

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA
41 THE TRANSMISSION TO THE BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH: A
SOLEMN CEREMONY OF KOSEN-RUFU

The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra—A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century

This is the forty-first 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 June 1998 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

Nichiren Daishonin placed particular importance on the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The focus of this chapter is a ceremony where the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are entrusted with the mission to spread the essence of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. Participants this time explore the profound significance of this ceremony from the standpoint of the Buddhist understanding of the nature of life.

41 The Transmission to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth: A Solemn Ceremony of Kosen-rufu

As the light of the sun and moon
can banish all obscurity and gloom,
so this person as he passes through the world
can wipe out the darkness of living beings,
causing immeasurable numbers of bodhisattvas
in the end to dwell in the single vehicle.
Therefore a person of wisdom,
hearing how keen are the benefits to be gained,
after I have passed into extinction
should accept and uphold this sutra.
Such a person assuredly and without doubt
will attain the Buddha way. (LS21, 276)¹

FROM THE RECORD OF THE ORALLY TRANSMITTED TEACHINGS

Myoho-enge-kyo is not the Mystic Law of Shakyamuni, because when the events in this chapter take place, the essence of the sutra has already been transmitted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices [Jpn Jogyo]. Generally speaking, this entrustment of Myoho-enge-kyo to Bodhisattva Superior Practices begins in the “Emergence of the Treasure Tower” [eleventh] chapter, becomes apparent with the “Life Span” [sixteenth] chapter, and comes to an end with the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” and “Entrustment” [twenty-second] chapters. “Thus Come One” refers to the Thus Come One explained in the “Life Span” chapter, and “supernatural powers” to the ten supernatural powers. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 770)

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.25 LB9909p25

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KATSUJI SAITO: This time we at last begin discussing the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This is the climax of the entire sutra. Let’s have a great discussion!

DAISAKU IKEDA: Nichiren Daishonin deemed “Supernatural Powers” one of the sutra’s most important chapters, along with the “Emerging from the Earth” (fifteenth) and the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapters. That’s because it describes the ceremony in which Shakyamuni entrusts the Bodhisattvas of the Earth with achieving kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law.

SAITO: Kosen-rufu is indeed a matter of the greatest importance.

IKEDA: For starters, let’s clarify just what the Lotus Sutra is. It is Shakyamuni’s will and testament. It embodies the teaching he most wanted to leave to posterity.

So what was Shakyamuni’s most ardent prayer? It was for all people to become happy. He says, “Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”² He is basically imploring us: “Strive to help all people, all living beings, become happy, just as a mother will put her life on the line to protect her only child!” This is what it means to stand up for kosen-rufu.

Shakyamuni continues:

May all beings be happy! . . . Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This they say is the noblest living here.³

In our practice of gongyo each morning and evening, we constantly pray for the happiness of all people. We pray for the happiness of all living beings. This is a truly lofty state of life.

Not only do we offer prayer; we also take action to actualize these prayers. That is, we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu. What a noble way to live!

TAKANORI ENDO: I believe that through my practice to the Gohonzon and participation in SGI activities, I have gradually come to such a state of life, even if only in some small measure. The fact that there are literally millions of people engaged in this process is wondrous; it is truly awe-inspiring.

IKEDA: Only Bodhisattvas of the Earth can carry out this practice of widely spreading the Law. It is in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter that Shakyamuni entrusts the Bodhisattvas of the Earth with achieving kosen-rufu in the Latter Day.

SAITO: This is the ceremony of transmission.

HARUO SUDA: *Transmission* refers to the Buddha entrusting his disciples with the teaching and instructing them to spread it widely.

IKEDA: Without *transmission*, Buddhism would die out with the mentor’s generation. No matter how great the teaching, it would have no lasting impact. It could not lead people to happiness.

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Even if a teaching encourages compassion toward all living beings, if it cannot actually help those who are suffering, then it is nothing more than theory. Buddhism expounds the Law, and it leads the people to happiness.

After his release from prison, Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai, composed the following poem while gazing up at the starry sky, reminiscing about his mentor:

I clutch in my hand the wish-granting jewel.
My heart cries out, "With this, I will save everyone!"
My mentor smiles in peace.

Carrying on the spirit of his mentor—first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who had died in prison—Mr. Toda stood up alone for *kosen-rufu*. The passing of the baton from President Makiguchi to Mr. Toda occurred while they were in prison. The last time they saw each other was in September 1943 at the Metropolitan Police Department, when Mr. Makiguchi was being taken off to the Tokyo Prison in Sugamo. Given the circumstances, most likely they could not speak freely to each other.

President Toda recalled: "All I could say was 'Sensei, please take care of yourself.' You nodded without uttering a word. But from the way you carried yourself and from the look in your eyes, I sensed your boundless mercy and courage."⁴

SAITO: This is a solemn and noble exchange between mentor and disciple. The ceremony on March 16, 1958, where Mr. Toda entrusted you with his vision, President Ikeda, also occurred in the midst of a heroic struggle against the devilish nature of power. That was during the turmoil surrounding the so-called Coal Miners⁵ Incident and the Osaka Incident.⁶

SUDA: This certainly shows the solemn unity of mentor and disciple as they faced a life-or-death struggle.

IKEDA: That is, of course, on a different level from the ceremony of transmission in the "Supernatural Powers" chapter. Still, it can be said that without the mentor-disciple relationship, as exemplified in the history of the Soka Gakkai, Buddhism simply would not exist.

SAITO: Yes. Shakyamuni awakened to the Mystic Law and, perceiving the life force of the universe in the depths of his being, he experienced the greatest of all joys. The problem was how he could communicate the Law to humankind. He understood it himself and could share his insight with others while he was alive, but what would happen after his passing? This seems to be the great theme of Buddhism.

Buddhism is through and through a religion for human beings. It does not postulate the existence of a transcendent deity existing apart from people or of a creative deity that single-handedly generated the universe. Without departing from the human being, Buddhism continuously urges people: "Awaken to your own true nature!"

Things like the will of a god never become an issue; everything depends on the will of the individual. Consequently, without the transmission from mentor to disciple, Buddhism would lose its vitality. That's why transmission is so important.

ENDO: Without mentor and disciple, the Law would perish.

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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IKEDA: That's true, but while we may speak of the Law "perishing," the Law itself is eternal. It is actually when there is no one who correctly inherits the teaching that the Law perishes.

SAITO: That certainly describes the state of affairs in the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood today.

SUDA: The mentor–disciple relationship has ceased to exist in the priesthood. As a result, it has lost touch with Buddhism. Even so, it continues to arrogantly pose as a religious authority and is therefore acting as a devilish function, a force that aims to destroy the Law.

IKEDA: I imagine that when Shakyamuni thought about the people of future generations, he worried about what he could do to help them. That is why in the end he taught his disciples to uphold and take as their mentor the eternal Mystic Law that had enabled him to become a Buddha. We discussed this in connection with the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true" (in the 27th installment of this series, March 1998, *Living Buddhism*).

Shakyamuni probably made this statement from time to time during his later years, which was most likely incorporated into the Lotus Sutra.

ENDO: Shakyamuni's mentor is the eternal Mystic Law that is itself the eternal true Buddha. In modern terms, we sometimes refer to this as the "universal life."

Anyone who practices with this eternal Law as his or her mentor can become a Buddha just as Shakyamuni did. It is the "great beneficial medicine" that enables all living beings to become happy. "Since I am teaching you this, you should take this great beneficial medicine and share it with others"—this is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and the spirit of the "Life Span" chapter.

IKEDA: The focus is solely on the period after Shakyamuni's passing. It is on the future, and on future kosen-rufu. To lose sight of this one point is to fail to grasp the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

SAITO: Transmission is the central theme of not only the "Supernatural Powers" chapter but of the Lotus Sutra in its entirety. This is particularly evident in the description of the Ceremony in the Air. The appearance of an enormous tower in the "Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (eleventh) chapter, the portrayal of countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth dancing forth from within the earth in the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter, and the discussion of the eternal Buddha in the "Life Span" chapter are all for the sake of transmission.

SUDA: In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin says, "This transmission of Myoho-renge-kyo to Bodhisattva Superior Practices begins in the 'Treasure Tower' chapter, becomes apparent with the 'Life Span' chapter, and comes to an end with the 'Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One' and 'Entrustment' chapters" (GZ, 770). Unless we understand the meaning of transmission, the Ceremony in the Air, with all of its extraordinary circumstances, becomes little more than a fairy tale.

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Buddhas Who Carry Out the Practice of Bodhisattvas

ENDO: Let's consider the outline of the "Supernatural Powers" chapter. As the title "Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One" suggests, this chapter reveals the Buddha's ten great supernatural or mystic powers, which are so awesome as to move the universe.

It begins with the Bodhisattvas of the Earth making a vow. They pledge to preach the Lotus Sutra far and wide in this *saha* world after Shakyamuni has passed into extinction, as well as in lands where other Buddhas have ceased to exist.

IKEDA: They promise to widely propagate the teachings of all Buddhas after they have passed away. In this we find the great and mystic significance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

To start from the conclusion: In any land, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth shoulder the task of widely propagating the Law from the Buddha to all people. Why is that? It's because while the Bodhisattvas of the Earth have the same state of life as the Buddha, their conduct is thoroughly that of bodhisattvas. They could therefore be described as "bodhisattva-Buddhas."

If the life-state of the bodhisattva is not one with that of the Buddha, he or she cannot correctly propagate the Law. At the same time, in a defiled age, unless bodhisattvas go out into the world and assimilate themselves to society, *kosen-rufu* cannot be achieved. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are endowed with these qualities. That's probably why at the close of the "Supernatural Powers" chapter they are described as passing "through the world." It is in the world and among the people that they carry out their practice.

SUDA: The passage reads:

As the light of the sun and moon
can banish all obscurity and gloom,
so this person as he passes through the world
can wipe out the darkness of living beings,
causing immeasurable numbers of bodhisattvas
in the end to dwell in the single vehicle.
Therefore a person of wisdom,
hearing how keen are the benefits to be gained,
after I have passed into extinction
should accept and uphold this sutra.
Such a person assuredly and without doubt
will attain the Buddha way. (LS21, 276)

It describes the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as taking action in the world, illuminating all beings and removing the gloom of suffering from their lives, just as the light of the sun and moon banishes darkness. It also says that they inspire countless bodhisattvas and ultimately enable them to become Buddhas. In other words, they make *kosen-rufu* a reality.

IKEDA: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are like so many suns. And, as indicated by the description "like the lotus flower in the water" (LS15, 222), they dwell in society, but are

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

not sullied by its evils.

SAITO: They are suns and lotus flowers. From this we see the profound meaning that attaches to the Daishonin's name *Nichiren*, which literally means "Sun Lotus."

IKEDA: Research has shown that the sun and the white lotus are consistently used as symbols of the Buddha in the Lotus Sutra.

ENDO: In a study of the Sanskrit text of the sutra, the Indologist scholar Shuntaro Matsuyama argues that from the "Treasure Tower" chapter on, Shakyamuni is identified with the "white lotus as the embodiment of the true Law," and also with the "light of the sun."

SAITO: The Daishonin says:

The Lotus Sutra is the sun and the moon and the lotus flower. Therefore, it is called *Myoho-renge-kyo* (the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Mystic Law). Nichiren is also like the sun and the moon, and also like the lotus flower. (MW-4, 87)

IKEDA: This is very profound.

SUDA: Continuing with the summary of the chapter, in response to the vows of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, Shakyamuni uses his supernatural powers to reveal various mystic phenomena to Bodhisattva Monjushiri and countless other bodhisattvas. These are termed the "ten supernatural powers."

The Ten Supernatural Powers: Symbols of Kosen-rufu

IKEDA: There might seem to be something fantastic about this display of supernatural powers. But we should bear in mind that they represent functions of life.

SUDA: Yes. For the first of these, it says that the Buddha "extended his long broad tongue upward till it reached the Brahma heaven" (LS21, 273). In ancient India, people would stick out their tongues in a gesture to testify to the truth of their words. By extending his tongue, Shakyamuni is indicating that the Lotus Sutra is entirely free of falsehood.

IKEDA: The Daishonin says that the tongue being broad indicates that the Mystic Law can save all beings in the Ten Worlds, and the tongue being long indicates that the Law has existed from time without beginning (GZ, 770).

SAITO: In regard to the second supernatural power, the sutra says:

From all his pores he [Shakyamuni] emitted immeasurable, countless beams of light that illuminated all the worlds in the ten directions.

The other Buddhas . . . did likewise, extending their long broad tongues and emitting immeasurable beams of light. (LS21, 273)

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

IKEDA: The universe is completely illuminated. It is a magnificent image.

This is the world of kosen-rufu. We shine, too. When we truly burn with a spirit of faith, our entire life radiates—with character, wisdom and hope. And we can illuminate the lives of others.

ENDO: Next, it says that Shakyamuni and the other Buddhas drew their tongues together and, exhibiting the third and fourth supernatural powers, “coughed in unison, and all together snapped their fingers” (LS21, 273). According to Indian custom, people would also snap their fingers to give evidence of the truth of their words.

SUDA: These sounds reverberate throughout the universe. As for the fifth power, it says, “The sounds made by these two actions filled all the Buddha worlds in the ten directions, and the earth in all of them quaked and trembled in six different ways” (LS21, 273).

IKEDA: The universe trembles with joy. In other words, even the land attains Buddhahood. This is the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life; it symbolizes the great drama of kosen-rufu.

SAITO: After the land trembled with joy, the sixth supernatural power manifests itself:

The living beings in their midst . . . all saw in this saha world the immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas seated on lion seats . . . and also saw Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Thus Come One seated together on a lion seat in the treasure tower. Moreover, they saw immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and the four kinds of believers who reverently surrounded Shakyamuni Buddha.

When they had seen these things, they were all filled with great joy, having gained what they had never had before. (LS21, 273)

IKEDA: The multitude of Buddhas, sitting upon *lion* thrones, stretch out as far as the eye can see. The term lion is written with two Chinese characters; the first stands for *mentor* and the second for *disciple*. This indicates that when mentor and disciple are one, any realm can be transformed into a Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.

SUDA: The original meaning of the term used for the place the high priest sits is lion’s chair, suggesting that it is the seat of a practitioner who upholds the path of the oneness of mentor and disciple. One who betrays one’s predecessors has no right to occupy this chair.

SAITO: The worlds in the ten directions could be said to refer to the realms where all beings of the Ten Worlds dwell. The seventh supernatural power is displayed when, upon seeing this, these “heavenly beings in the midst of the sky cried out with loud voice” (LS21, 273).

The heavenly beings declare:

There is a land named *saha*, and in it a Buddha named Shakyamuni. Now for the sake of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas he is preaching a sutra of the Great Vehicle called

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas. You must respond with joy from the depths of your heart, and also offer obeisance and alms to Shakyamuni Buddha! (LS21, 273–74)

ENDO: The eighth supernatural power then takes place in response to these voices. The sutra says: “The various living beings . . . pressed their palms together, faced the *saha* world, and spoke these words: ‘Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha! Hail, Shakyamuni Buddha!’” (LS21, 274).

IKEDA: The Daishonin notes that “Shakyamuni Buddha” here represents the spirit of endurance. This expresses a wonderful doctrine of life.

To live in the *saha* world requires tremendous forbearance; it is a place where one must steadfastly persevere. It is a land inhabited with people of poor capacity, people who cannot accept something true at face value. Instead, they are inclined to persecute those who stand up for justice.

SUDA: Japan is a case in point.

IKEDA: Those who cast aside self-interest and devote themselves to helping others become happy are slandered and abused. We live in a truly befuddled world.

To withstand such persecution and contempt and still persist in spreading the Mystic Law calls for a spirit of endurance. Even if we should be persecuted time and again, we need to continue struggling with dauntless resolve, repeatedly pushing back the devilish forces. Nichiren Daishonin teaches that doing so is itself the world of Buddhahood and the life state of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The living beings in the worlds in the ten directions revere this world of Buddhahood. That is, they hold in high esteem the spirit of thorough dedication to kosen-rufu. Without doubt, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the universe applaud us who are now fighting for kosen-rufu.

SUDA: Up until the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, the *saha* world was viewed as an undesirable place filled with people of extreme evil who could only be led to Buddhism with great difficulty. But the Lotus Sutra changed things entirely.

As for the ninth supernatural power, it says:

Then they [the living beings in the worlds in the ten directions] took different kinds of flowers, incense, necklaces, banners and canopies, as well as the ornaments, rare jewels and other wonderful articles that adorned their persons, and all together scattered them far off in the direction of the *saha* world. The objects thus scattered poured in from the ten directions like clouds gathering together. Then they changed into a jeweled curtain that completely covered the area where the Buddhas were. (LS21, 274)

And in regard to the tenth power, it says: “At that time the worlds in the ten directions were opened up so that there was unobstructed passage from one to the other and they were like a single Buddha land” (LS21, 274).

ENDO: It was already explained in the “Life Span” chapter that the *saha* world itself has been the True Land of Shakyamuni since the remote past. In this scene, the *saha* world

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

actually becomes the Land of Tranquil Light.

Those Who Practice With a Spirit of Endurance Are Buddhas

IKEDA: The Buddha goes to the place where people are suffering the most—to the *saha* world. A real Buddha shares everyone’s sufferings. Anything short of this is not the genuine article.

Is a priest automatically respectable? No, definitely not. Does being a politician or a celebrity make someone great? Certainly not. Nor does having a high position in our organization. Commendable are those who exert themselves alongside the people facing the most hardship.

Members on the forefront of the women’s division who pray for the happiness of all and work tirelessly to spread the Daishonin’s teaching, sometimes even over the chiding and opposition of their husbands and the bad-mouthing of others, are truly great. That spirit to endure is what we mean when we say “Buddha.”

Referring to the principle that the *saha* world itself is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, President Toda once commented, “Buddhism at this point has refuted everything it had expounded.” This is because, contrary to what had previously been taught, this concept reveals that the ideal is not to eventually reach some distant pure land, but to eternally strive for peace and human happiness while living in this world, which is filled with suffering. The Buddha exists nowhere apart from such a spirit of endurance.

That the *saha* world is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light is stating this revelation from the standpoint of the environment. From the standpoint of the person, it implies that the Buddha is in reality a “bodhisattva-Buddha.” Shakyamuni was a bodhisattva and at the same time a Buddha.

The idea of the bodhisattva is said to originally refer to the way of life that Shakyamuni followed while he was striving for enlightenment. But it is not the case that Shakyamuni was a bodhisattva only during his years of practice. Even after he had attained the Way, Shakyamuni continued to carry out the actions of a bodhisattva to spread the great Law to which he had awakened. While boundlessly rejoicing in the awareness of the eternity of life that filled his being, he took action to spread that Law to others. This is what is meant by a “bodhisattva-Buddha.”

That’s why Mr. Toda said that this revelation turned Buddhism on its head. The essential point is that even after attaining enlightenment, Shakyamuni continued to exist as a human being. The Lotus Sutra thus appeals: “Restore your humanity!”

The True Buddha Is a Common Mortal

SAITO: It occurs to me that the notion that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time during his present lifetime in India, which is refuted in the “Life Span” chapter, must contain extremely dangerous implications. It suggests that Shakyamuni was an ordinary person “before” and a Buddha “afterwards,” making it difficult to recognize him *as a human being*.

In fact, it is because he earnestly sought the correct path as *a human being* that he awakened to the world of Buddhahood within his own life. And because he became enlightened in this fashion, he followed the supreme way of life *as a human being*. From start to finish, Shakyamuni was human.

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

ENDO: Such a view could easily cause people to think that attaining enlightenment made Shakyamuni some kind of special or superhuman being. While this might not have been a problem for those alive during Shakyamuni's lifetime who could see his humanity for themselves, I imagine that for people after his passing, the temptation to see him as other-worldly would have been very strong.

SUDA: This leads to Shakyamuni's deification, and the tendency for people to think of themselves as unworthy. Though it may sound like humility, self-deprecation is actually an expression of arrogance, for it suggests that one pretends to know the full potential of human life, while in fact being ignorant of it. It equates to a lack of faith in one's humanity.

IKEDA: To think of oneself as just common is indeed a great mistake. The fresh breeze of the Lotus Sutra dispels such dark clouds of illusion. It does not discriminate against the ordinary person, but says that all people are themselves Buddhas, that the human being is supremely worthy of respect. Nichiren Daishonin gives ultimate expression to this spirit of the Lotus Sutra when he says:

The common mortal is the entity of the three properties, or the true Buddha. The Buddha is the function of the three properties, or a provisional Buddha. Shakyamuni is thought to have possessed the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent for the sake of us common mortals, but on the contrary, it is the common mortal who endowed him with the three virtues. . . . Here the "true Buddha" is the common mortal, whereas "provisional Buddhas" means the Buddha. (MW-1, 90–91)

These words certainly overturn all the assumptions of Buddhism up to that point. The common mortal is the true Buddha, the Daishonin says, and the Buddha is a provisional Buddha, a projected image of the common mortal. He is asserting that the existence of the common mortal is not subordinate to that of the Buddha, but, in fact, the existence of the Buddha is predicated on that of the common mortal.

This is a declaration of extreme significance not only in the history of Buddhism, but in the history of all religion. Religions in general place absolute beings such as gods and Buddhas "above" and human beings "below." The Daishonin states unequivocally, however, that gods and Buddhas exist because of people, and that they are merely means to enable people to become happy. This is the mammoth declaration of a religion that exists for human beings.

History has witnessed countless instances of religions whose original intent was to bring happiness to the people, becoming slaves to authority. The philosophical roots of such transformation lie in the assumption that gods and Buddhas are superior human beings.

SUDA: I suspect the notion that clergy are above other people has the same origin. People are taken in by the illusion that since gods and Buddhas are superior to people, then clergy, who are supposed to be intermediaries between people and those higher beings, must also be better than ordinary believers.

SAITO: In that sense, the idea that priests have an intrinsically higher standing than lay

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

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people is fundamentally alien to the Daishonin's Buddhism.

IKEDA: That is true, but it's important to remember that thought and philosophy depend on people. If the mentor–disciple spirit should be forgotten, then even Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism could be used to suppress people, instead of existing for their benefit. This is an issue we have become very familiar with.

In any event, I think we can say without a doubt that in proclaiming that the once exalted Buddha is only provisional, the Daishonin has made a landmark declaration in all religious history. What enables him to say this? This is actually the key point of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter.

This may be jumping ahead, but the transmission from Shakyamuni to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is a ceremony signifying that the common mortal is a true Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin explains all teachings, even those like the ten supernatural powers that seem to have little to do with regular people, in terms of human life. From the standpoint of the Buddhist philosophy of life, “Thus Come One” in the chapter's title refers to the life of the universe and therefore indicates the lives of all beings. The Daishonin says, “‘Thus Come One’ refers to all living beings, as has already been explained in the earlier ‘Life Span’ chapter” (GZ, 770). And “supernatural powers” means the power of the spirit or of life. In particular, it refers to the great life force of Buddhahood. The life force of the universe that is inherent in the lives of all living beings is called the “supernatural powers of the Thus Come One.” The Bodhisattvas of the Earth carry out the task of kosen-rufu manifesting this great life force.

Kosen-rufu means awakening all people to the supreme life force of the “supernatural powers of the Thus Come One.” In other words, it means expanding the ranks of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and perpetuating the chain reaction of human revolution, the momentous movement of human happiness. The teaching of the ten supernatural powers is a prophetic revelation of this aspect of kosen-rufu.

SAITO: Certainly, the description at the end of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter of the worlds in the ten directions all becoming one and of all beings devoting themselves to the Buddha is a vision of kosen-rufu.

SUDA: “Great events do not have small omens” (MW-5, 161), the Daishonin says. Nowhere else do we find mention of such “omens” occurring in all worlds in the ten directions.

ENDO: The Daishonin clearly indicates this when he says, “The great omens of the Jinriki [‘Supernatural Powers’] chapter foretold that the essence of the Lotus Sutra would spread after the Buddha's death when the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law had passed and the Latter Day of the Law had begun” (MW-4, 149).

IKEDA: We are now making this a reality. It's remarkable—truly mystic. We are leading lives of great excitement.

In general, people associate supernatural powers with psychic or superhuman abilities. But that is not what it means in this context. The Daishonin admonishes, “One should judge the validity of a teaching by its doctrine, not by the superlative perception or occult powers [of its practitioners]” (GZ, 16). To make psychic powers or the like the standard is

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.25 LB9909p25

Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

to set people with extraordinary abilities apart from regular human beings. This is dangerous.

We must also keep in mind that possessing superhuman powers is no guarantee of happiness. As a matter of fact, those who rely on special ability may neglect their own growth as human beings and actually become miserable as a result.

ENDO: I seem to recall that some years ago there was a lot of interest in people who could bend spoons using psychokinetic powers. My friend, after seeing a number of demonstrations on television, remarked: “Just what on earth is it good for? I could see that it might have some value if they could return the spoon to its original shape!”

SUDA: It is a human tendency to forget the purpose behind our actions.

IKEDA: In any undertaking, we should ask, “Why am I doing this?” The most important reason, of course, is happiness. Such things as superhuman abilities that do nothing to promote human happiness ultimately have no significance.

The Daishonin says, “Apart from the attainment of Buddhahood, there are no ‘secrets’ and no ‘supernatural powers’” (GZ, 753). Attaining Buddhahood, achieving a state of life of absolute and eternal happiness, is the Buddha’s supernatural power. For this is itself the supreme power according with the law of life.

SAITO: In the “Supernatural Powers” chapter, following the description of the ten supernatural powers, there is at last the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Carl Jung: Do Not Become a “Slave” of the State

IKEDA: Let’s take up the profound meaning of this transmission next time. If we were to try to cover the entire chapter all at once, it might be too much for our readers to digest.

The main point of the various supernatural powers that we have discussed this time is to alert all people to the dignity of their lives. The “Supernatural Powers” chapter cries out to people in a dynamic voice that reverberates throughout the universe. It is an appeal for *kosen-rufu*. It calls for the realization of the compassionate prayer of Shakyamuni, the person, for all beings to become happy.

Japan today is facing a dangerous situation where many feel there is nothing in which to believe. A recent survey found that 72.2 percent of Japan’s citizens feel that things are getting worse. That’s nearly three out of four people; it’s a record high for negative sentiment.

SAITO: That survey was conducted by the prime minister’s office. The number of respondents who feel things are improving was a record low (12.6%).

IKEDA: On the global scale, too, there is a gaping void in people’s hearts, and it seems that such spiritual desolation is only becoming more widespread. A hundred years ago, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) declared that “God is dead.” This century has seen other icons occupy the vacant seat of a god in which people have lost faith.

ENDO: One of these would be worship of the state, which we discussed in connection with the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter.

SUDA: Faith in science would be another candidate. Worship of wealth is also a kind of faith. And we can plainly see the result of the Japanese belief that money brings happiness or that the path to happiness lies in economic abundance.

SAITO: An expert notes that during the chaotic postwar era, money in Japan was seen as a means to ensure a peaceful and secure existence. In other words, people believed that only money could bring peace and security. As a result, he argues, people have developed an inordinately strong attachment to money, which has thus, in a sense, taken on the role of a religion.

IKEDA: With the “death of God” has come the “death of the human being.” This is perhaps the reality of the twentieth century. Not only have we seen the death of spirituality, but worship of the state has brought with it unprecedented cases of ‘megadeath.’ The twentieth century has been the most murderous century ever.

We must overturn this situation and make the next century an age in which the human being is highly revered. That is the purpose of the kosen-rufu movement. We need to call out to all people to open up the great life force of the “supernatural powers of the Thus Come One” within them. We mustn’t allow the iniquity of nationalism to fill the spiritual void in people’s hearts today.

ENDO: It is said that the sudden rise of Nazi Germany was preceded by a widespread nihilistic sentiment.

IKEDA: The famous Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875–1961), in an essay titled “The Undiscovered Self,” writes: “If the individual . . . should feel that his life has lost its meaning . . . then he is already on the road to State slavery.”⁷ That’s because someone who feels this way lacks the strength to resist the enormous power of nationalism. And once we fail to oppose evil, we are on our way to becoming its slave.

Jung says that for authoritarians who want to fill people with a sense of reverence for the state, the greatest source of trouble is religion that does not compromise with the state.⁸ Therefore, he says, the state will “try to cut the ground from under [such] religion.”⁹

Because religions that do not kowtow to authority teach “another authority opposed to that of the ‘world,’”¹⁰ they are a thorn in the sides of those who would turn people into slaves of the state.

Jung declares without reservation: “The dictator State . . . along with the individual . . . swallows up his religious forces. The State takes the place of God.”¹¹

SUDA: To say that a state “takes the place of God” certainly sounds like worship of the state.

ENDO: The frightening thing is that many people fail to realize that they have been taken in by nationalism. While remaining apathetic, they are herded down this slippery path unawares. And when they finally understand what has happened, it is already too late. This is the fundamental problem.

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.25 LB9909p25

Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

IKEDA: Jung's conclusion is that the sole power to resist the devilish nature of nationalism lies in individual awareness of the dignity of human life, in the sense that "man is a microcosm, a reflection of the great cosmos in miniature."¹²

SAITO: That is in complete agreement with the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra.

IKEDA: By contrast, Jung lamented that in the modern age, "the insignificance of the individual is rubbed into him so thoroughly that he loses all hope of making himself heard."¹³

SUDA: Certainly, there is a spreading sense of helplessness; people feel that nothing they can do will amount to anything. People are also growing isolated from one another, having become uninterested in sharing their thoughts and feelings. There is a lack of solidarity.

ENDO: Consequently, people withdraw and grow silent. But this is just what those in power want. This confirms to me how important our movement is.

Tagore: A Life "Gushing" with Joy

IKEDA: While the "Supernatural Power" chapter describes omens of kosen-rufu on a universal scale, human revolution is kosen-rufu in the microcosm of the individual. It means to bring forth great vitality, like the image of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who emerge bursting through the ground.

While on a different level from the sutras, I would like to cite a few famous remarks by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). When he was around twenty, Tagore one morning had a remarkable experience. Looking out from the veranda, he writes, "All of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side"¹⁴

He describes this experience in the famous poem "The Waterfall Awakens":

Oh, why—I myself do not know—
has my life now awakened from its slumber
after the course of many years?

My life has now awakened from its slumber.
There is much water; the waves rise and swell.
The longing of life, the passion of life—
I could not remain closed and hold it back.
The mountain, rumbling, causes the earth to shake
and tremble.
Rocks, rumbling, crash down.
Foaming waves, roaring, swell
and roar with fury.¹⁵

ENDO: He says that the world shakes and sways—this is reminiscent of the "Supernatural

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.25 LB9909p25

Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

Powers” chapter.

IKEDA: He is describing the powerful quaking of life. While the “Supernatural Powers” chapter certainly speaks of the earth trembling with boundless joy, Tagore here is probably describing a fitful struggle to awaken to and bring out his greater self.

But toward the end of the poem, welling with joy, he sings:

Speaking the thoughts of my heart,
singing the melody of my heart,
the more generously I give of my life, the more it
surges forth.
It is inexhaustible.
I have many words to speak, many songs to sing.
My life overflows: I have an abundance of joy, an
abundance of dreams.
Life overflows and in ecstasy.
What can compare with such joy?
Such beauty?¹⁶

SAITO: He literally depicts the joy of one who has awakened to the greater self. I sense in this the spirit of India that resonates through the Lotus Sutra.

IKEDA: Everyone has the ability to achieve an awakening even more profound than Tagore. The substance of such an awakening—of the supernatural powers of the Thus Come One—is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

When we chant daimoku to the Gohonzon each morning and evening, we cause a magnificent drama like that described in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter to arise in the microcosm of our lives. When we then cause that drama of change to unfold in society, we are grasping the chapter’s true meaning.

To do that, we need courage. We have to take the initiative. When we do so, we change and society changes, too.

Tagore, having awakened to the greater self, bids us to break through our own narrow limitations!

To be continued

1. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number and then the page number.
2. *The Sutta-Nipata*, trans. H. Saddhatissa (London: Curon Press, 1994), p. 16.
3. Ibid.
4. From his remarks at the third memorial for Mr. Makiguchi, marking the second anniversary of the latter’s death. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 385.
5. Yubari Coal Miners’ Union Incident: In 1957, Soka Gakkai members working as coal

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (41)

Subject: Living Buddhism 09/99 v.99 n.9 p.25 LB9909p25

Author:

Keywords: Chapter Come Dialogue Lotus Powers Supernatural Sutra Thus

- miners in the town of Yubari, Hokkaido, were barred from joining the workers' union.
6. Osaka Incident: This refers to Mr. Ikeda's arrest in 1957 on trumped-up charges of violating election law. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing.
 7. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 10, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Rockville, MD: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 254.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
 13. *Ibid.*
 14. Rabindranath Tagore, *Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1961), p. 217.
 15. Translated from Japanese: *Togoru Chosakushu* (Collected Works of Tagore), trans. Tatsuo Morimoto (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 501-502. Translation into English of this and the next quote is by SGI Newsletter based on the Japanese source.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 504.