming together, therefore, from all parts into the city, they banished Aristides by the ostracism, giving their jealousy of his reputation the name of fear of tyranny.<sup>12</sup>

**Ikeda:** This is an important historical lesson.

As the country prospered, the people became conceited and swollen with self-importance and lost the spirit to respect others. When someone even slightly better than the norm appeared, the citizenry would try to pull the person down out of envy. As a result, people of the highest caliber disappeared from Athens, with only people of inferior ability remaining.

Eventually, Athens found itself without people who could manage the affairs of state. It declined, and finally was defeated in war. And so the curtain fell on Athens' glorious history.

**Saito:** Jealousy is truly fearful. As we've seen, it can destroy a country.

What is the true nature of envy? There is a great deal of research on the subject, but the Japanese philosopher Kiyoshi Miki writes: "A person feels envy toward someone who has a higher standing, or a more fortunate situation than he.... Moreover, envy prompts a person not to try to improve his own position, but rather to try to drag others down to his own level."<sup>13</sup>



SEIKO PRESS

Pottery fragment with the name of Aristides on it. Aristides (530–468 B.C.E.), an Athenian general and statesman, was banished from the city of Athens by a system in which people could vote to ostracize someone by writing the individual's name on pottery shards.

### It Is Better To Be Envid Than To Be Envidious

**Ikeda:** Rather than seeking to elevate themselves in order to become a better person in their own right, they try to drag the other person down. Such arrogance is of no benefit whatsoever to anyone under any circumstances. Even if one pursues this course with all one's might, no good will come of it. Injuring others won't improve one's own lot in the least.

The chief concern of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds is the pursuit of happiness. No true happiness can be found in the desire to be better than others that is characteristic of the world of Anger. People in this state are constantly chafing at those who are better than them, while fearful that their true nature will be exposed. To cover up their cowardice, they enviously try to drag others down. But, in truth, the more they do so, the more miserable they themselves become.

**Suda:** Why is that?

**Ikeda:** When someone is envidious, it is actually because he or she is inwardly aware that in some regard the other person is superior. There is a saying that envy is a [perverse] form of praise; to be

envious of someone is to inwardly recognize the person's superiority. But this is something those in the world of Anger want to avert their eyes from.

**Suda:** They make no attempt to assess just how petty their own lives are. When it comes to this, it turns out they have a good deal of pride.

**Ikeda:** This pride makes those in the state of Anger miserable. The more they realize the superior qualities of others, the more they envy and resent them; and, consequently, the more they become aware of the dreariness and pointlessness of their own existence. The angst that they feel at this awareness compels them to turn on others with added fury. It's a vicious circle.

In truth, to the extent that we can genuinely respect what is lofty and admirable in others we can develop good qualities in ourselves. Goethe laments of his contemporaries who were engaged in scholarly and literary activities: "True greatness is hateful to them; they would fain drive it from the world, so that only such as they might be of importance in it."<sup>14</sup>

**Saito:** It is certainly the case that no good comes of envy. As Kiyoshi Miki writes: "Envy is constantly very busy. I don't know of any emotion that is at once as busy and yet as unproductive as envy."<sup>15</sup> He is describing the power of envy that drives people to spend their time doing all kinds of pointless things.

**Ikeda:** What do you suppose causes a person to reach such a point? That is the crux of the matter.

**Endo:** A little earlier we said that someone in the state of Anger is cowardly. Is it perhaps the case that the roots of envy are also to be found in a lack of self-confidence?

As evidence, people who are envious have a hard time recognizing that they are attacking others out of envy. Instead, they invariably find some pretext to justify their actions. That's because the moment they recognize that they are jealous, they must recognize that they are inferior to the other person. And for someone who seeks to always be better than others, this can be unbearable.

**Saito:** Therefore, people who are envious always don a mask of righteousness.

**Suda:** Certainly. Unscrupulous journalists are a good example. These are people who think nothing of lying to bring someone down. Moreover, outwardly they always strike an upstanding pose, pontificating about social justice, freedom of speech and so on. When they find someone to pick on, they employ every base means available to them to injure the person. The conclusion is decided from the outset.

In the view of one critic, such journalists are not reporting facts, but merely making up stories and mass-distributing them.

**Endo:** How many people have had their human rights violated by such unethical individuals! It would seem that persecution by the tabloid media is the modern equivalent of Athenian ostracism. If nothing is done about the situation, it seems to me, contemporary society is sure to decline, as did ancient Greek society. For the more outstanding someone's actions, the more these people will envy and try to drag the person down.

### False Equality

**Saito:** It seems to me that the existence of malicious and base tabloid journals is symptomatic of a society that is steeped in envy. Conversely, it is the sentiment of envy swirling through society that makes it possible for such malice to exist in the first place. Isn't a false egalitarianism a key ingredient in the soil from which it emerges? By "false egalitarianism," I mean the negative sense of equality that demands that everyone be lined up shoulder to shoulder in perfect conformity.

**Suda:** You're suggesting that this kind of equality produces the envy that prompts people to try to pull down anyone who stands out.

**Ikeda:** Certainly, it may be that such conformism is at the root of the phenomena in Japanese schools of bullying. If a student is in some way different from others, he or she is immediately singled out for harassment. In such an environment of conformism, unless one gets in with the majority, one will become a social outcast.

In a sense, envy directed toward those who stand out and bullying are both products of conformism. In that light, it is very interesting that Athens was the birthplace of democracy.

**Suda:** I guess the pursuit of equality under democracy intensifies envy because it tries to force everyone into a mold.

**Ikeda:** Of course, that's not true equality. True equality starts from the recognition that each person is unique—like cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms.<sup>16</sup> Equality is for each person to be able to fully manifest his or her individuality; and democracy impartially gives all people this opportunity.

If people are evaluated based on a rigid set of criteria in the name of democracy, then those who

the other hand, will automatically feel superior to others in all areas, even though their only real success may be in having done well on examinations.

**Suda:** It would seem that this is the soil from which envy and bullying grow.

**Endo:** In the past, being a “good” student didn't count for anything at all in the society of children. Rather, it was things like being able to throw stones well, or knowledge about insects that could win one a certain measure of respect and status among one's peers. No wonder there was little tendency in such an environment for children to gang up on those who were good at studying.

**Ikeda:** Conformism is narrow-mindedness. Envy and bullying, and the cruel struggles of the world of Anger are born of such narrow-mindedness.

What is needed is the broad-mindedness to respect others. The ultimate articulation of such broad-mindedness is the Lotus Sutra, which explains that all people possess the world of Buddhahood. And its ultimate expression is the world of Buddhahood.

Conformism is a major issue not only in Japan but around the world. The tendency is for people to make economics their sole standard of value, and to classify countries as “advanced” or “developing” on that basis. But if we change the standard, the map of the world changes entirely. For example, if we viewed the countries of the world instead in terms of degree of family harmony, or degree of respect for nature or some other criterion, then the ones that qualified as “advanced” and “developing” would be completely different.

In the twenty-first century, it will be imperative that the peoples of the world learn to respect one another based on a pluralistic outlook.

### A Bulwark for Protecting Human Rights

**Endo:** This is a necessary word of caution for Japan, in particular, since the Japanese have a strong tendency toward conformism. The combination of a tradition of collectivism with conformism is a sure recipe for fascism. It produces an unwillingness to tolerate people's individual refusal to go along with the majority, which amounts to trampling on their human rights.

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do not meet the criteria of that system effectively have no ground on which to stand.

**Saito:** Japan's current education system functions in large measure to establish a ranking of individuals on the basis of achievement in tests. We live in a society in which success in life or happiness means entering the top schools and working at the leading companies, where academic credentials are the key determinant. Under the circumstances, while it might appear that people are being treated equally, that is not in fact the case, and there will always be winners and losers.

There is no medicine for curing the sense of defeat felt by those who lose. The “winners,” on

**Suda:** To put it another way, in Japanese society the more everyone is the same, the more comfortable everyone feels. The psychology is analogous to that of a group of people all jaywalking together; because of their number, they don't feel afraid.

**Ikeda:** Because of the very real danger that Japan may again slip into nationalism, this is the time when we have to really fight hard to foster individuals who possess sound conviction.

**Saito:** Nationalistic elements in Japan attack the Soka Gakkai precisely because it has become a "bulwark" for the protection of human rights.

**Ikeda:** We have to struggle bravely with the indomitable spirit of lion kings. The Lotus Sutra enables us to manifest the power of bounding lions. Only Bodhisattvas of the Earth and Buddhas are able to manifest "the lion's ferocity" (LS15, 218).

Toward evil, we have to fight with the intensity of *ashura* or a charging demon. Buddhism is victory or defeat. We have no choice but to win. When we thoroughly exert ourselves for *kosen-rufu*, the life of *ashura* manifests the function of Buddhahood. This is the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas existing throughout time and space heartily applaud when they see such valiant, dedicated efforts.

On the other hand, to fight solely for oneself is lowly and base. To look down on and harm others based on one's ego is the nature of Devadatta. Those who are dominated by the spirit to be better than others are themselves miserable.

**Saito:** In that position one is certainly miserable.

I suppose that Devadatta, who became Shakyamuni's arch enemy, had the deep-seated desire to be "better than" Shakyamuni. And toward that end, he soiled his hand with all kinds of evil machinations. Still, Shakyamuni was perfectly calm and self-possessed. Every time he saw Shakyamuni's composure, Devadatta must have been filled with chagrin and driven further down the path of Anger, as though reminded of his own pettiness. In the end, he tumbled into a state of life of Hell.

**Suda:** Devadatta advocated practices<sup>17</sup> more severe than those advocated by Shakyamuni, and main-

tained an upright and humble appearance. This is the working of a "mind of minor goodness."

**Ikeda:** Those in the world of Anger deceive themselves and deceive others; they live a life of lies built upon lies. They are neither able to experience true fulfillment nor expand their state of life. Clinging to their own puny illusory sense of self while making a false show of strength, they lead a pitiful existence.

**Endo:** Another passage in the book we talked about a moment ago, *People of the Lie*, reads:

Forever fleeing the light of self-exposure and the voice of their own conscience, they are the most frightened of human beings. They live their lives in sheer terror. They need not be consigned to any hell; they are already in it.<sup>18</sup>

**Ikeda:** An arrogant mind is always bobbing this way and that. It never knows a moment's calm. People who are envious try to upset the lives of others while their own lives are in fact in the throes of the wildest of fluctuations.

The Daishonin describes the befuddled vision of the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, saying: "Those who are unable to reflect on their own errors, being overcome with envy, have their eyes spinning around in their heads. However, it seems to them that the mountains themselves are heaving" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1453). A great mountain is unmoving. Those who nevertheless make a great commotion as though the mountains were heaving and shaking reveal that their own eyes are agog.

**Saito:** The "mirror" for discerning this is the doctrine of the Ten Worlds. Many people, influenced by those filled with envy whose eyes are turning over and over, cannot correctly judge the greatness of a large mountain.

**Ikeda:** That is indeed the state that the sutra describes where it says, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" (LS10, 164).

Our examination of the world of Anger has become quite lengthy, but this is perhaps inevitable because, as the sutra says, hatred and

jealousy abound. It is a subject with a great deal of relevance to the state of affairs in the world today.

### Humanity—The Path of Self-mastery

**Saito:** This brings us to the world of Humanity. In contrast to the world of Anger, which is characterized by the desire to be better than others, the world of Humanity indicates a state of life of victory over the self. When I first heard this, it struck me as quite a revelation.

**Ikeda:** Strictly speaking, the world of Humanity is the first step toward attaining a state of self-mastery, the culmination of which is to be found in the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

Citing a familiar Buddhist concept, the Daishonin says, “Those who devote themselves to the three treasures and uphold the five precepts, will be born again as human beings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430). The teachings of both the three devotions<sup>19</sup> and the five precepts<sup>20</sup> signify the effort to advance along the correct path in life. When we follow this path, our life becomes stable; we are not tossed about this way and that the way someone with an arrogant mind is.

Broadly speaking, the teaching of the three devotions indicates a spirit of faith. Haughty people in the world of Anger cannot recognize anyone as better. They cannot bow their heads to anyone. But as a result, in the final analysis they become the slaves of their own arrogance and captives of evil. Those in the world of Humanity, by contrast, humbly and most sincerely respect those of higher attainment and ability, and, consequently, accrue inner wealth.

The teaching of the five precepts is not something that seeks to bind our life from without. They could be described, rather, as a standard or vow that is internalized, a path in life. When we understand that breaking the five precepts produces the effect of suffering, and become able to control ourselves with our own intellect, we are in the world of Humanity.

**Suda:** In Sanskrit, *human being* is signified by the term *manusya*, which means “thinking being” or “one who thinks.” From that standpoint, I guess that intellect is the key condition of humanity.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more

than animals” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240).<sup>21</sup> Beings in this state possess a greater ability to correctly discern the good and evil of things than do those dwelling in the three or the four evil paths.

**Saito:** T’ien-t’ai cites “the ability to widely recognize causes in anticipation of future effects” as the distinguishing characteristic of Humanity. In other words, to dwell in the world of Humanity means to understand the principle of cause and effect to a certain degree.

**Endo:** The May issue of the *Daibyakurenge* carried an interview with Professor Sallie King (of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia) on Buddhism’s philosophy of human rights. The article contained a discussion of the five precepts.

Professor King noted, for example, that if one were to undertake the first precept of Buddhism, not to harm others, it would obviously be for the other person’s good. But such restraint would, at the same time, also be in one’s own interest. Because, as she rightly points out, the karmic consequences of such an act would accrue to the perpetrator. In this sense, the Buddhist perspective of human rights, which has, at its foundation, the good of all people, is quite different from that in the West.

**Ikeda:** The modern significance of Buddhism becomes all the more clear. Buddhism clarifies the path of fulfillment for both oneself and others; it reveals the correct path in life for human beings. Because we are advancing along the correct path, we lead stable lives, realizing progressive improvement and growth.

Regarding the state of Humanity, in the *Gosho* “The True Object of Worship,” the Daishonin says, “calmness is [the world] of Humanity” (MW-1, 52).

**Suda:** It is a state of calm and tranquillity, as when one takes a moment’s rest after a hard day’s work.

**Endo:** For me, I associate the “calmness” that the Daishonin speaks of with the last scene in the novel *Shin Heike Monogatari* (New Tale of the Heike), by the popular Japanese writer Eiji Yoshikawa (1892–1962).

It is the scene where Abe-no-Asatori and his wife, Yomogi, peasants who have observed the continuous struggles between the Minamoto and Taira clans

for hegemony over a half century, have an intense discussion. While viewing the cherry flowers of Mount Yoshino, and looking back on the tumultuous past, the couple feel an acute sense of happiness.

When it comes to human happiness, where we are at right now is the happiest point that can be reached.... Why, even so, do people all shed blood and fight over rank and power?

There is no use comparing individual differences in talent, or the different professions and missions that people pursue in life. Those who thoroughly dedicate themselves to their work in life are all respectable; that's what is important. There is no difference among them as human beings.<sup>22</sup>

To me, this ordinary elderly couple that had miraculously managed to survive in an age rife with war represents the world of Humanity.

**Ikeda:** That's a famous scene. While perhaps ordinary and unremarkable, they display a splendid radiance as human beings.

Those in the world of Anger vie with one another in their quest for status and power, spilling blood and doing injury to one another. But the two of them lived true to their hearts. Without comparing themselves to others, they strove to follow through on their own path. Even in a society characterized by Anger, those who persist in following such a path attain the peace of mind, the world of Humanity.

Peace of mind or calmness are definitely not something that can be gained without diligent effort. Unless we make steadfast effort, our state of life will inevitably be colored by our environment or those around us.

**Suda:** Certainly, the tendency is for someone in the world of Humanity to quickly be pulled down into one of the three evil paths or the world of Anger on account of external influences of various kinds. This is evident in our everyday lives. It is extremely difficult to maintain a calm and tranquil self. At the slightest thing, one may become downcast or filled with rage.

### Living Humanely Makes Us Human

**Ikeda:** That is precisely the challenge of leading a humane existence. And this is all the more difficult

because this is the Latter Day of the Law and we are surrounded by negative influences. For precisely this reason, to live as human beings we need to follow a path of continuous advance. This path is none other than our Buddhist practice.

When a top stops spinning, it falls over. It is only stable when it is rotating at a high speed.

It is not being born human that makes one a human being. Isn't it the case that we only become human when we make tenacious effort to live as human beings? In the early twentieth century, there was an episode in which two girls who had been raised by a pack of wolves were rescued by residents of a small village near Calcutta,

**I**n Buddhism, the human body is called the "correct vessel of the noble paths"—that is, it is the vessel of the Law for carrying out Buddhist practice. When we fill that vessel with the great life of the world of Buddhahood, we realize the true significance of our having been born as human beings.

India. The girls were about 2 and 8 years old at the time. When they were found, while their features were human, in their actions and activities they were no different from wolves. During the day, they would sleep in the corner of a dark room, or would lie perfectly still without moving in the least. At night, they would prowl around the vicinity, and would howl aloud repeatedly. They could neither eat with their hands nor stand up on two feet.

**Saito:** I heard about that. Later, various efforts were made to somehow help them behave as humans,



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To live as human beings, we need to follow a path of continuous advance. This path is none other than our Buddhist practice. When a top stops spinning, it falls over. It is only stable when it is rotating at a high speed.

but until their deaths their habits as wolves reportedly stayed with them largely unchanged.

**Ikeda:** That's right. Pitifully, the younger of the two children died shortly thereafter. And while the elder girl lived another nine years, even at the age of 17 she reportedly managed to use only four or five words.

**Saito:** It may be that being born as a human being means nothing more than that one has the potential to become human.

**Ikeda:** That's why education is so important. We need humanistic education to become human beings.

**Endo:** Come to think of it, I once heard the following episode. A child returned home after getting a perfect score on a test. Right off the bat his mother asked him how many children in the class had gotten perfect scores. When he answered that many had, she replied, "Then it's only natural that you should have gotten a perfect score."

**Suda:** A child, it seems, can never do well enough.

**Endo:** Often parents don't try to see what their children have learned or how they have developed. Instead, they are concerned only with how their children compare to their peers. This approach would seem to lend itself to producing people who dwell in the world of Anger.

**Ikeda:** It is becoming increasingly difficult to lead a simple, humane existence. In terms of the structure of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds, the world of Humanity is right in the middle. From that vantage, one can either ascend to higher states of life, or descend into the lower worlds. It could be said, therefore, that Humanity occupies the central position.

For precisely that reason, Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly says things like, "Since you have had the rare good fortune to be born in the world of Humanity, you should strive to attain a still higher state of life."

### **For What Purpose Were We Born As Human Beings?**

**Suda:** Yes. For example, in one Goshō he says, "Those who are born in the three evil paths are more numerous than the particles of dust on the earth, while those who are born as human beings are fewer than the number of dust particles one can place on his fingernail" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 70).

**Endo:** He also says, "Now I have already obtained birth in the human realm, something difficult to achieve, and have had the privilege of hearing the Buddhist teachings, which are seldom encountered. If I should pass my present life in idleness, then in what future life could I possibly free myself from the sufferings of birth and death and attain enlightenment?" (MW-5, 101).

**Ikeda:** Therefore, it's important that we really exert ourselves earnestly while we are hale and hearty. To the extent that we courageously take action for kosen-rufu, we solidify within our lives the path leading to eternal happiness.

In Buddhism, the human body is called the "correct vessel of the noble paths"—that is, it is the vessel of the Law for carrying out Buddhist practice.

When we fill that vessel with the great life of the world of Buddhahood, we realize the true significance of our having been born as human beings.

**Saito:** In that sense, can we perhaps say that the meaning of Humanity lies in striving to attain a still higher state of life?

### Elevating the State of Life of All People

**Ikeda:** Yes, I think so. A higher state of life would mean the worlds of Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

At any rate, there is something extremely profound and mystic about the function of state of life. Whether or not we are aware of it, our state of life to a great extent determines our actions, thoughts, relationships and path in life, as well as our emotions.

State of life, moreover, is not only a property of individuals. A society, too, has state of life, the Ten Worlds. Kosen-rufu is not only a struggle to change the state of life of individuals, but a movement to change the state of life of an entire country, to elevate the state of life of humankind. It is a grand and unprecedented experiment.

I am reminded of certain words of Shozo Tanaka. [The legislator Tanaka (1841–1913) made a name for

himself as a friend of the people in the Ashio Copper Mine Incident, which resulted in widespread environmental damage. He devoted his life to opposing abuses of people’s rights by the authorities.]

In his later years, he said: “A nation is like a person. A person is not necessarily respectable because he is stout. He is respected for his knowledge and virtue. A nation is like a person. A person is respected not because of his physical strength but because of his intellect, no matter how lean he is.”<sup>23</sup>

Victimizing the people both at home and abroad, Japan, in racing ahead along the path of Anger toward the goals of developing a rich nation and a strong military, became arrogant and lost its spirit. It lost sight of the path of humanism.

Tanaka declares: “Japan still sustains its body, but has lost its spirit. Japan no longer exists.”<sup>24</sup> He wrote these words four months before his death. Thirty-two years later, Japan ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

It is because we do not want this tragedy to be repeated that we are crying out to our compatriots: “Abandon arrogance! Humbly pursue the path of humanism!”

*(The discussion on the Ten Worlds will be continued.)*

1. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430.
2. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For 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.
3. *Yojana*: (Skt) A unit of measurement used in ancient India, equal to the distance that the royal army was thought to be able to march in a day. Approximations vary as widely as 9.6, 16 and 24 kilometers.
4. Nichikan, “Sanju Hiden Sho” (The Threefold Secret Teaching).
5. M. Scott Peck, M.D., *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 73.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
11. Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Greeks*, ed. Edmund Fuller (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1959), p. 99.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
13. *Miki Kiyoshi Zenshu* (Collected Works of Kiyoshi Miki), “Jinseiron Noto” [Thoughts on Life] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), vol. 1, p. 267–68.
14. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Words of Goethe* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1949), p. 129.
15. *Miki Kiyoshi Zenshu*, *ibid.*, p. 270.
16. Buddhism teaches that each of us has our own unique personality and mission. In the Gosho, it states: “Cherry, plum, peach or damson blossoms—all, just as they are, are entities possessing their own unique qualities” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784).
17. Devadatta sought to present himself as surpassing the Buddha and to gain recognition in society by advocating five practices. As detailed in the *Shibunritsu*, they were: to wear robes of rags; to seek food only by begging; to eat only one meal a day; to always sit out in the open; and to partake of neither salt nor the five flavors.
18. Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 67.
19. Three devotions: Devotion to the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law and the Samgha, or community of Buddhist followers.
20. Five precepts: Prohibitions against killing, stealing, illicit sex, lying and consumption of alcohol.
21. Editor’s note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
22. *Yoshikawa Eiji Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Eiji Yoshikawa) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982), vol. 39, p. 213–14.
23. *Tanaka Shozo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Shozo Tanaka) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979), vol. 11, p. 131.
24. *Tanaka Shozo Zenshu*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977), vol. 13, p. 446.

# Recollections With Leading World Figures

By Daisaku Ikeda



View of Zarcero and San Rafael Church.

President José María Figueres Olsen of the Republic of Costa Rica

say, what he would do if he were here. I have carried on an unending dialogue in my heart with my mentor.

I can still hear Mr. Toda's impassioned voice: "Revolutions always stir up persecution and criticism. Fear nothing! If you are prepared to give your life for your beliefs, what can there be to fear?... In two hundred years, you will be proven right."

"I entrust everything to you," he said before he passed away, and those words have become the core, the totality of my life.

**P**RESIDENT José María Figueres Olsen of the Republic of Costa Rica took office two years ago, at the young age of 39. During my visit to Costa Rica at his invitation [in June 1996], I told him: "Being young is a tremendous strength. Youth is an invaluable treasure. I was also young, only 32, when I succeeded my mentor as third president of the Soka Gakkai."

The Costa Rican president's father was José Figueres Ferrer (1906–90), the father of modern democracy in Costa Rica and a great humanist known

**I**N any undertaking, I have always asked myself what my beloved mentor, Josei Toda, would do in my place.

After his death, in times of both tranquillity and tempest, I have deeply pondered what he would think, what he would

DAVE G. HOUSSER/CORBIS



President José María Figueres Olsen of Costa Rica and First Lady Altmann de Figueres are greeted by SGI President Ikeda and Mrs. Ikeda at Soka University in Hachioji, Japan, May 1996.

affectionately by the people as Don Pepe. In the period of chaos following World War II, he helped bring down the corrupt regime and establish a new democratic government. With a clear vision for the future, he abolished the military.

The money saved by the elimination of the military was all redirected to education. Don Pepe laid down the basic guidelines for Costa Rica's development as a nation of peace, culture and education. Though a highly educated man who could speak five languages, he would proudly declare that he was simply a farmer.

At an official function shortly after his inauguration as president [in 1948], Don Pepe wore a tuxedo, but refused to wear the patent leather shoes that had been set out for him. "These are just fine," he said, pointing to the riding boots he had on.

"Your father was a great man," I said to the President. "I

know he is watching over you. I hope that, as the years go by, you will grow into a truly outstanding leader of Costa Rica.

"Your youth itself is a great hope for the future. A long time ago, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Soviet Premier Aleksey N. Kosygin said that they held me in high regard because I was young and the future still lay ahead of me. Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee, the British historian, also honored me with his trust, treating me as if I were his own grandson."

"If I remember correctly," remarked Mr. Figueres, "you were about my age, in your early forties, at the time of your dialogue with Dr. Toynbee [published under the title *Choose Life*]. The content of that dialogue remains wonderfully relevant even to this day."

President Figueres is a remarkably humble man. His entire being emanates with the desire to learn from others. He is not the least bit arrogant or

affected. He is the very picture of earnestness and sincerity.

AFTER visiting Cuba, I arrived at the airport outside of Costa Rica's capital, San José [June 26, 1996]. I was astonished and deeply humbled to find that President Figueres, First Lady Josette Altmann de Figueres and the president's mother, Mrs. Karen Olsen, were all there to greet me. The president also accompanied me on my departure, riding in the same car. He returned from an official trip out of town especially to see me off.

When I got into the car, he placed his hand on the door frame so that I wouldn't hit my head as I sat down. I was very moved by his kindness and consideration, and I felt as if I had caught a glimpse of the fine upbringing his parents had given him.

President Figueres, who received an honorary doctorate



DAVE G. HOUSER/CORBIS

### Democracy Square

from Soka University [on May 23, 1996], wore his Soka University badge the entire time I was there [from June 26 through 29]. With a friendly smile, he told me that he was proud of his association with Soka University.

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the SGI exhibition “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity” in San José, the president said: “I esteem all people and organizations, wherever they may be, who have contributed for many long years to the great river of human harmony. I would especially like to single out for mention the founding fathers and contemporary leaders of the Soka Gakkai. They are an excellent example of such individuals. There have been times when the Soka Gakkai has been persecuted and attacked for its love of truth and freedom, yet

they have never succumbed to such pressure and have continued to fight.

“In Japan and around the world, the Soka Gakkai employs that most excellent method—education—to build a foundation for world peace. It is nurturing a new culture for peace. Its leaders have striven with courage to achieve these difficult goals.”

**O**N another occasion, he even suggested that Costa Rica and the SGI form an alliance of humanism.

These words of commendation from one of the leading nations of peace are ones that I specially wish to share with all our members who have worked so hard.

The “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity” exhibition was held at the Costa Rican Center for Science and Culture, atop a

hill in San José. The building used to be a prison, but it was closed and turned into an educational center, which incorporates a children’s museum. The dark steel bars at the windows still testify to the structure’s past.

I remembered Victor Hugo’s assertion that one who opens the doors to schools closes the doors of prisons. Who becomes a criminal by choice? When we are born, when we are children, all of us are overflowing with hope; we are like little angels, wanting nothing so much as to grow, to be good and to be loved by others. Poverty, lack of affection and cruelty distort those happy natures. There are so many children in the world who, though they know it is wrong, have to steal just to survive. We must provide all children with a positive education, so that no child need resent

others, so that no child be made a victim of violence and driven to thoughts of suicide!

Surely Don Pepe must have shared this wish.

There is a famous story about the former president. It took place in December 1948, not long after his inauguration. The skies over San José were a clear, bright blue. Some 4,000 feet above sea level, the winds of the high plateaus blew through the Bellavista Military Barracks.

The barracks were filled with people—cabinet ministers, judges, elected representatives, high-ranking church figures, ambassadors and diplomats from various countries, labor union leaders, and many reporters and other media people. A brace of cornets rang out in a fanfare, followed by a roll of drums.

Don Pepe came up to the microphone at the podium and declared: “From today, the Republic of Costa Rica has eliminated its standing army.” After that brief statement, he walked to the wall behind the podium, picked up a sledgehammer, and swung it with full force against the wall.

What was he doing? The audience was astonished. The stones of the wall creaked and a part of the wall fell away. Everyone gasped. With a crash, the stones tumbled into the empty lot beyond. As one, the assembly released its breath.

Don Pepe returned to the podium and declared that the army barracks would now be turned over to the Ministry of Education and funds allocated to convert it into a beautiful

museum. Let us throw away our weapons and redirect those resources to the education of our children, he urged. This dramatic display is indicative of Don Pepe’s character—his humanism, his boldness, his eloquence, his wit, his ability to touch the hearts of others. Not to mention his meticulous attention to detail—for, in fact, he had worked on the wall the previous day so as to ensure that it would crumble in one go when he struck it.

HE then denounced the way dictators throughout history had used the military to crush anyone who opposed their rule and to threaten and oppress their fellow citizens. But he and his administration, he declared, did not fear the people; therefore, they had no need for weapons to preserve their rule.

During World War II, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first president of the Soka Gakkai, was incarcerated by the Japanese military authorities and died in prison. My own mentor, Josei Toda, was imprisoned along with him and harshly maltreated.

On the islands of Okinawa, the Japanese army, which ought to have been the residents’ ally and protector, slaughtered countless innocent civilians. Though there were dire food shortages, military commanders ordered the people to hand over all their supplies, threatening to shoot anyone who resisted. They even took food from the mouths of little children. When hungry babies cried, the soldiers

ordered their parents or guardians to kill them lest the cries warn the enemy of their hiding place. When the soldiers wanted to take cover from air raids or hide from the enemy in the many caves found on the islands, they forcefully evicted any civilians who happened to be there first, so that they could fit inside. They shouted at the people and beat them with sticks, showing no regard even for the elderly.

Violence begets violence. Hate breeds hate. War makes war. Don Pepe was determined to break this destructive cycle that has existed for as long as humankind has walked this earth. When he struck down the wall of the military barracks, a new world of peace and culture was revealed.

President Figueres also said in his speech at the opening of the “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity” exhibition: “I believe in the power of the human spirit to vanquish evil.... Peace cannot be based on the power of guns; it will grow from the serenity of the hoe that cultivates a field. Peace cannot be sustained by the arrogance of the military or the powerful; it can only be sustained by the friendliness of the farmer. The people of Costa Rica firmly believe that the greatest defenses are reason, equality and solidarity.”

In other words, the only way to create peace is to prepare for peace. The only way to establish the garden of peace is to plant the seeds of peace. To prepare for war in order to realize peace is a fundamental contradiction in terms.

Based on that conviction, since Don Pepe's time, Costa Rica has spent thirty percent of its national budget on education. It has created as many teachers as it once had soldiers: One in every ten Costa Ricans is a teacher. The sight of students in their neat uniforms on the streets of San José is striking. There are no children forced to make their living on the streets because they are too poor to attend school.

Although he has been working to further reform the educational system, President Figueres is still not satisfied. Says the Costa Rican leader: "In these last two years [since becoming president], I have built thirty-five new schools. One is on a tiny island. Before this new school opened, the children who lived on that island had to get up while it was still dark, take a boat for about two hours, depending on sailing conditions, and then travel another two hours by bus to get to school. They were getting up in the middle of the night! I almost wept when I heard this. That is why I decided to have a school built on that island.

"One thing strikes me about all of the developed nations. They have forgotten what it means to be thankful for what they have. It won't do to forget that one can study in school because society as a whole has made a sacrifice to make that possible. In the developing countries, there are many children who can't attend school, much as they would like to. They would give anything for the opportunity to study. We must not forget such people."

I constantly stress that those who attend university must work for the sake of others who wanted to attend but could not. They were able to study because they had the support of the people, of their fellow citizens. If one forgets that truth, what use is one's learning? If our elite become inhumane people who look down on others, our educational system is profoundly flawed. Education that does not teach a sense of values turns people into mere robots filled with data but with no understanding of what it is for.

**P**RESIDENT Figueres' mother, Mrs. Karen Olsen, told me that her husband, Don Pepe, used to say that what our abilities are is not as important as how we make use of them. These may seem like simple words, but aren't they actually a perfect solution to the problems facing education in Japan? Since her husband's death, Mrs. Olsen has continued to support her son, the president, and serve the people of Costa Rica.

"Around 1973 [during his third term as president]," Mrs. Olsen continued, "my husband often said to me that he had two worries concerning our nation. One was poverty. The other was wealth. He feared that, if in the future Costa Rica became a wealthy country, it might come to rely on its wealth alone and become corrupt and lacking in spirit."

That is precisely the problem. Is a nation that, though wealthy, allows those with power to violate the human

rights of its people a truly peaceful nation? Is a nation in which children imitate adult society by bullying other children and even driving them to their deaths a truly peaceful nation? One child described bullying as "a miniature war." Some even say that our schools have changed from places that give children hope to places that give them despair. Where did Japan go wrong?

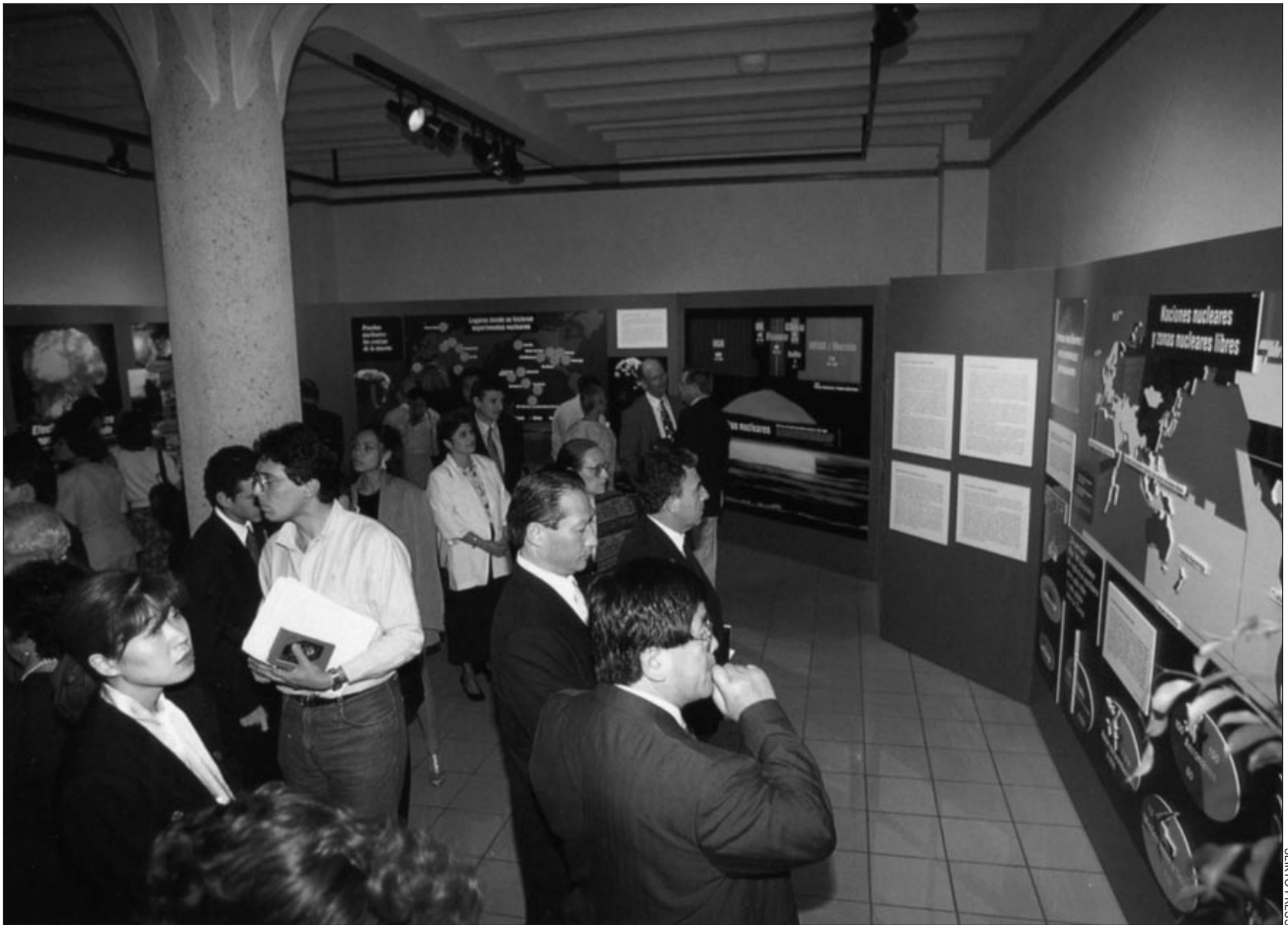
A friend of mine once related the following story. Right after the end of World War II, he was working at a repatriation center for Japanese soldiers who were abroad. Every day he was forced to tell the soldiers' families and relatives who visited him, "Your husband died in the war," "Your son died in the war." It was very painful for him.

One day, a girl of about 10 came to the center, leading her little brother by the hand. "My mother is sick and can't get out of bed, so I've come in her place. Please tell me where my father is." He asked her father's name and looked for it on the list. The little girl's father was dead, killed in Southeast Asia. He couldn't bear to look up from the papers in front of him. But the little girl was gazing directly at him, biting her lip.

"Your father..." he began, but the words caught in his throat and he couldn't go on.

"I still think about that girl and her family even now," he said to me.

Having experienced such tragedy, Japan vowed that it would become a land of peace and culture, never allowing



The exhibition "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" was held in San José in June 1996, making Costa Rica, which has abolished its military establishment, the first country in Latin America to host an exhibit on the horrors of nuclear weapons.

war to happen again. How did that Japan become this Japan, where children take their own lives because they are bullied by their classmates?

AT the opening of the "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity" exhibition, the award ceremony for a Costa Rican children's essay contest sponsored by the First Lady's Office was held. Written on the contest theme, "Building a World Without Violence," the prize-winning essays contained such statements as:

"Why can't we stop hurting people? Why do we always have problems with somebody else? Why can't we walk down the street without pushing someone out of the way...?"

"There are two kinds of abuse: physical and psychological. Physical abuse is where a child is beaten or hurt physically. Psychological abuse is where a child is caused mental suffering—for example, telling a child he is stupid, a failure or a good-for-nothing. When a child begins to understand that such things are being said

about him, he becomes a coward and is left with no courage to do anything. When he grows up and has children, he will most likely treat his children in the same way..."

"I'm a human being, I'm not an animal nor a toy.... Please, I'm a human being; I cannot endure any more violence."

"We know our parents teach us values when we are small so that we will respect the lives of others when we grow up. But I think very few people have learned these values properly, because not many put them into

Costa Rican artisan decorates the wheel of an oxcart. Since the railroads have replaced the carts, the folk art of painting the intricate designs is slowly dying out.

practice. I think only a few countries enjoy real “harmony,” and if we do our bit, perhaps we can be one of them.... Let’s strive to make a better world—one that all of us can be proud of. And let’s resolve all misunderstandings peacefully.”

An educational system that doesn’t teach people to respect others, but, rather, to push others out of their way, is a breeding ground for violence.

THE exhibition opening ceremony was held adjacent to the Children’s Museum. Through the partition, we could hear the happy voices of children playing. Laughter. Children calling their friends. The excited shouts of yet some fresh discovery. The delightful, innocent clamor of children running joyfully about swept in waves into where we were gathered.

At the podium, I declared: “The sight and sound of these youngsters, boisterous and full of vitality, are the very image of peace. It is here that we can find the power to stem the tide of atomic bombs. It is here we can find hope.” President and Mrs. Figueres nodded their assent. These happy, carefree children are surely the future that Don Pepe envisioned.

Don Pepe also eradicated the long-standing laws that discriminated against Costa Rica’s English-speaking black minority. He spoke to these citizens in



DAVE G. HOUSENICK/ORBIS

their own language, danced with them, kissed their babies and engaged them in dialogue.

When Don Pepe learned that the country’s National Symphony Orchestra was small and poor, he asked, “Why should we have tractors if we can’t have violins?” To him, the purpose of the economy was to provide for cultural pleasures.

Eventually the orchestra, staffed by many new talented youth, became one of the leading in the world and even performed at the United Nations.

Costa Rica is the only unarmed nation in Central America, a region of constant conflict. “We are all alone, alone,” mourned Don Pepe. But after his death in 1990, a



National Theater of Costa Rica.

leader of neighboring Nicaragua said: "I would like to leave the same legacy of peace to my country that Don Pepe left to Costa Rica. In the 1990s, I would like to make Central America into a region of peace and cooperation. The world is changing." The moral power of Costa Rica has earned the respect of the world and is

beginning to influence it in a positive way.

Mr. Makiguchi predicted that humanity would evolve from military competition to political competition and on to economic competition, and then finally to moral or humanitarian competition. I feel that Costa Rica, a truly advanced nation in terms of its

commitment to humanism, is setting an example for the rest of the world—an example of what we should strive toward in the twenty-first century.

Don Pepe was a visionary leader. He was a leader with a passionate love for his fellow human beings. One day, a hijacked plane carrying hostages was forced to stop for refueling at the San José Airport. When he learned of this, he sped off to the airport with a single-minded determination to free the hostages himself if need be.

He was a lion of a man. He loved the people, and he lived for their sake. He named his farm *Lucha sin Fin* (Struggle Without End), and that was his motto.

**N**OW, the lion's cub has risen up to take his father's place. With earnest sincerity, he vows to fight, to protect the people his father loved so much, to further develop the land of peace his father built.

When one has made the firm resolve to dedicate one's life to the people, short-term results are not important. That profound determination becomes a seed that will without fail bring forth brilliant blooms in one's homeland.

When I articulated this conviction, the President drew up his chin, as if confirming the commitment he holds so dear. In his office, a painting of his father in his later years looks over him, guarding him with fierce fatherly pride. □



# To Create From What I See

By Kirk Condyles,  
Long Island, New York

View over the East River from the Manhattan Bridge, New York.

**I**FIRMLY believe that my practice in faith brought me to photography. My experience as a photographer, of being primarily involved in social documentary, has broadened my life. I have become much more aware of life's ups and downs, of the greatness of people's spirit. It sometimes seems to me that many Amer-

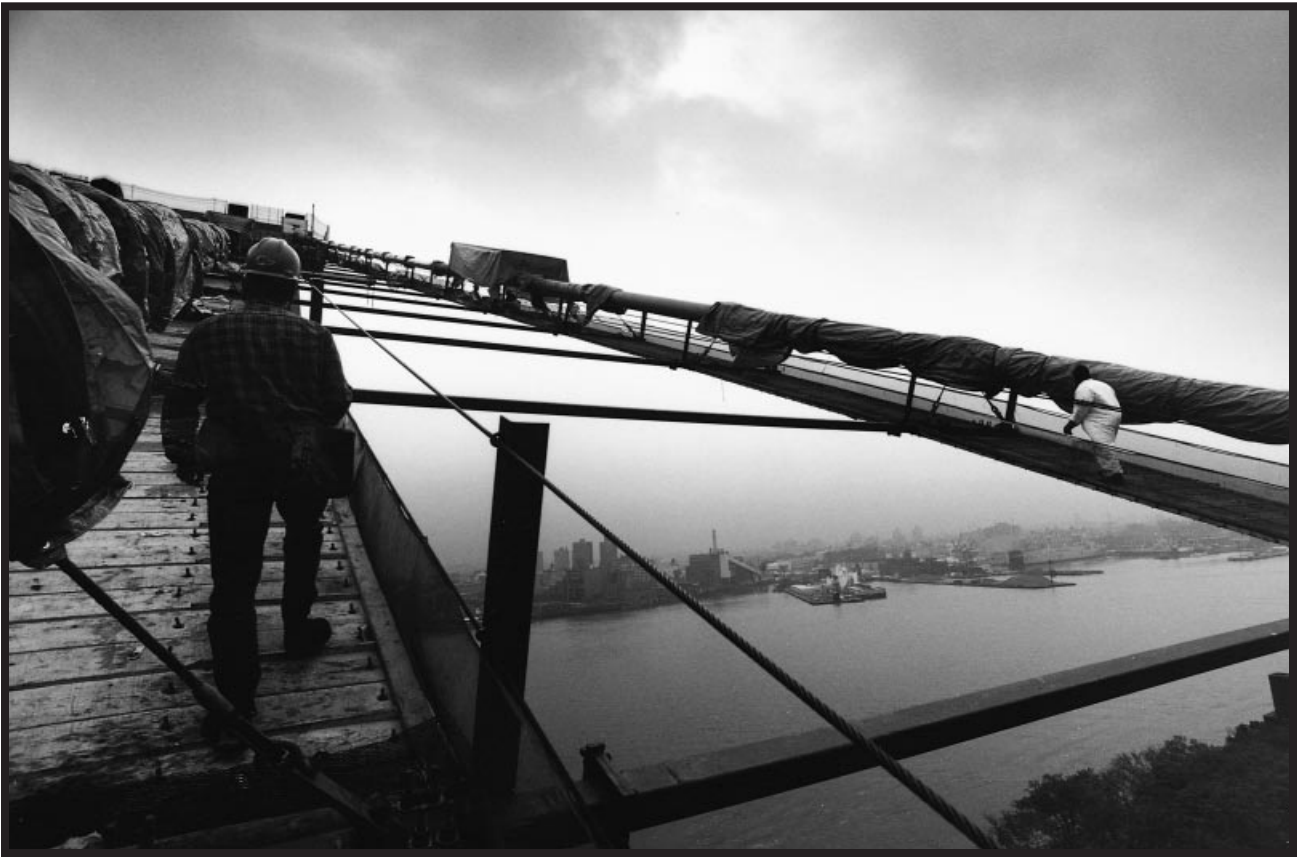
icans are spoiled. Right under our noses are people suffering. I know that even here on Long Island, children are going hungry. And others as well.

I have experienced the great joy that culture brings to people and seen what evil can do as well. I am not so simple as to believe that my work will bring some great change, but I am

bringing my bucket to the ocean. I find Edward Steichen's comments useful, saying that he preferred to think of photography not as a fine art, but rather "as the art of photography," comparing it to a manicurist or a bootblack. "That's the way I like it," he said. And I agree. Let others decide what is art.

I was saved from a foolish life by art and culture and my life has been a struggle to become an artist, to keep working freely and furiously. To be honest with myself. I have been fortunate that others have seen something in my work and used my photographs. Now I would like to move on to the next step: to let myself go free and create from what I see. To abandon what is safe and familiar takes a lot of effort.

I feel great gratitude and amazement that I have the Gohonzon. I have many struggles, desires and weaknesses. But none of them compares with the fortune I have gained. My gratitude comes naturally



Approach to Brooklyn anchorage of the Manhattan Bridge, New York.

when I chant to the Gohonzon and think of the last twenty-five years as a member of the SGI.

I first began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism the day after my nineteenth birthday. I attended my first meeting in Richmond, Virginia. It was a small meeting of about six people. I felt profoundly moved and began to chant that night. I feel especially lucky to have had as my first leader a Japanese-American lady by the name of Mrs. Costin. She was small but she was tough.

**W**E were a bunch of spaced-out hippies at first, but she raised us in our Buddhist practice, taught us about the Gohonzon and how to share this practice with others. She showed us how to challenge our prob-



Welder, Manhattan Bridge.

lems with daimoku and by reading Nichiren Daishonin's letters. She was strict yet warm and steadfast, and you knew you could depend on her. I can still hear her voice and see her in my

mind's eye. And I know that she is still there in Virginia, leading and guiding.

I had been an actor for many years and had become increasingly frustrated with the busi-



Ballerinas waiting backstage, Lawrence, New York.



Long Beach, New York.



Long Beach, New York.

ness as well as with blocked creativity. I knew that I was really finished with show business when I turned down a call to meet with Woody Allen about a new film.

I had always enjoyed writing and began to write short screenplays and filmed them in Super 8. This was my introduction to photography. Over the next three years I worked as a file clerk. I began taking photos

on my lunch hour and on weekends. I had sold my film equipment and bought a still camera. I knew very little about what I was doing, but went up to *Newsweek* magazine where I sold my first picture. Then I went back to school and studied photography. It wasn't long before I received my B.A. My thoughts went back to a time many years ago when I wrote a letter expressing my interest in

photography to *National Geographic* for my fourth-grade career day.

They sent back a form letter telling me to forget it. They used only the best and they found the people they needed, not the other way around. Being so young, I took their advice and forgot about it, believing that it was beyond me. After years of practice, I found new excitement using the camera to express myself. When I think of it now, it seems almost mysterious how this practice directed me to my happiness.

**T**HE organization, led by SGI President Ikeda, has always been the place for me to experience the real power of this teaching. Often I think I am my own worst enemy. But as long as I have continued to follow President Ikeda's guidance and participate in the kosen-rufu movement, I have experienced great protection in my life.



Rooftop sculpture garden at Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Chanting and doing gongyo every day have given me the confidence to challenge what needs to get done. Without chanting, my creativity seems to go dormant. But after reciting the sutra and chanting, I have my best ideas or have the energy to make efforts that lead to a day of progress.

I have been exceedingly fortunate to have the support of my wife and daughter, and at times their faith in me seems greater than my own. I am very close with my mother and 95-year-old grandmother.

My father and I were estranged for years, I was able to renew my relationship with him, and we grew close before his death.

There's no doubt that my life has been protected, and made far richer, thanks to my persistent efforts to practice Buddhism.

In President Ikeda's *Discussions on Youth*, I ran across this quote from Beethoven: "The true artist has no pride; unhappily he sees that Art has no bounds. Obscurely he feels how far away he is from his aim, and even while others may be admiring him, he mourns his failure to attain that end which his better genius illumines like a distant sun." I am no Beethoven, but I relate strongly to these words. I enjoy the process more than the completed work. The lust for life, the struggle, the



Sculpture garden at United Nations.

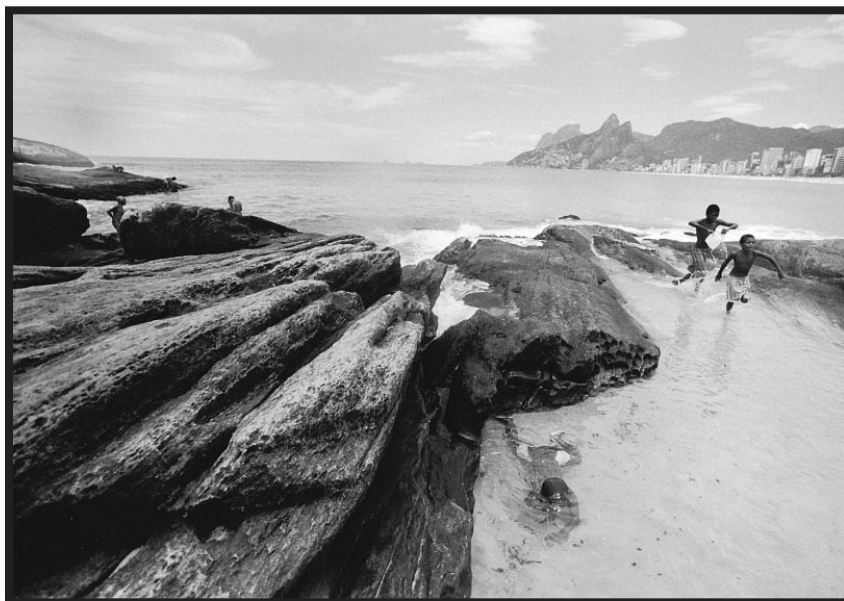


The Mangueira *favela*, Rio de Janeiro.

need to express and construct flow through me despite the suffering I experience in creation. I admire Beethoven for his great humility and his relentless efforts to create.

**M**Y first inspiration, Michelangelo, worked to the end of his life. He continued to write poems until then. In one, he refers to art as his primary interest, as his “idol and king.” But he goes on to say that it is a means to serve. In his case, it is to serve “God” rather than his pride. I wish to serve beyond conceit and pride, to contribute to society whatever talents I have to express the human experience.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have found in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism the most seamless and pure philosophy. Not a day



Harpoon Rock, Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro.

goes by that I do not think of my mortality, the vastness of the universe and our place in it. I am often oppressed by the terrible events around the world. Nichiren Daishonin’s writings

and President Ikeda’s speeches offer answers and show me that I have no other choice but to devote myself to practice—that the answer lies in me and I must dig it out. □

# Nicol Brunel: 'Painting Is Freedom for Me'

By **Stephanie Celano,**  
Staff Writer



**N**ICOL Brunel is an elegant and fascinating woman. A gifted opera singer and painter who performs primarily in France and throughout Europe, Nicol has appeared in numerous productions including *La Bohème*, *Romeo and Juliette*, *The Magic Flute*, *Manon* and *Idomeneo*. She has won first-prize awards in vocal competitions from the Nice Music Conservatory and Marseille International Opera Competition.

Beyond the drama and glamour, Nicol's life as an opera singer has been very regimented, wrought with many sacrifices. She began studying opera at 14 at the music conservatory in Nice, France. "It was very difficult," she recalls. "I studied

very hard and I had to make a lot of sacrifices, and I still do. My whole life is immersed in the study of opera. It is very intoxicating. When I learn a role, everything is so intense and dramatic. I love that, but it's difficult to develop friendships outside my art when I'm so consumed by it."

Nicol, in addition to being an opera diva, is a talented oil painter. Bursting into full bloom, Nicol's landscapes and paintings of flower gardens are impressionistic montages of color imbued with her enthusiasm. "I like to paint with oil because it's more difficult than acrylic," she explains. "I just like the process. You have to paint and wait until it dries and then paint again.

"I paint for myself because I like to create. I feel like I'm giving a present to someone or like I'm giving a cookie to a kid. I really love painting and I'm not eager to sell them. Slowly they are all selling, mostly by word of mouth."

Her brothers Gerard and Alain, both successful artists who were prodigies by the ages of 4 and 6, have been her greatest influences. "I just grew up painting and drawing and copying them. It wasn't until later that I studied fine art. It's not like it was a choice or anything. It has always been a part of my life."

Nicol confesses she's abandoned all the rules and techniques—color, shape, symmetry, negative space—that she

learned in art school. Nor does she feel the need to convey any messages, political or otherwise. "Now I paint until the painting smiles at me, until it makes me happy. When people say, "Oh, your paintings are so happy!" That's all I need. The extent of my goal in art is for people to enjoy my painting."

Painting provides a respite from Nicol's rigorous and structured role as an opera singer. "Singing opera is so precise. So exact. Painting is freedom for me. I can decide to paint with a color that doesn't even exist and nobody has anything to say about it. I visit gardens and museums and then I paint them from memory. I like to create wild, colorful gardens because it's unrestricted. I try to make something that looks beautiful to me—as if you are walking in a garden that is not well manicured and it doesn't matter."

Nicol began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism eighteen years ago in Los Angeles when she moved to the United States with jazz musician Bunny Brunel, who later became her husband. She met a woman at one of Bunny's concerts who told her about the SGI-USA. "She didn't try to force it on me, so my introduction was kind of gradual. At that time in my life, I couldn't have asked for anything more. I was in love, I was successful in my opera career. I had already won several competitions."

Nicol decided to chant and began studying and learning gongyo. "I wanted to prove it didn't work. After two months I felt really good. At the same

time I didn't want my happiness to be dependent on anything, so I stopped and that happy feeling went. I thought, "That cannot be." So I started again and never stopped since."

Last year Nicol says she experienced her most important revelations in her Buddhist practice. Due to a hemorrhage that never healed, she underwent a complicated microscopic surgery on her vocal cords. The vocal cords are perfectly aligned, so for an opera singer, this type of surgery is very serious because the slightest change in the cords is reflected in the voice.

**T**HE decision to have this operation was difficult because it could have ruined her singing voice and thus her career. "If the doctor removed too much during the operation, it would create a whisper in my voice or I could sound hoarse. I was totally panicked because all my tools were gone. For five months I literally couldn't talk, sing or chant. I had to chant and do gongyo in my head and communicate by writing everything down on pads of paper."

She was referred to the top voice surgeon in Los Angeles, but he wouldn't perform the operation himself; he assigned her to one of his assistants. She became so despondent that she cried for two days. "I was feeling sorry for myself. I felt like a victim. I was shattered. My behavior was contrary to everything that I learned through all my years of Buddhist practice. Then I realized that it was slanderous for him to treat me like he did and for me to be so influ-

enced. I also realized that I needed to generate within me the strength and confidence I knew I gained with the practice. And that if I could not chant or do gongyo aloud at the time, it didn't matter because this practice is inside of me. It was a big awakening for me."

In *Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Nicol found encouragement from the following passage:

To put ourselves down is to denigrate the world of Buddhahood in our lives. It is tantamount to slandering the Gohonzon. The same is true of setting your mind that absolutely nothing can be done about a particular problem. (p. 92)

In the aftermath, Nicol had to trust all those years of practice. The assistant surgeon turned out to be the most compassionate person for the job. "When the surgeon walked in the room, I felt like I knew him. He was like a friend. Of course, I had never met him. The surgery was unbelievable."

Two months later Nicol was singing and performing—high Cs and all. At the follow-up visit, the doctor thanked her for allowing him to perform the surgery.

"Deep down in my heart, I feel how profound this practice is. When I sing Puccini, my heart smiles. I am totally content and I know that I am creating value." This passion for creating, whether through her music or oil painting is inextricably linked to Nicol's desire to bring happiness to others. □



(Top left) *Huntington les pensées*, 1989, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in.

(Top right) *Untitled*, 1998, oil on canvas, 18 x 18 in.

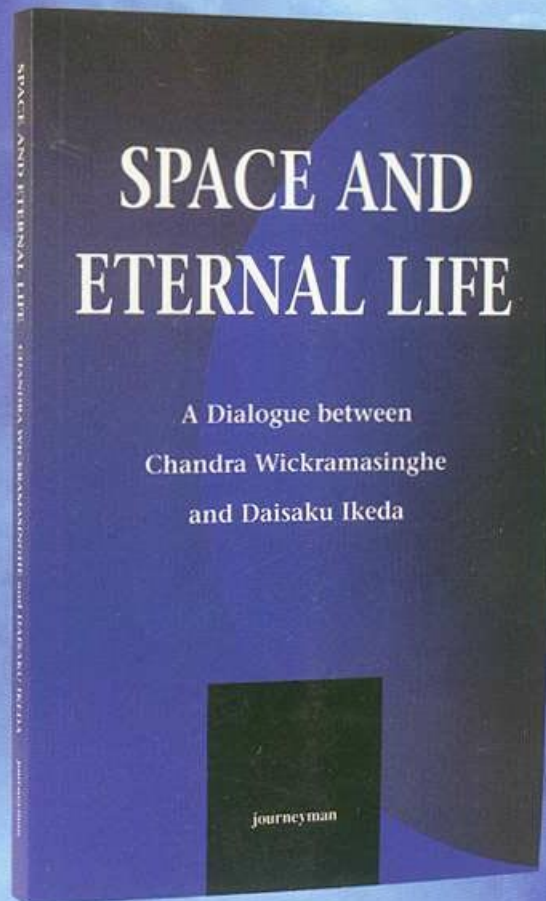


(Center left) *Bucks Country*, 1993, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in.

(Above) *Les Coquelicots*, 1989, oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in.

(Lower left) *Les Coquelicots*, 1991, oil on canvas, 18 x 36 in.

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## CHILE CULTURE CENTER

**T**HE SGI Chile Culture Center is located in Las Condes, Santiago, and was opened in December 1987. The Chile Culture Center consists of two main buildings, the Andes Community Center and the Heiwa (peace) Community Center, joined by an expansive garden.

President Ikeda visited Chile for the first time in February 1993. During his stay, he met with Chilean President Patricio Aylwin and was designated as an "Illustrious Visitor" to the Chilean capital, an honor given to only a few visiting international figures per year by the mayor of Santiago, Jaime Ravinet de la Fuente.

Chile marked the 50th country that President Ikeda visited since embarking on his first overseas trip in 1960. In celebration, the first SGICH General Meeting was held in the main prayer room. Afterwards, the members enjoyed a memorable garden party, highlighted by dancing and singing of favorite local folk songs.



Youth gather at Santa Lucia Hill in Santiago.