

**DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUA SUTRA**  
**42 THE ESSENTIAL TRANSMISSION TO BODHISATTVA SUPERIOR**  
**PRACTICES MARKS THE DAWN OF “HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM”**

*This is the forty-second installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito, Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the July 1998 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*This is their second discussion on the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter. The theme of the discussion is the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, in which all doctrines, supernatural powers and secret essentials of the Thus Come One are entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Through exploring the profound meaning of “Bodhisattvas of the Earth” and “Nam-myoho-rence-kyo Thus Come One” in light of the mystic principles of True Cause and True Effect, they elucidate the humanism of the Lotus Sutra.*

**42 The Essential Transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices Marks the Dawn of “Humanistic Buddhism”**

From “Reply to Takahashi Nyudo”

The persons living at the same time as Shakyamuni Buddha had already formed profound karmic ties with him in the past, and hence they were able to attain the Way. But Shakyamuni was much concerned about how to save those who would live after his passing, and so he put his eighty thousand sacred teachings<sup>1</sup> into written form. Among the sacred teachings of his lifetime, he entrusted the Hinayana sutras to the Venerable Mahakashyapa, and the Mahayana sutras, as well as the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, to Bodhisattva Monjushiri.

But the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo, the heart of the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the very eye of the Lotus Sutra, he did not entrust to Mahakashyapa

or Ananda, nor would he transfer them to the great bodhisattvas such as Monju, Fugen, Kannon, Miroku, Jizo<sup>2</sup> or Nagarjuna. These great bodhisattvas hoped that he would do so, and requested it of

him, but the Buddha would not consent. Instead, he summoned the venerable figure<sup>3</sup> Bodhisattva Jogyo [Superior Practices] forth from the depths of the earth, and in the presence of the Buddha Taho [Many Treasures] and the other Buddhas of the ten directions, the Tathagata Shakyamuni, seated in the tower adorned with seven kinds of precious gems,<sup>4</sup> entrusted the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo to Bodhisattva Jogyo. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, pp. 123–24)

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**IKEDA:** I recently heard a wonderful poem by the Uruguayan poet Eduardo Galeano:

Utopia lies at the horizon.  
When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two  
steps.  
If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten  
steps ahead.  
No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.  
What, then, is the purpose of utopia?  
It is to cause us to advance.<sup>5</sup>

Luíz Carlos Rossini, a member of the city council of Campinas in Brazil, cited this poem in his greetings [at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall].

**ENDO:** That was on the occasion of his visit to Japan to present you with an honorary citizenship. I recall that it took place on June 6 [1998], the 127th anniversary of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's birth.

**SUDA:** Not only did he bring the certificate of honorary citizenship, he also had with him a special memorial plaque honoring President Makiguchi; the Carlos Gomez Medal and Campinas City Council Achievement Medal for you, President Ikeda; and a plaque of commendation for Mrs. Ikeda. In fact, he had brought so many things that the joke was going around that he was like Santa Claus!

**SAITO:** His actions demonstrate the belief that, as human beings, it is our duty to honor great achievement.

**ENDO:** Such conviction is completely different from the jealousy that is all too commonplace in Japan.

**SAITO:** I was also moved by the poem. For SGI members, "utopia" could be said to represent kosen-rufu, the establishment of a peaceful world based on Buddhist thought. Of course, kosen-rufu is not the kind of surreal dream world that is implied by the term utopia. It's an ideal we continually challenge ourselves to advance toward. The power to inspire others to join in the struggle and enable them to move forward in their lives is an intrinsic aspect of the movement for kosen-rufu.

**SUDA:** Without the aim of kosen-rufu, we could neither practice with a selfless spirit nor attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

**IKEDA:** Kosen-rufu and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime could be compared to the two types of motion of the earth, revolution [on its axis] and rotation [around the sun]. They are intrinsically related.

I think this poem is wonderful because it explains the spirit of the Buddhism of True Cause in a way that is very easy to understand. To paraphrase the meaning in Buddhist terms, it is saying:

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With our sights on the distant True Effect, we  
continually advance.  
We are consistently setting forth.  
We ceaselessly burn with hope.  
With our sights on the future,  
We are ever moving on from the beginningless  
past of *kuon ganjo*.  
Each day, each moment, we experience the eternity  
of *kuon ganjo*.

“True Effect,” in this context, indicates kosen-rufu and attaining Buddhahood. While it may be possible to think of these concepts as final destinations beyond which there is no need to proceed any further, that is unrealistic.

**SAITO:** Indeed. Someone who has attained Buddhahood would not just sit back and relax, thinking, “I’ve achieved enough already,” but would tirelessly press on.

**IKEDA:** Of course, there is no denying that someone who has accomplished his or her mission in this life will feel immense satisfaction and fulfillment—a sense of “I’ve done it!” A Buddha is someone who even then continues working for the welfare of others.

The True Effect is an ideal, while the True Cause is reality. This brings us to the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter.

The ceremony of “transmission” that takes place in this chapter is basically the passing of the baton from the “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Effect” to the “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Cause.” This signifies a great transition from a Buddhism centering around the ideal image of the wonderful “effect of Buddhahood,” represented by the thirty-two features,<sup>6</sup> to a Buddhism focused on the “cause of Buddhahood,” or the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of all people. It is a move toward a Buddhism that exists solely in the reality of human life.

**SAITO:** The “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Effect” is Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the extremely remote past described as “numberless major world system dust particle *kalpas* ago” (Jpn *gohyaku-jintengo*).

**ENDO:** The “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Cause” is Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

**SUDA:** I think it could be said that Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment in the remote past, represents the world of Buddhahood, while Superior Practices represents the nine worlds. Just what does this transmission from the representative of the world of Buddhahood to the representative of the nine worlds signify? This has been a source of much controversy since ancient times.

## The Mystic Law Is the “Original Mentor”

Because after the Buddha has passed into extinction  
there will be those who can uphold this sutra,  
the Buddhas are all delighted  
and manifest immeasurable supernatural powers.  
Because they wish to entrust this sutra,  
they praise and extol the person who accepts and upholds it,  
and though they should do so for immeasurable kalpas  
they could never exhaust their praises.  
The benefits gained by such a person  
are boundless and inexhaustible,  
like the vast sky in the ten directions  
that no one can set a limit to. (LS21, 275)7

**IKEDA:** Last time, we studied the ten supernatural powers described in this chapter. Let’s pick up our discussion from that point.

**ENDO:** All right. To recapitulate, the ten supernatural or mystic powers of the Buddha are:

- (1) Shakyamuni Buddha extends his long broad tongue until it reaches the Brahma heaven;
- (2) he emits countless beams of light from every pore of his body, illuminating all the worlds in the ten directions;
- (3) other Buddhas clear their throats, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (4) they snap their fingers, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (5) all the lands in the ten directions tremble in six different ways;
- (6) all beings in the worlds of the ten directions behold the Buddhas in the *saha* world and rejoice;
- (7) heavenly gods proclaim to the beings in the ten directions that they should offer obeisance and alms to revere Shakyamuni Buddha;
- (8) on hearing this proclamation, all the beings in the ten directions press their palms together and salute the Buddha;
- (9) the beings scatter over the *saha* world offerings of various treasures, which gather together like a cloud and form a jeweled canopy over the Buddhas assembled there; and
- (10) passage between all worlds in the ten directions becomes unobstructed, as though they were one Buddha land.

In short, this is describing the *saha* world itself manifesting as the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. It is also a picture of the world of kosen-rufu. This time we will look at what follows the description of the Buddha’s ten supernatural powers.

First, I would like to note that Shakyamuni says something surprising here:

The supernatural powers of the Buddhas, as you have seen, are immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable. If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were

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to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of *asamkhyā kalpas* to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. (LS21, 274)

**SAITO:** It seems to me that, in a sense, the ten supernatural powers are explained in order to express this idea.

**IKEDA:** Shakyamuni is not simply praising the benefit of the Lotus Sutra. He is in fact praising the benefit accrued by the person who will uphold this sutra after his passing, that is to say, the benefit of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. That is the point.

**SUDA:** This is indicated in the verse section of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter where it says:

Because they wish to entrust this sutra,  
they praise and extol the person who accepts and upholds it,  
and though they should do so for immeasurable *kalpas*  
they could never exhaust their praises.  
The benefits gained by such a person  
are boundless and inexhaustible,  
like the vast sky in the ten directions  
that no one can set a limit to. (LS21, 275)

**ENDO:** Right before this, it says:

Because after the Buddha has passed into extinction  
there will be those who can uphold this sutra,  
the Buddhas are all delighted  
and manifest immeasurable supernatural powers. (LS21, 275)

This passage is lauding those who uphold the sutra after the Buddha’s passing, meaning the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and Superior Practices in particular.

**SUDA:** Their benefit is described as “boundless.” It is infinite, like the universe.

**IKEDA:** Even though the Buddhas possess such incredible powers that they can move the universe itself, they cannot praise enough the benefits of Superior Practices. This is extraordinary.

The sutra says, moreover, that all Buddhas manifest their “immeasurable supernatural powers” because they are delighted that Superior Practices will uphold this teaching after the Buddha’s passing. The ten supernatural powers therefore celebrate the future activities of Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

**SAITO:** From this part alone, we can see that Bodhisattva Superior Practices is a being of extreme significance.

What's more, all of Shakyamuni's preaching since the appearance of the Treasure Tower in "The Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (eleventh) chapter has been building up toward this transmission of the Law to Superior Practices. You could say that Superior Practices holds the key to understanding the Lotus Sutra.

**ENDO:** In the prose section preceding the verse section of the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, Shakyamuni says that he could never finish illustrating the benefits of the sutra, even employing these supernatural powers; whereas in the verse section he speaks of the benefit of the person who upholds the sutra as similarly defying description. In the former instance he is talking about the "Law"; in the latter, he is talking about the "Person."

**IKEDA:** I'm jumping ahead, but Shakyamuni is ultimately extolling the benefit of the "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One," which embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law. Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment in the remote past, and Bodhisattva Superior Practices are both "transient manifestations" of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One, the "fundamental Buddha" of the universe.

The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the Buddha whose life is without beginning or end; the universal life itself; the origin of all Buddhas throughout time and space; the entity of the eternally inherent Ten Worlds and their mutual possession.

Of the Ten Worlds, the Lotus Sutra identifies the world of Buddhahood with Shakyamuni and Many Treasures, who accompanies Shakyamuni in the Treasure Tower. And it identifies the nine worlds of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One with Bodhisattva Superior Practices and other beings. This signifies that the worlds of Buddhahood and Bodhisattva exist in the life of the same fundamental Buddha.

It is for all of these reasons that Shakyamuni is unable to fully elucidate the magnificence of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. And, since the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the "original mentor" that allows all Buddhas to attain enlightenment, this means that Shakyamuni is in fact also praising the mentor.

**SUDA:** Then it makes sense that, in spite of his supernatural powers capable of moving the universe, Shakyamuni is not able to pay tribute enough to the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. That's because the Thus Come One of "the supernatural powers of the Thus Come One" is the "body," and the supernatural powers are that body's innate functions. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the ultimate source from which the body, or enlightened entity, of the Buddha arises.

**IKEDA:** What is more, since the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is one with the universe, we ourselves and all living beings are entities of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the true aspect of the lives of all beings of the Ten Worlds.

It is Nichiren Daishonin who teaches this, and who is therefore called the "lord of the teachings." When we chant daimoku just as the Daishonin instructs, our voices resonate throughout the entire universe. Just as a soft voice can be transformed into a booming

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voice through the use of a good megaphone, when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with heartfelt prayer, we can move the entire universe. As Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, says: “[If you have faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a short while] no prayer will go unanswered, no offense unexpiated, no good fortune unbestowed, and all righteousness proven.”<sup>8</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin says that it is “not difficult” for those who chant the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra to become Buddhas equal to Shakyamuni (cf. MW-1, 259). This statement is very significant. He says this because the Mystic Law is the origin of all Buddhas.

We must absolutely never give up on prayer. He declares: “Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (MW-1, 120). We need to pray “as though to produce fire from damp tinder or to obtain water from parched ground” (MW-6, 74).

**ENDO:** Yet there are those who say that even though they are praying, they see no results.

**IKEDA:** As Nichikan points out, there is an important distinction between “daimoku of faith” and “daimoku of practice.” The act of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is “daimoku of practice,” but the results of our efforts vary greatly depending on whether we truly have confidence in the benefit of the Gohonzon. Offering “daimoku of faith” is what makes the difference.

### **The Boundless Power of the Mystic Law**

**SUDA:** I heard the following experience from a member of the Kanagawa Nurses Group that I think illustrates this perfectly. Ms. H., the chief nurse of a hospital attached to a university medical school, was asked for advice on a couple, Mr. and Mrs. T., who were facing a grave and difficult situation.

In the fall of 1996, Mr. T., who was in his forties and worked for a construction company, underwent surgery for a tumor in his brain stem. However, it seems that it was not possible to remove the tumor in its entirety. Mrs. T., who had joined the Soka Gakkai as a result of her husband becoming sick, was praying for his recovery. But from around the summer of 1997, Mr. T.’s headaches and nausea worsened and he began having consistent convulsions. The doctors informed Mrs. T. that while the tumor had not metastasized or spread, he was experiencing these symptoms because water had built up in his brain, and that surgery to remove this fluid would be necessary. Mr. T. was only able to walk with a great deal of assistance, and his speech was limited to grunts and moans.

Mrs. T. told her district women’s division leader that although she had been chanting daimoku for her husband’s recovery for a year, she could not see any improvement in his condition. The leader then discussed her situation with Ms. H., the nurse. Ms. H. gave the following advice: “The fact that the tumor has not metastasized is the benefit of the daimoku. This is really remarkable. Mrs. T.’s questions about whether he will recover, or whether her prayers will be effective, are simply barriers that she has created in her own life. But there is no barrier, there is no limit, to the great power of daimoku. Now is the

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time when she needs to offer strong prayers! It's a matter of overcoming any feelings of confusion or doubt, and offering wholehearted prayer with the strongest possible determination and focus. She needs to pray in such a way as to send a 'beam' of daimoku to the diseased area!"

**ENDO:** That's very clear guidance. The advice of the members of the nurses group, based as it is on their experience, is very compelling.

**SUDA:** Indeed. When the district leader related all this to Mrs. T, her prayers became all the more earnest. That very evening, there was a change in Mr. T's condition. He suddenly started producing more urine, and a continuous stream of tears and mucus began flowing from his eyes and nose—so much so that his pillow became soaked.

This went on for three days. On the fourth day, he showed startling signs of recovery. He became able to carry on ordinary conversations with the members of his family and could walk about without any help. The doctors were surprised at this change in his condition and brought him in for more tests. They concluded that he had fully recovered and that surgery was no longer necessary.

Mr. T. made a complete recovery. On seeing this, his son, who was in the seventh grade, remarked, "Daimoku is incredible! I want to join the Soka Gakkai, too. I want to start right away." He urged his sister, who was in elementary school, to practice Buddhism also, and the siblings joined together.

**SAITO:** That's a wonderful experience. I am reminded of just how important it is to offer resolute prayer.

### **Victory of Mentor and Disciple—Victory of Faith**

**ENDO:** It's true that people sometimes limit the beneficial power of daimoku without realizing it. We need to be confident that, just as Nichikan says, "no prayer will go unanswered."

**IKEDA:** That's right. And, in particular, the prayers of those who are exerting themselves to accomplish the propagation of the Mystic Law cannot fail to be answered. The Daishonin says, "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (MW-1, 93). To be "of the same mind as Nichiren" means to cherish the same determination for kosen-rufu. When we work for kosen-rufu and we stand up with the resolve to demonstrate the victory of faith, our lives overflow with benefit beyond belief.

We receive benefit because we work for kosen-rufu, which is the wish of the Buddha. This is analogous to how someone who works for a company receives a salary.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda characterized those who chant with a laundry list of things that they want, as though it were the "duty" of the Gohonzon to supply benefit, as having "beggar's faith." And he urged that instead they should stand up with the determination: "I will stake my life on the struggle for kosen-rufu!"

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When we muster the faith to uphold the Gohonzon and the Mystic Law with our very lives, we are protected by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout time and space. In response to our earnest efforts in faith to score a resounding victory for the SGI, an organization dedicated to the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, all the protective functions of the universe come to our aid.

What was Mr. Toda's prayer when he was imprisoned alongside his mentor, founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi? Each day, morning and evening, he prayed: "I am young and my mentor is old. If only my mentor could be released even one day sooner, it would not matter how long I remained. May my mentor be quickly released!"<sup>9</sup>

How noble!

The wisdom of the Buddha is vast and boundless. Although President Makiguchi died in prison, Mr. Toda, his faithful disciple, survived the ordeal and went on to prove the greatness of his mentor. Now, because of his selfless struggle against nationalism, the SGI has gained immense trust in Asia and throughout the world.

**SAITO:** President Makiguchi is lauded across the globe. In Brazil, for example, schools in increasing numbers are implementing his value-creating pedagogy. And a number of municipalities have named parks and streets after him.

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi triumphed. President Toda's prayers were victorious. Their struggle transcended life and death.

Japan, with its parochial, island-nation mentality, confined the truly great Mr. Makiguchi to a tiny cell by himself. However, due to the unyielding determination of Mr. Toda, his mentor's greatness has broken free of such shackles and reached the far corners of the earth. This is a genuine united struggle of mentor and disciple. Buddhism comes down to the relationship of mentor and disciple. In the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, too, we have a "ceremony of mentor and disciple."

**ENDO:** Yes. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are disciples whom Shakyamuni has instructed since the remote past. And in this chapter Shakyamuni entrusts them with the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

**SAITO:** This is the key point. If we only look at the literal meaning of the text of the chapter, we wind up with the simple interpretation that Nichiren Daishonin, as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, spread the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni.

**SUDA:** That is, in fact, the standard interpretation.

**SAITO:** But Nichiren Daishonin says: "Myoho-renge-kyo is not the Mystic Law of Shakyamuni, because when the events in this ["Supernatural Powers"] chapter take place, the essence of the sutra has already been transmitted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices" (GZ, 770). The Daishonin is clearly stating here that the teaching he is spreading is not that of Shakyamuni.

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**ENDO:** Even so, some still interpret these words of the Daishonin to mean that he is saying that Myoho-enge-kyo is not Shakyamuni's teaching because Bodhisattva Superior Practices inherited the teaching in the same way that a son inherits the estate of his father and insists: "Since the tenure of my father is over and I am now head of the household, everything belongs to me and no longer to my father."

**SAITO:** How can we further clarify this?

**IKEDA:** The analogy of a family estate expresses one side of the truth. Namely, that the Latter Day of the Law is the "age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices" and not the "age of Shakyamuni." In the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, Shakyamuni transfers his teaching in its entirety; it's as though he is saying, "From here on, I leave everything in your hands."

Let's look at the passage.

**SUDA:** Okay. Shakyamuni says:

To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra. (LS21, 274)

This is a well-known description of the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

**SAITO:** In short, it means that the Lotus Sutra reveals the life of the Thus Come One in its totality. Shakyamuni then says that he transfers this to Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China describes this transmission as summing up the entirety of the Lotus Sutra. And he explains the significance of the Lotus Sutra based on this passage. This is the doctrine of the five major principles of "name, entity, quality, function and teaching."

*["Name" signifies all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, or the sutra's title, Myoho-enge-kyo. "Entity" signifies "the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One," or the ultimate Law itself. "Quality" indicates "all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One," or the causality of the enlightenment of the Thus Come One. "Function" indicates "all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One," or the power to benefit all people. And "teaching" indicates that "all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra."]*

It seems to me that T'ien-t'ai is explaining the reason that the Lotus Sutra is endowed with infinite benefit; in other words, he is elucidating that it is the ultimate source of all benefit.

**SUDA:** Put another way, it is the very "life" of the Thus Come One.

**ENDO:** And this is transferred to Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

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## **Superior Practices Is a Bodhisattva-Buddha**

**IKEDA:** The question then becomes: Just what is this bodhisattva who “receives and embodies the entirety of the Thus Come One?”

Ordinarily, when we speak of a bodhisattva we mean someone who is practicing the teachings with the aim of becoming a Buddha. But this is clearly not the case with Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Although he embodies the “entirety of the Thus Come One,” he is still called a bodhisattva. Superior Practices is a “bodhisattva-Buddha.”

Let’s go back to the analogy of transmission from father to son. Assuming that father and son are connected, then if the father is a Buddha, it would be only logical that the son who inherits the family estate is also a Buddha.

**ENDO:** Certainly, a person who inherits rule over a country from a king is also a king.

**IKEDA:** At the time of their appearance, Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as follows: “The bodies of these bodhisattvas were all golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness” (LS15, 213).

**SUDA:** The thirty-two features are special characteristics of Buddhas. This therefore seems to indicate that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are Buddhas.

**SAITO:** What’s more, they are described as even more splendid in appearance than Shakyamuni. The sutra likens Shakyamuni to a young man of twenty-five with a hint of immaturity, and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as venerable seasoned elders of a hundred years (cf. LS15, 221).

**IKEDA:** Therefore, the ceremony of essential transmission in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter is fundamentally a transmission from a Buddha to a Buddha. This is a state of life that “can only be understood and shared between Buddhas” (LS2, 24).

Why, then, does Superior Practices appear as a bodhisattva? Well, for one thing, it is so as not to refute the principle of “one world, one Buddha.” People would be confused if two Buddhas were to appear at the same time.

**SAITO:** This is the view that Superior Practices assumes the position of a disciple who is helping Shakyamuni expound his teaching.

**ENDO:** When the Bodhisattvas of the Earth make their appearance, everyone else, including Bodhisattva Maitreya, is startled. This is what prompts Shakyamuni to begin preaching the “Life Span” chapter. In that sense, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth certainly assisted in his preaching.

**IKEDA:** But this takes on still greater significance, given that Bodhisattva Superior Practices appears unequivocally as the representative of the nine worlds. This point virtually transforms the entire history of Buddhism. It is a recognition of the virtues (or effect) of Buddhahood existing within the practice (or cause) of a bodhisattva.

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Up to this juncture, Buddhism had taught that the effect was superior and that practice, which is the cause of enlightenment, was inferior, which seems like common sense.

**ENDO:** I think we intuitively think of the world of Buddhahood as above, or better than, the nine worlds.

**IKEDA:** But with the appearance of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, it becomes evident that the cause (the nine worlds) contains the effect (the world of Buddhahood).

Why is this important? Let's try to recall the teaching of the "Life Span" chapter. There, Shakyamuni explains that he attained Buddhahood in *gohyaku-jintengo* the extremely remote time described as numberless major world system dust particle *kalpas* ago. This implies that all Buddhas in the universe are disciples of Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past. Then what about before that time?

**SAITO:** Shakyamuni's statement, "originally I practiced the bodhisattva way" (LS16, 227), indicates that prior to the time of *gohyaku-jintengo* he carried out bodhisattva practice.

**IKEDA:** From there we can infer that since he carried out the Buddhist practice, there was a Buddhist Law. There was a Law, but no Buddha, which means that there was no "Buddha who is at one with the universe and whose life is without beginning or end."

**SUDA:** It goes without saying that if the time when the Buddha appeared could be pinpointed, he could not be called the "Buddha eternally existing over the three existences of past, present and future."

**ENDO:** The view of Shakyamuni as having first attained enlightenment during his lifetime in India is refuted as "without origin and existing only in the present." Such a Buddha is like "grass without roots." But, the Shakyamuni of the "Life Span" chapter, who revealed that he attained enlightenment in the remote past, is no different from a Buddha who became enlightened at some specific point in time; the only difference is time. Strictly speaking, this view also fails on the grounds that it is "without origin and existing only in the present." It does not present Buddhahood as originally inherent.

**SAITO:** If a Buddha's enlightenment is not originally inherent, then the Buddha cannot be called the true Buddha who exists eternally.

**IKEDA:** While this is an important point for our present discussion, it is somewhat challenging. Those who find this a bit confusing should feel free to just skip ahead! It's a concept that can be studied throughout one's life. Even if we don't fully comprehend the fine points of Buddhist theory, the main thing is that we understand the importance of chanting daimoku.

**SUDA:** I, for one, am relieved to hear you say that!

**IKEDA:** To return to the topic at hand, there are two ways of explaining the fundamental Buddha at one with the universe whose life is without beginning or end. The first involves

ignoring the workings of causality. By doing so, we can assume the existence of a Buddha whose life is without beginning or end and leave it at that. That's because once causality is brought into the picture, the question arises regarding what happened before the effect of Buddhahood was attained.

However, if the issue of causality is simply passed over, then what we are talking about is not Buddhism. It is precisely this explanation of the workings of cause and effect that distinguishes a teaching as Buddhist, while the absence of causality marks a teaching as non-Buddhist.

In particular, the “cause of Buddhahood” and “effect of Buddhahood” are Buddhism’s main concern. It could be said that, after Shakyamuni’s passing, Mahayana Buddhism itself originated out of the people’s quest for the cause that had enabled Shakyamuni to attain Buddhahood.

**SAITO:** Yes. Having lost Shakyamuni, they must have sought to become Buddhas themselves by grasping the cause that enabled him to attain enlightenment.

**IKEDA:** To put it another way, it was an investigation into the true nature of Shakyamuni’s life, which yielded a variety of doctrines expounding an “eternal Buddha.”

**SUDA:** These would include a discussion of Shakyamuni’s eternal life as a “Buddha of the Dharma body,” in contrast to the living Shakyamuni. A number of arguments were further advanced as to the “properties of the Buddha’s life,” including the doctrine of the Buddha’s three inherently enlightened properties (of the Law, wisdom and action).

**ENDO:** Perhaps an argument could be made that the various Buddhas of Mahayana Buddhism—Vairocana<sup>10</sup> of the Kegon Sutra, Amida<sup>11</sup> of the Pure Land sutras, and Dainichi<sup>12</sup> of the Dainichi Sutra—each reveal one side of the Buddha while pointing toward the fundamental Buddha whose life is without beginning or end.

**IKEDA:** But no matter how these teachings might talk about the eternal life of the Buddha, there was a great limitation. In the first place, because they described the world of the Buddha as a grand and beautiful realm, they departed from “Shakyamuni the human being.” This signifies their having moved away from the reality of human life. Another limitation has to do with the issue of cause and effect that we are now discussing. If the “cause of Buddhahood” comes first and the “effect of Buddhahood” comes later, then it follows that the Buddha appears at some particular point in time.

In short, to explain the Buddha without beginning or end, the effect of Buddhahood (benefit) has to be recognized as being inherent in the cause of Buddhahood (practice). This is the second approach, and the only one that can suffice to explain the reality of the original Buddha being eternally present over the three existences.

**SAITO:** This seems to be the most logical conclusion.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Superior Practices is actually a Buddha who is exerting himself at the

level of Buddhist practice that enables one to attain enlightenment. In other words, he is the Buddha embodying the simultaneity of cause and effect.

The original Buddha whose life is without beginning or end could not be revealed without the appearance of Superior Practices. His emergence points to the existence of the “true Buddha of *kuon ganjo*,” the Buddha enlightened from time without beginning, which far surpasses the idea of an unimaginably remote time in the past called *gohyaku-jintengo*.

**SUDA:** I am much clearer now on a number of points that were somewhat ambiguous.

This “original Buddha whose life is without beginning or end” is then the Nam-myoho-rence-kyo Thus Come One that we refer to as the Buddha of absolute freedom of *kuon ganjo*, or time without beginning.

### **Each Day Is *Kuon Ganjo!***

**IKEDA:** That’s correct.

**SUDA:** So it becomes clear that *kuon ganjo* in this context does not mean the remote past. It transcends the framework, indeed the very concept of time.

**IKEDA:** Yes, *kuon ganjo* is another name for life that is without beginning or end. It pertains not to the doctrine of time, but to the doctrine of life.

The truth in the depths of life, the very life of the universe that continues to function ceaselessly, is referred to by the term *kuon ganjo*. This can also be called the “Thus Come One originally endowed with the three enlightened properties.”

The Daishonin says, “*Kuon* means neither created or adorned, but remaining in one’s original state” (GZ, 759). “Not created” means inherently endowed; it does not indicate a specific point in time. “Not adorned” means not possessing the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics; it refers to ordinary people just as they are. “Remaining in one’s original state” means eternally existing.

*Kuon* signifies Nam-myoho-rence-kyo; it signifies the Gohonzon. When we pray to the Gohonzon, that very instant is *kuon ganjo*; it is beginningless time. For us, each day is *kuon ganjo*. Each day we can cause the supreme, pure, eternal life of *kuon ganjo* to well forth from our entire being. Each day we depart anew from *kuon ganjo*, the starting point of life.

**SAITO:** This is what it means to live based on the mystic principle of the True Cause.

**IKEDA:** That’s why the present time is the most important. We should not dwell on the past; there is no need to do so. Those who exert themselves fully in the present moment and burn with great hope for the future are the true sages in life.

In transmitting the essence of the Lotus Sutra to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, Shakyamuni entrusts him with achieving kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law.

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Therefore, when we stand up in earnest and work for the propagation of the eternal Mystic Law, we experience the eternity of time without beginning in each moment.

President Toda always regarded propagation of the Mystic Law as his personal responsibility, vowing to realize it without relying on anyone else. And he prayed that youth would rise up with the same great spirit of faith.

On one occasion before a gathering of about twenty youth, he suddenly called out in a powerful voice: "I will accomplish kosen-rufu!" He then had each person there repeat these words: One after another they fervently exclaimed, "I will achieve kosen-rufu by myself!" Some spoke with weak and unsure voices. Some were taken aback. And some later abandoned their faith. President Toda's sole wish was for young people to stand up with the same determination as he himself cherished. This was his strict compassion. My feelings toward the members of the youth division are exactly the same.

At any rate, although the doctrine concerning Bodhisattva Superior Practices is extremely difficult, since it is the very heart and essence of the Lotus Sutra, let's pursue our investigation a little further.

**SAITO:** Okay. To confirm what we've covered so far, while the Lotus Sutra expounds the essential transmission from Shakyamuni as the Buddha enlightened since the remote past to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the Law that is thus handed down is not the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra, but the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that is contained in the sutra's depths.

**IKEDA:** That's right. But I think the expression "handed down" may tend to invite misunderstanding. Fundamentally, Bodhisattva Superior Practices is already an entity of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Since he has possessed this Law eternally, the purpose of the ceremony is merely to verify that he is qualified and charged with spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day; it provides proof of his status.

**ENDO:** Then if I may return once again to the analogy of inheritance of a family estate, it's something like a document from the parent certifying the transference of assets.

**IKEDA:** I think you could say that. The "Supernatural Powers" chapter is the letter of certification. Compared to the Mystic Law itself, it is merely a shadow. To illustrate, let us say that a child receives ten million yen from his parents. That would also be a kind of transmission. The ten million yen is the "body," and the certificate attesting that he has received it is the "shadow." The difference between body and shadow is like that between day and night. This is also stated in the Daishonin's writing, "Hyaku Rokka Sho" (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons).

*The Mystic Law which Shakyamuni received in the remote past when he was practicing the Bodhisattva Way at the level of initial aspiration [Jpn myoji-soku] is the body, whereas Superior Practices and the others are the shadow. The transmission of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra in the remote past is the same as Nichiren's present inheritance of the "Life Span" chapter. (GZ, 865)*

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This is complex. In essence Nichiren Daishonin says that since the remote past, he—as a common mortal at the stage of one initially taking faith—has been upholding the true Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, that is, the “body,” or the essential teaching. From that standpoint, the ceremony involving Superior Practices and the other bodhisattvas is the “shadow,” or the theoretical teaching. The sutra is a prophesy; it is documentary proof authorizing the Daishonin to carry out widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One reflected on the canvas of the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra manifests both as Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past (the world of Buddhahood) and as Bodhisattva Superior Practices (the nine worlds). We must never forget that the Mystic Law is the “body,” and Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the “shadow.”

### **There Are No Buddhas Apart from Human Beings**

**ENDO:** So the ceremony of transmission boils down to a passing of the eternal Law from the world of Buddhahood to the nine worlds. But what is its significance?

**IKEDA:** It indicates that the common mortal is a Buddha.

**SAITO:** Last time, you emphasized this point citing a passage from “The True Entity of Life.”

*The passage reads: “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” (MW-1, 90).*

**IKEDA:** I would like to talk more about that later on, but for now, in the context of our present discussion, the point I wish to stress is that while we might speak of the Buddha as a “perfected being” possessing the thirty-two features, this is an ideal image that recedes the closer you get, as in the poem about a utopia that I cited earlier.

Although we might make assumptions about what a “perfect Buddha” is, in actuality this is nothing more than a target. In other words, there is no such thing as a Buddha living apart from the nine worlds of the ordinary person; an idealized Buddha possessing the thirty-two features simply does not exist. In reality, the Buddha can be found only in the life and activities of a bodhisattva. There is no Buddha other than the bodhisattva-Buddha. The effect resides within the cause. That is to say, the simultaneity of cause and effect is the true aspect of attaining Buddhahood. This is the reality of the original Buddha’s enlightenment; therefore, apart from this there is no attainment of Buddhahood. The Daishonin says, “Shakyamuni’s practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the single phrase, Myoho-renge-kyo. If we believe in that phrase, we shall naturally be granted the same benefits as he was” (MW-1, 64).

**SAITO:** What, then, is the reason for the description of “perfect Buddhas” possessing the thirty-two features? Is it simply to prompt people to practice, much as utopian ideals cause people to seek to advance humanity?

**IKEDA:** It is to motivate people to persevere in Buddhist practice. Descriptions of Buddhas who are endowed with wonderful and grand attributes generate within people a yearning to know such beings, which subsequently inspires them to strive to attain Buddhahood themselves. Such images are meant to awaken within people the desire to advance and seek self-improvement.

To say that the Buddha does not exist only means that ordinary people cannot see the Buddha with their own eyes. The world of Buddhahood is undeniably inherent in our lives; it just is not manifested anywhere other than in the nine worlds.

As the Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan says, “The bliss body of the Buddha, which is created by causes, represents the provisional result obtained in a dream, while the uncreated, eternally endowed three enlightened bodies represent the eternal true Buddha.”<sup>13</sup>

**SUDA:** “Created” means that it is not inherent; it is something achieved which had not existed previously. The “bliss body of the Buddha” is a property of the Buddha achieved as the result of Buddhist practice. With the exception of the Buddha inherently endowed with three enlightened properties, all Buddhas adorned with idealized features and characteristics are provisional Buddhas who symbolize the effects of Buddhist practice; they are but illusions.

**ENDO:** An actual Buddha is inherently endowed with the three enlightened properties; it is an eternally existing condition of life, not something attained as a result of countless aeons of practice.

**SAITO:** I have read this passage many times, but now I have an entirely fresh sense of its meaning.

**IKEDA:** Majestic Buddhas are but illusions that have nothing to do with reality. The only actual Buddhas are ordinary people who each moment bring forth the eternal life force of time without beginning. There is no Buddha existing apart from the people. A Buddha set above the people is a fake, an expedient means. Therefore, the correct way is to live with dignity as a human being and to continue along the supreme path in life; to do so is to be a Buddha.

This is what the Lotus Sutra teaches. The transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter signifies such a transformation toward a Buddhism focused on the human being. As the Daishonin indicates when he says, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren . . .,” we, who are endeavoring to spread the Mystic Law and thereby bring happiness to all humanity, are the Buddhas of the modern age. There are no others.

For this reason, those who use SGI members for personal gain will without fail experience retribution for acting against the Law of the Buddha. On the other hand, to work for the welfare of SGI members and strive to see them become ultimately happy is to cause wonderful benefit to bloom in one’s life.

*(To be continued)*

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1. Eighty thousand sacred teachings: The entire body of teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime. The figure eighty thousand is not intended to be literal but simply indicates a large number.
2. Jizo: "Earth Repository." A bodhisattva entrusted by Shakyamuni Buddha with the task of saving living beings during the period from Shakyumuni's death until the advent of Bodhisattva Miroku, 5,670 million years later, as the next Buddha. In Japan, Jizo became the object of a popular cult and was often thought to protect children.
3. The "Emerging From the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as more venerable in appearance than Shakyamuni Buddha himself. When Shakyamuni declares that these bodhisattvas are his original disciples, Bodhisattva Miroku expresses doubt, saying that it's as though a young man of twenty-five were to point to venerable men of a hundred and say, "These are my sons!"
4. This refers to the Treasure Tower of Taho Buddha. According to "The Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (eleventh) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Taho Buddha appeared at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra seated in a magnificent jeweled *stupa* that emerged from beneath the earth and then rose into the air where it hung, suspended. Shakyamuni seated himself in the tower beside Taho at the latter's invitation. The "seven kinds of precious gems" adorning the tower are gold, silver, lapis lazuli, giant clam shell, coral, pearl and carnelian.
5. Translated from Spanish. Eduardo Galeano, "Ventana sobre la utopia" (Window on Utopia), *Las palabras andantes* (Walking Words) (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1993).
6. Thirty-two features: Remarkable physical characteristics said to be possessed by Buddhas symbolizing their superiority over ordinary people.
7. 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.
8. "Kanjin no Honzon Sho Mondan" (Commentary on "The True Object of Worship").
9. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 419.
10. Vairochana: A Buddha who appears in the Kegon, Bommo and Dainichi sutras. The Shingon sect equates this Buddha with its central deity, Mahavairochana.
11. Amida: Skt. Amitayus or Amitabh, Infinite Life. The Buddha of the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the western region of the universe.
12. Dainichi: Skt. Mahavairochana. A Buddha mentioned in the Dainichi and Kongocho sutras, worshipped by adherents of esoteric Buddhism.
13. *Shugo Kokkai Sho*, one of the most important works of the Japanese Tendai school. This passage is cited in the *Gosho Zenshu* on pages 382, 560, and 783.

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