

living BUDDHISM

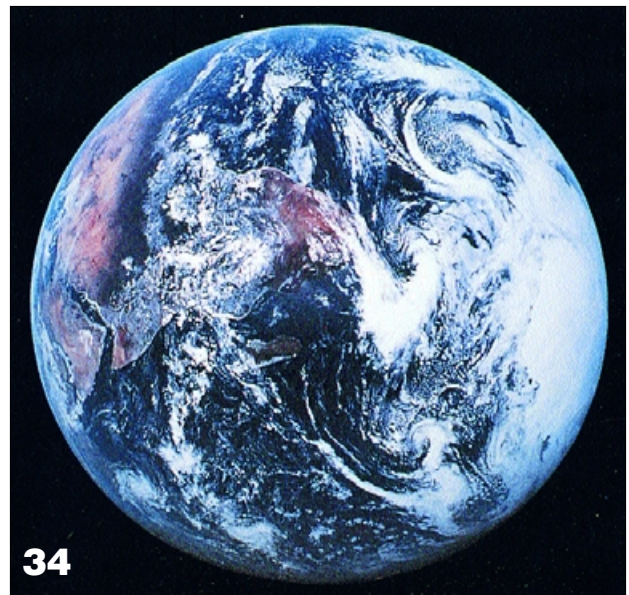
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Living Buddhism is the monthly journal of the SGI-USA, an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

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by Thomas Rebek.



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Aspiring for Inner Globalization

NEW Year's Day 1999 — the door of history is about to close on the old century and open on the third millennium — the vast stage of a new century, a new civilization.

People shape history. Ordinary citizens must be its protagonists.

Why did the "people power" revolution of the Philippines succeed? Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos stated unhesitatingly that it was because the people trusted themselves and had faith.

Toward an age when the people are the key players... Toward a world where there is widespread communication among its diverse citizenry... This direction, I believe, will be of prime importance for human society in the twenty-first century.

How many people are there, I wonder, who truly believe that we can change the world through the power of spiritual value?

Uniting philosophy and the people — this is the unparalleled significance of the popular movement of the SGI, which has now spread to all corners of the globe.

Let's look at the world for a moment:

There are so many places and communities on this planet — with its forests, mountains and deserts — that we know very little about. Places and communities that have given birth to unique

cultures, religions and peoples.

What is it that links and unites, at the very deepest level, this myriad diversity that almost seems to defy cohesion?

It is none other than our shared identity as human beings.

Everything begins from having respect for human dignity and appreciating the inherent value of each person's life and the wonder of human existence.

Let us so begin our inner quest.

"How should we live our lives?"

"What are life's true values?"

"What is the purpose of our existence?"

We have to say good-bye to a world that deems such questions pointless.

The humanistic teachings of Buddhism forge self-reliant, independent-minded citizens.

Good citizens are those who love both their own country and the world. A strong alliance of global citizens who possess a sound humanistic philosophy will transform the world.

The development of the people constitutes the foundation and framework for human progress.

Rapid globalization is rendering geographical differences virtually meaningless and making the world one.

But external globalization has brought with it serious social ills in the form of chaos, stagnation

and the deterioration of indigenous cultural values.

Ours is a movement that aspires for internal globalization — a transformation that begins from within human beings and then develops a vast network of such inner-motivated people.

Let us put down strong roots of faith deep in our lives as we continue to seek to realize our limitless human potential — not from without but from within. And let us sow the seeds of peace in one heart after another, thereby creating a rich blossoming of peace in the twenty-first century.

I am absolutely convinced that the unceasing efforts, day and night, you are making toward this end have infinitely profound significance for the future history of humankind.

At this decisive juncture, as we lay the important foundation for the third millennium, let us continue to encourage and support one another and advance toward peace and the happiness for all people.

— With my sincere prayers for the happiness, vigorous endeavors and long lives of all my precious fellow SGI members in 128 countries around the world.

Daisaku Ikeda
January 1, 1999



VICTORY THROUGH TRUST AND FRIENDSHIP

I WISH every one of our readers and fellow SGI-USA members the happiest of New Year's, and thank each of you for your support and efforts, which have resulted in a meaningful and fulfilling 1998.

As we enter the new year, more and more people are becoming overwhelmed by fear of what might happen with the close of the millennium. The issues of warfare and political conflict face our country at this moment, but amid the turmoil, we possess an extraordinary light of hope. That light is Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, our faith in it, and this wonderful organization of the SGI.

In November 1998, I had the memorable experience of participating in the SGI Fall Training Course in Nagoya, Japan. The highlight of this course, for me, was the 18th World Peace Youth Culture Festival held at the huge Nagoya Dome. Spanning two days, with 100,000 total participants, the truly amazing thing was that

All in all, to win a victory in the community means to become people who are indispensable to and appreciated by our families, at work, in our neighborhoods and among our fellow SGI members.

20,000 young people took complete responsibility for all performances, behind-the-scenes planning and operations. There was incredible energy and passion, the kind that only youth can create.

There were many new members and many teenagers, as well as those in their early 20s. Some had wildly colored hair or body piercings—it was wonderful to see all these different types of individuals. The energy, freshness and seeking spirit of these young people—most of them, as I mentioned, new members—convinced me that the statement by the second Soka Gakkai presi-

dent, Josei Toda, that “the new century will be created by the passion and power of youth” is today becoming a tangible reality.

Witnessing this, I resolved to work harder to make our organization all the more attractive and embracing for the youth of today. I feel that fostering the next generation is the most important challenge for the twenty-

first century. I also strongly sense that this is why SGI President Ikeda has declared that he is dedicating the remainder of his life to the task of education, for education is the process of raising and empowering youth.

This year, 1999, has been designated in the SGI the Year of Victory in the Community for the New Century. Victory, I feel, does not mean beating someone else at something, but rather to challenge and win over ourselves—over our own weaknesses—and to win trust by becoming people of the highest integrity and humanity. All in all, to win a victory in the community means to become people who are indispensable to and appreciated by our families, at work, in our neighborhoods and among our fellow SGI members.

Nichiren Daishonin often quoted the passage by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai that reads, "No affairs of life or work are in any way different from the ultimate reality." If we take "ultimate reality" to mean the Gohonzon or the Law itself, then, as President Toda often said, we should cherish our work and our daily affairs and responsibilities as much as we cherish the Gohonzon. To deepen our sense of responsibility and self-challenge in these areas is a cause for growth and good fortune, and will engender trust.

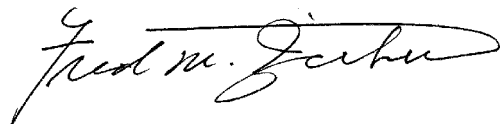
Of course, chanting daimoku and participating in SGI-USA activities are great sources of unbeatable courage and confidence. And when our lives shine with courage and confidence, we can inspire hope in the hearts of our friends, colleagues and acquaintances. In addition, I am convinced that when we consistently pray with the resolve—"I want to share this wonderful practice and philosophy with someone. I want to help even one more person live a better life!"—we will

discover the wisdom and courage to reach people's hearts. As I continue to chant daimoku with this prayer, I feel this desire and awareness becoming ever more deeply ingrained in my life. As a result, I find myself making friends more easily and sensing more naturally the right time and the best way to discuss Buddhism with them. Nichiren Daishonin describes the greatest kind of friend as one who leads another toward the Mystic Law and thus gives that person the opportunity to sever the bonds of karma and suffering, and to lead a life of hope and fulfillment.

Though removed from them by great distances, Nichiren Daishonin never forgot about his friends, and throughout his life, corresponded with and encouraged them with the utmost warmth and sincerity.

And today, President Ikeda is setting for us an excellent example in becoming the best of friends with those he meets, never forgetting them or allowing the human bond he has formed with them to weaken.

I, too, will challenge myself through prayer and action to become a trusted friend to all of you, so that together, as individuals and as an organization, we can become the most cherished and trusted members of our communities.



Fred M. Zaitso
SGI-USA General Director

living BUDDHISM

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FROM THE EDITOR

A HAPPY New Year to all of you, the readers of *Living Buddhism*. My name is Jeff Kriger, and this issue of *Living Buddhism* marks the first for which I have had the new and challenging opportunity to work with the capable staff of this magazine as its managing editor. Margie Hall, managing editor of *Living Buddhism* for the past two years, has moved on to the *World Tribune*, as its managing editor.

If I may take a few lines to introduce myself, I come to *Living Buddhism* after having served as a member of the SGI-USA editorial staff since 1984 as a translator and editor, as well as, most recently, manager of the Book section. In my fifteen years with the editorial department, I feel I've had the fortune to receive the education of a lifetime. In that time, not only have I been able to improve my understanding of Japanese, and, more importantly, of English, but I have been exposed each day to a profound philosophy of the highest worth, and a teacher, in SGI President Ikeda, of tremendous capacity and vision.

With this new assignment, I will do my best to support our staff to produce a publication that can truly communicate the spirit and essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and the significance to our lives and to humanity of the SGI's movement that is based upon it. I am looking forward to your continued support and interest in *Living Buddhism*, and to hearing your comments and suggestions.



The staff of *Living Buddhism* wishes you a Happy New Year. (Left to right), Shin Yatomi, Stephanie Celano, Dave Baldschun, Gary Murie and Jeff Kriger.

FROM OUR READERS

Thanks For Sharing

I appreciate the "Publisher's Commentary" by Fred Zaitzu. It's encouraging to hear such humane and personal thoughts from our SGI-USA General Director. I especially like the entry from the October 1998 issue, with regard to his daughter. I am very encouraged to have a leader in the SGI-USA

who can share his struggles. That is so much more encouraging than pretending to be perfect. It is always one's struggle that is most encouraging. We all have weaknesses. We are all working on winning over ourselves. It is the person who doesn't give up that has a great story to tell. Thanks.

HEIDI BERGMAN
New York City

Selections of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings for 1999 Study

The following selections from *Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin* are the study material for the first half of 1999:

January and February: "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen (1)," p. 122.

March and April: "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen (2)," p. 132.

May and June: "Letter to Lord Toki," p. 143.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

karma: Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny

each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

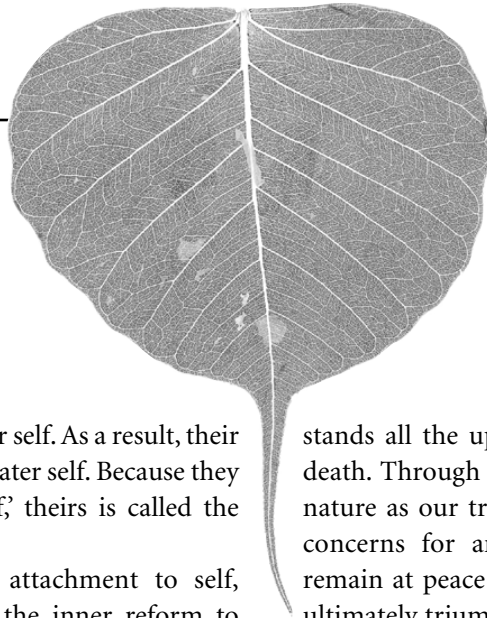
The Four Virtues of the Buddha: Breaking out of the lesser self

HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES is reflected in how we see the world and how we treat others. The less sure we are of ourselves, the more we become fixed on ourselves while disregarding others and the world around us. Selfishness is often the flip side of a lack of self-identity. Even when those who are not really sure of themselves try to do something for others, they are often motivated by selfishness. They may be attempting either to make themselves feel needed by others, or seeking some sort of praise, recognition or even the salvation of their souls for their "altruism." Buddhism views altruism as an expression of one's awakening to one's true self and explains that it stems from compassion, appreciation and a sense of interconnection rather than insecurity. The notion of the "four virtues of the Buddha" describes and encourages a holistic view of self, a view that transcends selfishness.

The Buddha, or enlightened one, is said to possess four virtues: true self, eternity, happiness and purity. The original concept of these four virtues, however, predates Buddhism. Brahmanism, the prevailing religion in Shakyamuni's India, taught that the human being has an enduring soul or essence called *atman*—"the breath of life." *Atman*, often translated as "self," was viewed as eternal, happy and pure. Espoused by the Brahmins, then India's highest, priestly caste, Brahmanism explained that the supreme purpose of *atman* was to acquire wealth and honor. So, by making offerings to the deities, people sought worldly gains. *Atman*, in this sense, may be viewed as self in pursuit of selfish desire.

In his early teachings, Shakyamuni refuted the Brahmanic view of self and in his later teachings revealed his enlightened perspective on the matter. When people are consumed with egotism, no matter how much they seek wealth and honor, the pain of their hunger will not be eased. So from this standpoint, Shakyamuni taught that the self is impure and transient and causes suffering. In the earlier sutras, he explains that nothing remains constant, there is no such thing as eternal self. Because the self was

transient and not enduring, the Buddha taught, attachment to it or anything in this impure and fleeting world was the cause of suffering. In his later teachings, which came to be classified as Mahayana, or "Greater Vehicle" teachings, especially in the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, Shakyamuni expounds an entirely new view of self. He explains that one's true self, that is, one's Buddha nature, is eternal, transcending the cycle of birth and death; it is essentially pure and endowed with happiness. From the viewpoint of Mahayana Buddhism, therefore, true self, eternity, happiness and purity are called the four virtues of the Buddha. In this regard, one Mahayana scripture explains: "The deluded beings are attached to their lesser self and thus suffer. Buddhas



and bodhisattvas discard the lesser self. As a result, their self is pure and thus called the greater self. Because they think of all living beings as ‘self,’ theirs is called the greater self.”

While Brahmanism justifies attachment to self, Mahayana Buddhism advocates the inner reform to discard one’s lesser self and develop the greater self rooted in compassion. The Nirvana Sutra clarifies this point, saying: “The deluded beings view that in this world, self is eternal, happy and pure, but this is topsy-turvy. The Buddha also views that in this world, self is eternal, happy and pure, and this is the truth.” Buddhas are those who are awakened to the greater self of compassion. In this expanded vision of self, they see that their lives are connected to others and the world around them. So Buddhas have genuine appreciation for others and are driven by their desire to contribute to the world around them.

Nichiren Daishonin attributes the four virtues of the Buddha to the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Bodhisattva Superior Practices (*Jogyo*) represents true self. Revealing true self means for us to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, thus manifesting our innate Buddhahood and shedding the lesser self of egotism. Bodhisattva Boundless Practices (*Muhengyo*) signifies eternity. Through establishing our true self of Buddhahood, we come to understand, perhaps not intellectually but with our innermost heart, the eternity of life, and remain unswayed by our ever-changing circumstances while confidently challenging ourselves. Bodhisattva Pure Practices (*Jyogyo*) represents purity. Once we are awakened to the greater self of Buddhahood, we are no longer tainted by delusions. With a secure sense of self, we can even positively influence our environment, thus purifying it. Finally Bodhisattva Firmly Established Practices (*Anryugyo*) signifies happiness—a kind of happiness that with-

stands all the ups and downs of our lives, including death. Through developing confidence in the Buddha nature as our true self, we free ourselves from trivial concerns for any unnecessary artifice of life and remain at peace with ourselves, knowing that we will ultimately triumph over any obstacle.

It is significant that the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth represent the four virtues of the Buddha. As the names of those bodhisattvas indicate, only through our dedicated practice as bodhisattvas—practice dedicated to the happiness of others—can we break through our lesser self and reveal the greater self of Buddhahood. In other words, our bodhisattva practice is the cause for the Buddha’s four virtues to manifest in our lives. Yet from another perspective, it may be also said that Buddhas are in essence those who are awakened to their greater self and act for the well-being of others. In this sense, the altruism of Bodhisattva practice is not only the means to overcome the lesser self and develop the four virtues; it is also a direct expression of these four virtues inherent in life, in our Buddha nature. This is why chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which calls forth our inherent Buddhahood and its corresponding virtues, provides the greatest basis for an altruistic life—a life dedicated to the happiness of others.

The four virtues of the Buddha, from the standpoint of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, describe the ideal characteristics of human beings whose view of self is not hindered in any way by selfish ego. Their understanding of self is so encompassing that their own existence and the world around them become indistinguishable. A limited understanding of self, however, leads to egotism, bringing suffering and misery to both oneself and others. True self-knowledge—an awakening to our true, greater self—in this sense is a key to overcoming selfishness. □

“Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen” Part 1

The following excerpts from Nichiren Daishonin’s “Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen” and accompanying commentary are from SGI President Ikeda’s book, Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 122–31.

To the mother of Oto Gozen:

Since you revere the Lotus Sutra, you are a woman who is certain to become a Buddha. [Therefore] although in my present circumstances I am ill disposed to write, I send you letters frequently. Also, I understand that you are looking after the disciples [in Kamakura]. I cannot thank you enough.

Above all, your having come here, even though you are a woman, is an expression of your profound spirit of faith. Whereas in my case, I am only here because I was made to come. I feel immensely indebted. (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 1222)

A Person of Genuine Faith Shines When Faced With Great Obstacles

IT was a miraculous journey: a woman traveling all the way from Kamakura to Sado Island with her small child in tow. Braving mountainous terrain, treacherous

passes, crossing the sea, she appeared breathlessly before Nichiren Daishonin in his place of exile.

“It was almost too amazing to be true” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 197), the Daishonin says. At this unexpected appearance of one of his Kamakura followers, the Daishonin probably doubted his own eyes. To a place where no visitors

came, here were two—a woman with a small child!

His initial surprise soon turned to profound concern. “How was your journey?” he asked. “Did you have any trouble on the way? Is your child all right? Seeing you is the most wonderful thing. Nothing could make me happier.”

The woman was a person of wholehearted faith. And doubtless

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Date: November 3, 1272 or 1273.

Recipient: A woman living in Kamakura with her young daughter, Oto Gozen. Her name remains unknown, but she is thought to be the woman upon whom Nichiren Daishonin bestowed the Buddhist name Nichimyo Shonin or “Sage Sun-Mystic.”

Background: The Daishonin, age 51 or 52, depending on the dating of the letter, was an exile on Sado at the time he penned this letter to thank the woman for her visit. The original, consisting of three pages, is extant at Cho'on temple in Nagasaki, Japan.

she had deeply cherished the determination to see the Daishonin on Sado. “I cannot just sit idly by at this time when the Daishonin is battling great persecution,” she probably felt. She must have wanted to do anything she could to lighten his burden even a little.

This letter to the mother of Oto Gozen,¹ which was the name of the young child, praises a mother of seeking spirit who, seven centuries ago, single-mindedly advanced one step at a time in the footsteps of her mentor.

The letter is only dated November 3, but recent research supports the view that it was written at Sado in 1273.

In May the previous year, the Daishonin had written “Letter to Nichimyo Shonin” (MW-3, 43–53). That letter also was to a woman who, like Oto Gozen’s mother, had traveled from Kamakura to visit the Daishonin at Sado with a young child. The Daishonin praises the woman highly, even giving her the Buddhist name Nichimyo Shonin.

It is generally believed today that Nichimyo Shonin and the mother of Oto Gozen were the same person. This lecture is based on that assumption.

To the mother of Oto Gozen:

Since you revere the Lotus Sutra, you are a woman who is certain to become a Buddha. [Therefore] although in my present circumstances I am ill disposed to write,² I send you letters frequently. Also, I understand that you are looking after the disciples [in Kamakura]. I cannot thank you enough. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1222)

“If you cannot become a Buddha,” he is saying in effect, “then who can?” “If you cannot become happy, then what is the purpose of Buddhism?” This question contains the Daishonin’s spirit.

In times of adversity we can understand a person’s true worth. The actions of Oto Gozen’s mother, Nichimyo Shonin, at the height of great persecution in which “999 out of 1,000 discarded their faith” (MW-3, 69), shine eternally. She is an eternal model for women throughout the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law.

In the fall of 1271, when the Daishonin was nearly beheaded at Tatsunokuchi and then exiled to

Sado Island, there also raged a storm of persecution against his followers. Some were incarcerated, some had their lands confiscated and some were driven out of Kamakura.

As a result of this wave of attacks, many disciples and lay followers abandoned faith. Others, who perhaps did not formally give up their faith, were inwardly defeated. And some not only abandoned faith but also maliciously reviled the Daishonin.

Certainly there were base people who betrayed their comrades and thought only of trying to protect themselves. In the end, such people wind up being trusted by no one. And, above all, they wind up unable to trust even themselves. Losing all support from both within and without, they meet pitiful ends.

But no storm, however great, could put out the fire that blazed in the life of the original Buddha. During his exile to Sado—the greatest persecution of his life—the Daishonin could say with imperturbable calm in “The Opening of the Eyes,” “I, Nichiren, am the richest man in all of present-day Japan” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 151). He succeeded in leaving behind a monumental achievement.

“The flame in my heart for the salvation of all people burns stronger still,” he announces. “The Opening of the Eyes” is the Daishonin’s declaration of his spiritual victory to all his followers. This “message of light” must have illuminated their hearts when they were gritting their teeth in the face of great persecution and struggling to protect one another.

A small fire can easily be extinguished by a gust of wind. But with a large fire, it is just the opposite—the stronger the wind, the higher and more furiously it blazes. Great difficulties are a tailwind for the advance of kosen-rufu.

Shijo Kingo, to whom “The Opening of the Eyes” was entrusted, could not simply sit still in Kamakura. He struck out from the capital for Sado. And Oto Gozen’s mother also undertook the journey. While an adverse wind raged throughout the land, she sought the Daishonin

without a second thought for personal safety.

“How could you fail to attain Buddhahood?” (MW-3, 199), the Daishonin asks, praising her efforts to seek him out and somehow repay her debt of gratitude. “Right now, what can I do to help?” she probably wondered.

It also seems that she had been diligently looking after the Daishonin’s priest disciples in Kamakura. And the Daishonin was profoundly grateful. “I cannot thank you enough,” he says. This passage conveys his sincerity.

In recent years, though, we have seen a great many arrogant priests who take for granted others’ efforts on their behalf. These priests have betrayed the Daishonin.

Above all, your having come here, even though you are a woman, is an expression of

your profound spirit of faith. Whereas in my case, I am only here because I was made to come. I feel immensely indebted. (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1222)

Nichimyo Shonin’s actions were an expression of her earnest faith. What we set our hearts on determines everything.

She certainly did not have particularly favorable circumstances. It appears that she had been separated from her husband for some time. And her daughter Oto Gozen was still, in the Daishonin’s words, an “infant” (MW-3, 53).

But taking her beloved child along, she set out on the journey. It was not uncommon at the time for women to travel alone. In contrast to the well-maintained roads like the one between Kamakura and Kyoto, however, the route to Sado

Milestones of the Thirteenth Century

While the historic events surrounding the life of Nichiren Daishonin were taking place in thirteenth-century Japan, other milestones were occurring in the world. The following are a random sampling of events that occurred around that time.

1250: The Inca state is born at Cuzco in the heart of the Andes Mountains in Peru.

1261: Latin Empire of Constantinople collapses.

1265–1321: Dante Alighieri, author of *Dante’s Inferno* and *The Divine Comedy*, lived.

1270: France’s Louis IX reigned for nearly forty-four years and was canonized as St. Louis in 1297.

1271: Marco Polo, 17, travels to India and the Far East.

1271: Kublai Khan founds the Mongol dynasty that will rule China until 1368.

1272: A silk-reeling machine is invented and will spur the use of silk textiles.

1274: Marco Polo visits Yunnan and will enter the service of Kublai Khan next year and will continue until 1292.

1274: China’s Kublai Khan sends an invasion fleet to conquer Japan, but a typhoon strikes November 20, sinking more than 200 Mongol ships along with 13,000 men sleeping aboard; the survivors retreat to the mainland in terror.

1275: *Chirurgia* by William of Saliceto contains the earliest record of human dissection, a practice discouraged by the Church since 1163.

was a difficult one that entailed crossing both mountains and sea. It was a journey that could take even a strong man as long as three weeks.

We can get a sense of this journey's difficulty if we consider that the trip from Kamakura to Kyoto, a much longer distance, took about two weeks. Also, the stretch of sea that must be crossed to reach Sado is typically rough. People sometimes had to wait for several weeks for the waters to become calm enough to attempt a crossing. The journey by ship was an ordeal unimaginable by today's standards.

The Daishonin is not exaggerating when he describes it as a journey "over treacherous mountains and the raging sea." "The wind and rain," he adds, "make untimely onslaughts" (MW-3, 52).

What a difficult expedition it must have been for a woman with a small child! She plodded along in the early summer heat, taking her daughter by the hand or perhaps carrying her on her back, and wearily wiping the sweat from her brow.

Our Spirit Determines Everything

MOREOVER, this was immediately after an incident of internal strife within the ruling Hojo clan.³ There was much instability. The Daishonin says, "The people...are as bestial as dogs or tigers" (MW-3, 52). Also, the mountains were infested with bandits, and pirates lay in wait on the sea.

Many times, to avoid the night damp, the mother must have had to ask strangers to put them up for a night. There were probably also



times when her daughter would not stop crying. Just thinking about it is heart wrenching. "You must have felt as though you were undergoing the sufferings of the three evil paths" (MW-3, 52), the Daishonin says. That's how difficult a journey it was—but the mother was not defeated.

Why not? Because she was determined to walk the same path to Sado that the Daishonin had walked. She wanted to shoulder the same hardships as her mentor. How admirable! How beautiful and noble!

Faith makes people strong. And people of genuine faith shine the most when they encounter great difficulties. Certainly, it is better not to have obstacles. But from another standpoint, difficulties are benefits. By challenging and overcoming them, we can forge a character of pure and immutable "gold."

Even if all the leaves on a tree should fall off in a strong wind, as long as the branches and trunk remain intact, in time the tree will again produce flowers. Likewise,

the spread of Buddhism will continue as long as there remain people of genuine faith. The important thing, therefore, is to raise one person of genuine faith.

The Daishonin praised the mother of Oto Gozen, saying, "You are undoubtedly the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan" (MW-3, 52). And he gave her the name Nichi-myō Shonin.

Nichi is from Nichiren, meaning sun, and *myō* is the first part of *myōhō*, or Mystic Law. He adds the honorific title Shonin, meaning sage or saint. We see that distinctions between priestly and lay, male and female, did not matter in the least to Nichiren Daishonin; he fixed his gaze solely on people's hearts, their spirit.

Spirit means inner state of life, or one's heart. It decides what we devote our lives to. It is the fundamental prayer on which we base our existence. A person's spirit is invisible but becomes manifest at a crucial moment. Not only that, it also controls everything about a person, each moment of every day

—it is the fundamental determinant of one's life.

The Kegon Sutra says, "The heart is like a skilled painter." Like a great painter, the heart freely creates representations of all things. One's heart is the designer, the painter, the sculptor and the architect of his or her being.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai cites this sutra passage in explaining the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms. He uses the image of a great painter to explain that the heart manifests in the three thousand realms of all phenomena.

It is our spirit, our life-moment, that counts. Our spirit is our hopes, our prayers. And it can also be identified with the subconscious.

"What kind of future do I envision?" we may ask ourselves. "What kind of self am I trying to develop? What do I want to accomplish in my life?" We should paint this vision of our lives in our hearts as specifically as possible. This "painting" becomes the design for our future. The power of the heart enables us to actually execute a wonderful masterpiece in accordance with that design. This is the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms.

The more specific and detailed the blueprint we have in our hearts, the better. The point is to continue vividly painting the target we have and to advance toward that goal single-mindedly. Then, at each instant, the reality of our lives will gradually approach the painting that is our aspiration.

Everything depends on what is in our hearts. Heartfelt prayers will definitely be answered. If we

decide that something is impossible, then, consistent with our minds in thinking so, even things possible will become impossible. On the other hand, if we have the confidence that we can definitely do something, we are already one step closer to achieving it.

In accordance with the principle of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms, pessimistic thoughts or feelings take form, just as they are, in reality, producing negative results. People who have negative thoughts create effects for themselves that perfectly match their thinking.

So it is important to be optimistic. There is no such thing as pessimism in Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra gives us the key that enables us to possess great confidence and burn with hope even amid circumstances that appear despairing. Nichiren Daishonin proved this with his life.

Amid the desolate conditions of Sado, the Daishonin says that he feels "great joy." These words in fact conclude "The Opening of the Eyes."

In a letter to his follower Sairenbo, which he also wrote on Sado, the Daishonin calmly promises, "Although the lord of Kamakura may continue to refuse to pardon Nichiren, I will call upon the heavenly deities, and when I have returned to Kamakura, I will write to you" (MW-7 [2nd ed.], 27). True to his words, the Daishonin returned triumphantly to Kamakura. His victory over incredible odds is proof of the principle of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms.

Above all, I am confident that the Daishonin's resolve for world kosen-rufu in the ten thousand

years and more of the Latter Day was the cause that resulted in the appearance of the SGI, and it called forth Bodhisattvas of the Earth throughout the world.

The power of our hearts is great. Nichimyo Shonin's heart was directed toward the Daishonin. And from him, she learned to share the Lotus Sutra's ideal of all people becoming happy.

She was determined to travel to far-off Sado, even though it meant crossing mountains and treacherous waters. I hope that each of you will steadfastly advance one step at a time toward a great ideal, walking along roads, traveling over mountains and crossing seas, as need be, to reach it.

The Daishonin says, "Even common mortals can attain Buddhahood if they cherish one thing: earnest faith" (MW-1, 268).

We need to direct our spirit, our hearts, toward kosen-rufu. Attaining Buddhahood depends on cherishing such resolve. When we have such a spirit, our lives sparkle with jewels of good fortune and happiness. We undertake a wonderful journey through life in which our dreams, one after another, are accomplished. □

1. "Oto Gozen no Haha Goshō" (*Goshō Zenshu*, pp. 1222–23): thought to have been written in November 1273, when the Daishonin was 52.

2. The original Japanese could also be interpreted as meaning, "Although I am not much of a letter writer...."

3. In 1272, Hojo Tokisuke, an elder half brother of the ruling regent, Hojo Tokimune, plotted to seize power. But Tokimune discovered the plot and swiftly suppressed it by having his brother killed.

The Journey That Touched the Daishonin's Heart

Background commentary to "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen" compiled by the SGI-USA Study Department.

IF you were like most people in thirteenth-century Japan, you would have spent your entire life without ever leaving your native town or village. There would be, of course, treks to the marketplace or to nearby temples or shrines and sometimes the government brought peasants to large cities such as Kyoto or Kamakura as laborers. For many, those trips were the only opportunities to travel outside their local areas, and they were unpleasant ones. In fact, in 1275 a complaint was lodged with the government against a local official for enforcing cruel labor practices on such a trip.

Travelling long distances was dangerous and costly, making it extremely difficult even for those who had an urgent need. As natural disasters, famine and pestilence repeatedly befell Japan during the Daishonin's day, public safety measures did not exist, even outside large cities. Highway robbery and murder were commonplace. Travelers who could afford it hired armed escorts

for their protection, and accommodations along highways were scarce. Horses or attendants were necessary to carry provisions and other belongings. Under these circumstances, it was almost unthinkable for an ordinary woman without escort to travel any great distance.

So, in May of 1272, when a woman from Kamakura suddenly appeared with her young daughter at the doorstep of Nichiren Daishonin's place of exile at Ichinosawa on Sado, a remote northern island in the Sea of Japan, he could scarcely believe it. Later he recalled the visit as "almost too amazing to be true" (MW-3, 197). When the Daishonin was exiled to the island in 1271, it took his party twelve days to travel from Echi near Kamakura to Teradomari where they had to take a ferry to the island. The round trip from Kamakura to Sado and back, therefore, would have taken nearly a month. Having traveled the same road as his visitor, the Daishonin empathizes with her arduous journey:

From Kamakura in Sagami Province to the northern province of Sado is a journey of more than

a thousand *ri* over treacherous mountains and the raging sea. The wind and rain make untimely onslaughts; bandits lurk in the mountains and pirates lie in wait on the sea. The people at every stage and every post town are as bestial as dogs or tigers, and you must have felt as though you were undergoing the sufferings of the three evil paths. (MW-3, 52)

In praise of her earnest desire to seek Buddhism, the Daishonin gave her the name Nichimyo Shonin. *Nichi* of Nichimyo comes from Nichiren, indicating the sun, and *myo* is that of Myoho-renge-kyo. *Shonin* here means a sage or a Buddha. The Daishonin tells her: "You are undoubtedly the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan. Therefore, following the example of Bodhisattva Fukyo, I bestow on you the Buddhist name, Nichimyo Shonin" ("Letter to Nichimyo Shonin"; MW-3, 52).

ACCORDING to Nichiko Hori, the fifty-ninth high priest of Taiseki-ji and noted historian of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the woman whom he named Nichimyo Shonin and the woman who visited him in exile with her young daughter Oto Gozen—the recipient of "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen"—were the same person. Her real name is unknown, and the date when she took faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism is uncertain. She was not a woman of high status, although it appears that she was educated enough to read.

What made her life particularly difficult was the fact that she was a single mother. Nichiren Daishonin touches upon her circumstances as follows: “Nevertheless, despite all the risks involved, you traveled to Sado carrying your infant daughter, since her father, from whom you have long been separated, was not to be depended upon for her care” (MW-3, 53). We do not know the reason she was separated from her daughter’s father.

For a woman to live without a husband and raise a child was no easy task in the patriarchal society of thirteenth-century Japan where women as a rule did not own property and lacked any independent economic means. Nichimyo Shonin had neither a husband nor an adult son upon whom to depend financially. Prejudice toward her for being a single mother must also have run deep. Women were generally looked upon as inferior to men not only socially and economically, but also intellectually, morally and spiritually. The Daishonin describes the misogynist view of women that was pervasive at that time:

A woman’s nature differs from a man’s just as fire differs from water, fire being hot and water cold.... A sutra states that it is a woman’s nature to be jealous, but no sutra says that women are good at seeking Buddhism. A woman’s mind is compared to a breeze; even if it were possible to bind the wind, one could never grasp a woman’s mind. A woman’s mind is likened to characters written on the surface of water; they do not remain a moment. A woman is compared

to a liar; one cannot tell whether a liar’s words are true or false. A woman’s mind is compared to a river, for all rivers meander. (“Letter to Nichimyo Shonin”; MW-3, 51)

Buddhist sutras other than the Lotus, which were generally embraced in Japan, viewed women in a very critical light, as the Daishonin suggests here. Considering the prejudice that she had to suffer as a woman, the Daishonin’s praise no doubt encouraged her greatly. Moreover, it was praise that was fully deserved.

After the shogunate government’s all-out crackdown on the Daishonin’s followers in Kamakura after its attempted execution of the Daishonin in 1271, most believers in the city renounced their faith. As Nichiren Daishonin describes: “When I incurred the displeasure of the government, even in Kamakura 999 out of 1,000 discarded their faith” (MW-3, 69). Many of them even criticized the Daishonin.

The early 1270s were particularly difficult times—the Daishonin was exiled to a remote island as a criminal deemed dangerous to the government, and his movement was virtually destroyed.

It was during this time that she remained steadfast in faith and traveled to see the Daishonin on Sado. She remained true to her teacher, even when many around her bitterly criticized him. And she continued to seek Buddhism from him literally at the risk of her life.

In another letter, Nichiren Daishonin reiterates his praise for her resilience in surviving in an

oppressive, male-dominated society as a single mother:

A woman’s soul is her husband. Without him, she has no soul. Nowadays, even married women find it difficult to get along in the world. Though you have no husband, you lead your life more courageously than those who are married. Furthermore, you maintain your faith in the Buddhist gods and continue to worship the Buddha. You are indeed a remarkable woman. (“The Supremacy of the Law”; MW-3, 196)

The Daishonin’s description of women’s state here is noteworthy: “A woman’s soul is her husband. Without him, she has no soul.” Here the Daishonin states the predominant contemporary view that a woman did not have her own soul—she had no identity and independence of her own.

In this regard, the Daishonin encourages Nichimyo Shonin never to trade her spiritual freedom and independence for the seemingly advantageous protection and security from men and marriage: “No matter whom you may marry, you must not follow him if he is an enemy of the Lotus Sutra. Strengthen your faith more than ever” (MW-3, 199).

AT a time when women’s submission to men, especially to their husbands, was viewed as one of their most celebrated virtues, the Daishonin here encouraged women to actively disobey the men in their lives where those men opposed or interfered with their religious faith and practice.

Considering the social and cultural context of the day, the Daishonin's advice for Nichimyo Shonin is remarkably progressive.

In an era when marriage was viewed as the only source of women's happiness, the Daishonin makes it clear that what is most important to women is not marriage or a man but faith. Through faith a woman can overcome the insecurity that comes with independence and freedom in such a society and reclaim her soul or true identity.

After returning from her visit to Sado, Nichimyo Shonin continued to practice Buddhism in Kamakura while supporting the Daishonin's disciples. As the Daishonin states: "I understand that you are looking after the disciples [in Kamakura]. I cannot thank you enough" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1222). In 1274, the Daishonin was pardoned and returned from his exile to Kamakura. After his third and last remonstrance with the government, he moved to Mount Minobu in order to perpetuate his teaching for posterity.

In October of the same year, Mongolian forces attacked Japan as Nichiren Daishonin had predicted earlier. Although the Mongolian fleet temporarily retreated to the continent mainly due to storms, in April of the following year they sent an envoy demanding that the shogunate government submit or face another attack. The government beheaded the Mongol envoy in defiance. Nonetheless, the entire nation was swept by the fear of another invasion from an enemy whose military strength was far

superior to that of the small island country.

It is at this time that Nichimyo Shonin once again visited the Daishonin at Mount Minobu. He praises her unchanging faith and sincerity as follows:

While I was in Kamakura,... I had no way of determining whether the faith of individual believers in the Lotus Sutra was deep or shallow. This I came to know only after I had incurred the displeasure of the authorities and had been exiled to Sado. Though no one else came to visit me, you, a woman, not only sent me various offerings but personally made the journey to see me. It was almost too amazing to be true. And in addition, you have now called on me here in Minobu. I know of no words with which to thank you. ("The Supremacy of the Law"; MW-3, 196-97)

Judging from this letter, it is evident that over the years the Daishonin and Nichimyo Shonin developed a strong bond of trust. Keenly aware of people's desperate fear for their lives in the wake of the first Mongolian attack, the Daishonin concludes the letter by telling her:

Should any calamity befall us, you should immediately come to visit me here, where you will be welcomed wholeheartedly. Should the worst happen, then let us starve together among these mountains. I would imagine your daughter, Oto, has become a fine and intelligent

young girl. I will write you again. (MW-3, 202)

A passage such as this clearly expresses what is at the core of Buddhism—genuine compassion and trust among people.

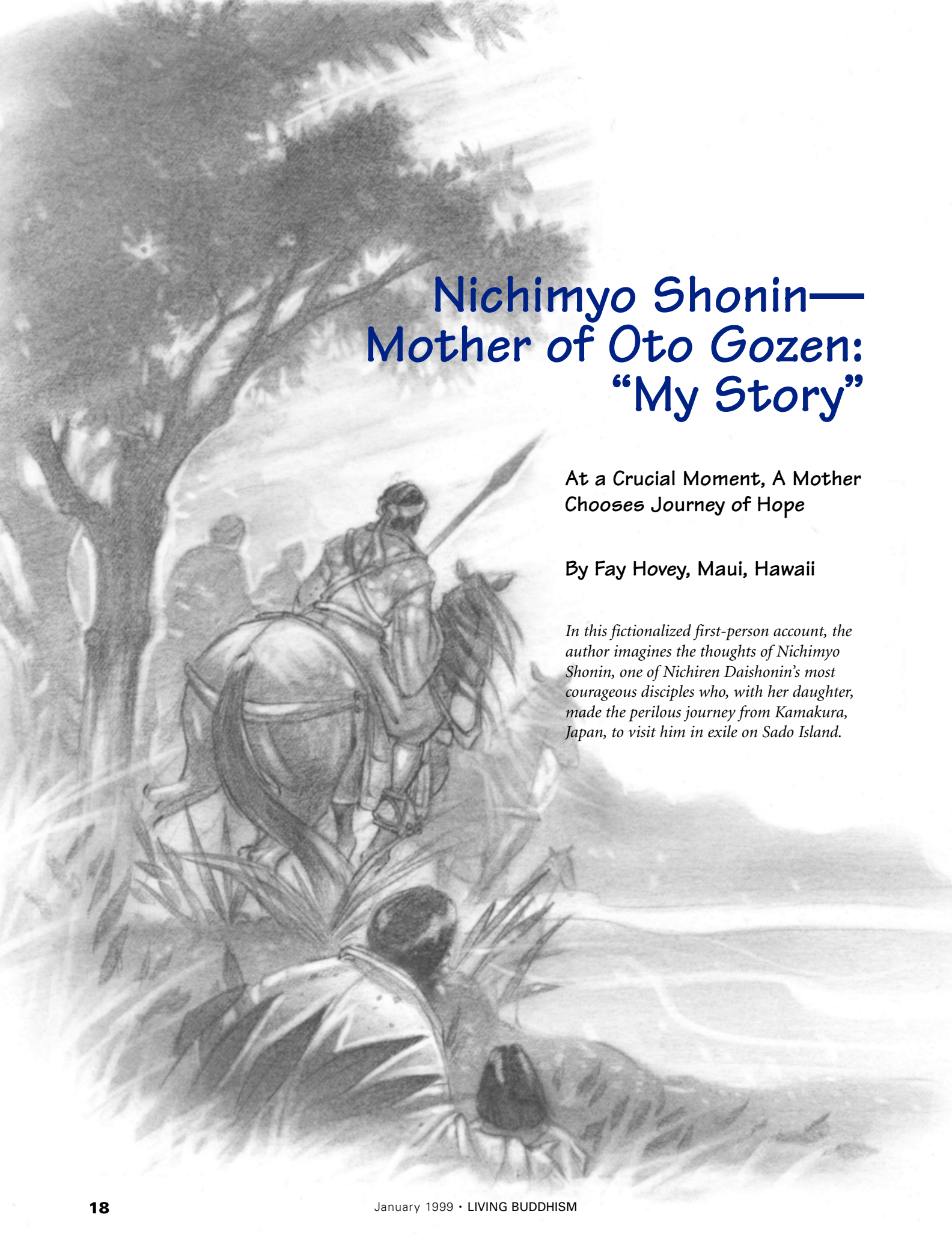
IN 1282, seven years after Nichimyo's visit to Minobu, her beloved teacher died. After the Daishonin's death, five of the six senior priests he had appointed betrayed him and committed numerous errors, misinterpreting his Buddhism.

One such error, for example, was promoting the worship of statues of Shakyamuni Buddha rather than the Gohonzon. The Daishonin's Buddhism, however, was carried on by Nikko Shonin, who left Mount Minobu to protect the integrity of the teachings.

In 1298, sixteen years after the Daishonin's death, Nikko Shonin established a seminary at Omosu in the Fuji area. It is said that Nichimyo Shonin and her now grown daughter, Oto Gozen, visited Nikko Shonin there. Persevering in her faith despite numerous persecutions and prejudice, Nichimyo Shonin developed a profound and heartfelt understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Her faith and experience enabled her to discern who was correctly practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism and who was merely keeping up appearances while in fact distorting it.

The triumph of this believer is instructive for us in many ways. Though nameless, she left a brilliant legacy of faith, especially for many of today's women who still face prejudice and oppression. □



Nichimyo Shonin— Mother of Oto Gozen: “My Story”

At a Crucial Moment, A Mother
Chooses Journey of Hope

By Fay Hovey, Maui, Hawaii

In this fictionalized first-person account, the author imagines the thoughts of Nichimyo Shonin, one of Nichiren Daishonin’s most courageous disciples who, with her daughter, made the perilous journey from Kamakura, Japan, to visit him in exile on Sado Island.

“LOOK!” My little daughter pointed behind us with her small fingers as we made our way along the steep mountain road. Turning, I saw the dust rising up far behind and, kneeling, I placed the palm of my hand on the earth. Horsemen! The ground vibrated with the hooves of horses. I climbed down the embankment, and we took shelter in a thicket as the sound drew closer. It wouldn’t do for a woman alone with a child to be found wandering in such a remote place; so we huddled close, Oto’s face amused at what appeared to her to be a fine game of hide-and-seek. Placing my finger over her lips, I warned her not to cry out and pulled her closer to me as the unmistakable smell of horses and men, long on the trail, drew closer. Soon, they were upon the road above us.

After they were gone, we made our way to the churned-up road and as it was becoming dark, we slipped into the forest, thick with cedar and pine. We found a tree with big roots and a padding of pine needles, and we ate the last of the rice I had brought with us. Oto, still happy to be on an outing, spent the last minutes of light climbing over an old log clad in green moss. The birds soon fell silent, and night filled up the branches of the trees, and then it was completely dark. Singing a little goodnight song, I tucked a thick kimono from my bundle around Oto and she was soon asleep as I sat long into the night, chanting and keeping watch.

A forest at night is very differ-

ent from the daytime. At night, there is only sound: the crack! of a branch, small rustlings of woodland creatures unseen. And hearing the sound of my own heart beating, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” I prayed. May we be protected, may we be guided safely to see the priest Nichiren.

Being a woman alone in the world with a small child was a dangerous thing in my time. I had no protector, no male relative to rely upon. I had no reserves, nothing to hold back hunger for long. And the cold weather was coming. I pushed myself each day to walk further, to make our way over the mountains to the sea, to find a boat somehow, to reach Sado Island in the Japan Sea where they had taken my mentor. Since the loss of my husband, I had felt so vulnerable and alone in the world. There were many times I wanted to give up, just throw myself into a convenient pond or river or just lie down and turn my face to the wall. However, I was chanting and, although something in me wanted me to give up, something else within me was growing stronger each day. I was determined to prevail. And I had Oto to guide and care for.

When dawn drew away night’s black veils, we drank a little water and moved on. We became creatures of the forest, quiet, cautious and alert to any sign of danger. We stooped to drink at streams and chewed on bark to stave off the sharp pangs in our stomachs. Oto soon grew tired of the journey and cried fretfully for food. I found berries and we ate too

many, which made things worse. Avoiding villages along the way as we descended the mountain, we were like ghosts moving invisibly from place to place. Sometimes I thought myself foolish for starting this journey—for putting us both in more danger. But, I tell you, I’ll take a quiet death looking up into the sky through the tree branches over the rough danger of our towns, filled with the sick, the greedy and the unscrupulous. A few times we ventured close into the small homes on the outskirts and sat quietly eating whatever people could spare. One kind old woman gave me a worn pair of shoes and pressed two coins into my palm.

After many weeks of travel, we came upon our first view of the ocean! Waves tumbled in upon the shore, sending all the rocks on the beach to grinding and clicking against one another in a low growl. Clouds of mist rose up and wet our clothing with a salt damp. This was not the tranquil, sparkling expanse I had imagined. The winds tore pieces of clouds like rags, and I couldn’t see Sado Island in the distance at all. At Teradomari we were forced to wait for the storms to pass. I searched for someone to take us across for the two small coins I had knotted into my kimono. I found work doing laundry at an inn and traded my labor for fresh clothing for both of us and precious food. I did not want us to meet the Daishonin half-starved in filthy clothing. Each day I watched the sky, praying that good weather would come soon and we could be on our way. We



were so close at the time and the wait wore on us, but there was no turning back.

Have you ever wanted to see someone so much that you'd go to any length to travel to him or her? All I knew was that the Daishonin had become like my father—my only family—and if I was to die trying to see him again, then I would die. Desperate times bring different things out in people—resources they might not have known they had, actions they did not know they were capable of. My world was filled with desperate people, and I saw this as my journey toward hope, the only true

hope I'd known. I believe, because I was chanting, we managed to make it through, with people helping us just at the right time. It was several weeks before we were under way to Sado with a one-eyed fisherman who tested my two coins between his teeth before waving us on board. The storms had passed but the ocean was still rough, and soon we were green with seasickness, the old man laughing at us both as we hung over the side, miserable and cold. He left us on an unfriendly-looking beach in the harsh night and we stumbled along a small path, making our way toward the dim

and wavering light of a small town.

As we approached, the night watchman hesitated before letting us in. I think he thought we might be ghosts. I'd heard about Sado Island being isolated and severe, but I hadn't realized how dangerous it truly was. The watchman, moved to kindness after deciding we were humans, let us sleep in the gatehouse that night. In the morning, I decided not to ask of my mentor's whereabouts, but instead, listened in the marketplace and near inns for old people's gossip and children's careless chatter.

I needed to find the dwelling at

Ichinosawa. They said an evil priest dwelled there with his acolyte. The priest had angered the military government with his slanderous and demanding words. A good deal was said by those who claimed a first-person encounter with him: that he had the horns of a demon and that even the wolves that roamed the desolate island in packs took care to avoid him. When we approached the residence, I saw wisps of smoke snatched away over the roof by the stiff breeze. After all that way, I was finally standing on the path with my mentor's residence in sight and I was overwhelmed with happiness and relief. I fell to my knees and Oto began to cry. Tears of relief cascaded from my eyes and I opened my mouth to call out, but my voice wasn't there. I looked across the wide channel we had crossed and the dim shape of mainland Japan in the distance. How had I done this?

I had been traveling so long I felt to be no longer myself. Perhaps I really was a ghost! Oto's

cries soon brought someone to the door of the small dwelling. Nikko, the young priest, leaned forward, squinting at us and soon his face broke into a wide smile and he ran toward us with his coarse clothes flapping and tears springing from his eyes. "It is the mother of Oto Gozen! Master! Look who is here!"

And he took up little Oto with one arm and with the other helped me to my feet. "It is hard for me to believe it is really you! I cannot believe it!" We made our way to meet the Daishonin, who hurried down the path calling out our names in disbelief. "Child, it is you! How can this be? How did you get here all by yourselves?"

"M-M-Master," I stammered. "I'm here. I j-j-just had to see you!" And I bowed over and over again with nothing else to say. Oto was happily patting Nikko's shaved head and pulling on his ears while he laughed and tickled her.

"Come in, come in," the Daishonin said. "Sit here by the fire. Tonight, we celebrate your arrival, and you will tell us the

story of your long journey!"

We sat up late into the night, the wind howling around the eaves. They listened with serious faces lit by the fire's glow while I told them of our walk through the mountains and the passage over the sea. They stopped me from time to time, asking about things I'd learned along the way, what people were saying about him on the mainland. They shook their heads in wonder marveling at the protection granted us by the Mystic Law.

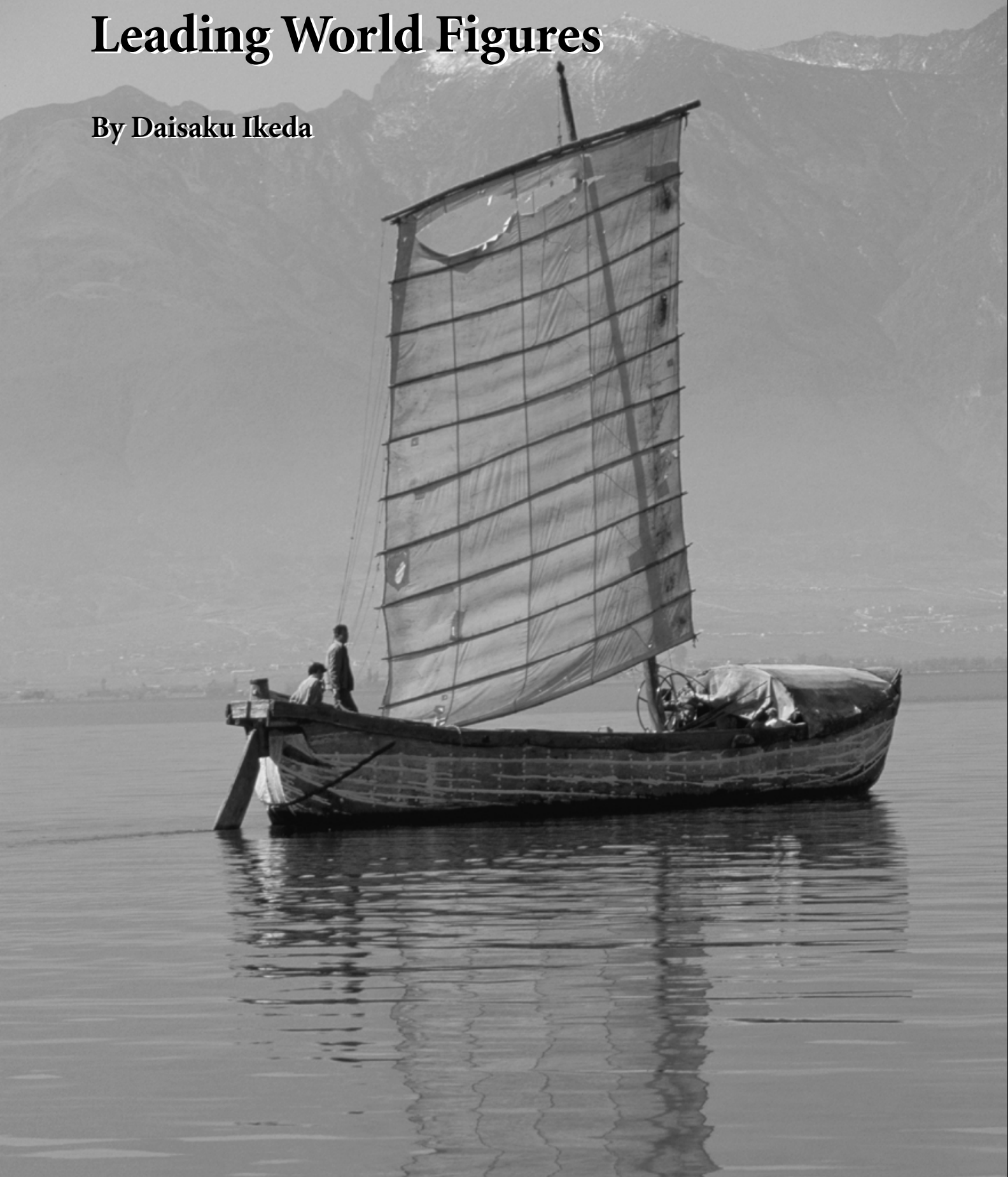
That night, Oto and I wrapped ourselves in deerskins by the fire. The last thing I heard before I slipped over the threshold of sleep was the Daishonin's voice telling me that, no matter what, I could always make my way to him, that I was his family member and his home would always be open to us. Despite the terrifying and lonely circumstances of my life and the hard journey, I had done the right thing: At a crucial moment, I had chosen hope. I smiled and fell into a pure and dreamless sleep. □

Illustrations by Ed Lee



Recollections of Leading World Figures

By Daisaku Ikeda



Warrior With a Pen:

Ba Jin, President of the Chinese Writers Association

It is perhaps only natural that a person persecuted for his or her beliefs may no longer find it possible to trust anyone but the young. My mentor, the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, often stated rather sharply: “I don’t expect anything from the old. I place my hopes on the young.” He said this because he never forgot the bitter memory of one comrade after another—all of his own generation—recanting their beliefs after their arrest and imprisonment by the Japanese military authorities during World War II.

The first time I met the Chinese writer Ba Jin, he had similar words. “Youth,” he said, “are the hope of humanity.” During the decade of China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Ba Jin was slandered as “a great poisonous weed” — his writings condemned as harmful and seditious. He was persecuted and tread upon. Through hearing even a small part of the horror he experienced, I could sense the profound weight of his statement about youth.

We first met in April 1980, nearly a year after I retired as president of the Soka Gakkai. Although of course it wasn’t nearly on the level of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Soka Gakkai itself was in the midst of a storm of persecution by

authoritarian priests within Nichiren Shoshu at that time.

What outrages are perpetrated when fanaticism joins hands with authoritarian power! Is there no limit to the cruelty human beings can inflict upon other human beings? What is it that lowers people to the level of savage beasts?

As attacks on the Soka Gakkai and myself, based on the wildest lies, continued unabated in those days, China’s Cultural Revolution was certainly not something I could be indifferent to.

On that first meeting, I welcomed Ba Jin to our Shizuoka Training Center. He was accompanied by his fellow writers Madame Xie Bingxin and Mr. Lin Lin. A group of visiting junior high school girls from Tokyo greeted our Chinese guests by singing “A Hope-filled Twenty-first Century” and “With the Strength of Youth.” Their rosy cheeks glowed in the gentle spring sunlight as they filled the verdant garden with song.

Beaming with delight, Ba Jin told the students that watching young people grow gave him inordinate pleasure. He sincerely thanked them and said: “Youth are the hope of all humanity. Our efforts for Sino–Japanese friendship are really for all of you, as well as for the young people of China.”

Altogether, Ba Jin and I have met four times. Each time, I sensed behind his aura of gentle humility an inner strength that comes from an ironlike conviction. Ruthless persecution drove many to suicide during the Cultural Revolution. I once asked the Chinese writer if he had ever contemplated death during those bitter days. “No,” he said, adamantly, “I never considered it... I experienced much pain and hardship during that time, but through it all my only thought was ‘I have to keep fighting, I have to make it through to the very end.’”

During the Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin was attacked with such labels as “Mafia boss of the literary world” and “reactionary.” His house was raided by the Red Guards and his wife beaten with a copper-buckled belt. Condemned as a “monster and demon” — a hated class enemy — he was placed in one of many private prisons known as “barns” and interrogated there for days on end. He was forced to confess to crimes he did not commit. He was insulted and denounced before a large public assembly. He was treated in an utterly inhumane fashion.

He was torn from his friends. His pen — the very life of a writer — was taken from him. His wife, who was his only support, was also

persecuted. When she fell ill, she was refused treatment for being the wife of a “poisonous weed.” By the time she was finally admitted to a hospital, it was already too late. Three weeks later, she died.

Even a decade after the Cultural Revolution, Ba Jin spoke of suffering from nightmares and physical pain from the still raw emotional scars of those days.

At first, Ba Jin believed the rhetoric of lofty goals and principles of the Cultural Revolution, but he soon realized that it was all a lie. The Cultural Revolution was little more than a chance for the Gang of Four and other self-declared “true soldiers of the revolution” to advance their own careers by stepping over the corpses of the innocent victims they framed and condemned to death for crimes never committed.

How closely this resembles priests who, while professing true faith, persecuted the very people who were innocent and on the side of truth! Ba Jin has written that the large number of cruel and inhuman acts that marked the Cultural Revolution were engendered by “a religious-like fanaticism cloaked in the robes of the Left.”

Ba Jin was robbed of everything — his beloved wife, his work, even his dignity as a human being. Yet, he kept his eyes open and cried out defiantly in the innermost depths of his heart: “Come what may! I am ready for you. I will survive!”

Then the storm passed. In its aftermath, Ba Jin pledged to write about why the great farce of the Cultural Revolution had occurred and what would be necessary to keep such a tragedy from ever hap-

pening again. He would leave a record for future generations. And he resolved not to die until he had accomplished that goal. I will never forget the way his eyes flashed with determination as he shared his thoughts with me. There are things that violence cannot take from us, things that only flame up even more brightly when the authorities attempt to suppress them.

As a warrior of the pen, Ba Jin has inherited the spirit of his teacher, the renowned Chinese writer Lu Xun (1881–1936). Writing of his youthful days studying under Lu Xun, Ba Jin compares his teacher to Danko, a legendary folk hero who appears in a short story by the Russian author Maksim Gorky (1868–1936). Danko tore out his own heart and used it as a torch to light the way for the people. In the same way, says Ba Jin, “Lu Xun illuminated my path with the flames of his burning heart for several decades.” To this day, he says, the memory of his mentor gives him courage to go on living; the lessons he learned from him are something he will always remember.

When Ba Jin was a guest speaker in Kyoto at a *Seikyo Shimbun*-sponsored lecture series, he declared:

I do not write to earn a living or to build a reputation. I write to battle enemies. Who are they? Every outdated traditional notion, all irrational systems that stand in the way of social progress and human development, and all cruelty in the face of love. These are my great enemies.

My pen is alit and my body aflame. Until both burn down to ash, my love and my hate will remain here in the world. (April 11, 1980)

Born in 1904, Ba Jin confesses that age, in addition to illnesses and accidents, has at times made his pen feel as heavy as lead. But he has always kept on writing every day, even if only a few lines. He has a fire in his heart that he must express; he has a spiritual debt that he feels must be paid.

Several weeks after our first meeting in Shizuoka, I had another opportunity to meet the Chinese author, this time in Shanghai. He came to the hotel where I was staying, and we shared a discussion on the subject of politics and literature. He said: “Literature cannot be separated from politics. But politics can never take the place of literature, because it is literature that builds the human spirit.”

Some literature intentionally expresses no interest in politics, with the result that its ability to decry authoritarian abuses of power atrophies. In contrast, as long as literature is lovingly connected to the lives of the people, it cannot help but keep a watchful eye on politics.

In this respect, Ba Jin’s view of literature is rooted in the traditional Chinese notion that literature is an important national endeavor and immortal enterprise. For him, literature is not a hobby or a distraction; it requires the awareness that each word, each sentence one writes, could sign one’s death warrant.



Chinese author Ba Jin greets SGI President Ikeda at his home in Shanghai, 1984. Ba Jin was persecuted during China's infamous Cultural Revolution of the late sixties.

“No great work of literature has ever been composed following the dictates of a ruler,” says Ba Jin. “It is always the people who determine literature’s greatness.” Writing, he asserts, is just telling the truth and confronting lies.

“Youth are the hope of humanity”—Ba Jin actually first learned these words in the mid-1920s from the American anarchist Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who was arrested and eventually executed for a crime he didn’t commit. Ba Jin, who was studying in Paris at the time, wrote to him in prison. And Vanzetti’s reply contained those words. In that reply, a spiritual

baton was passed from a prisoner, who stood falsely accused and condemned to death because of his political beliefs, to a young student in a foreign land. May the next generation not commit such foolish, ignorant acts. May you build an age of truth—this was Vanzetti’s heartrending cry.

On another occasion, in June 1984, I visited Ba Jin’s home in Shanghai. His library contained many Japanese books, including a comprehensive collection of Japanese literature.

“Our young writers are making such great strides that I almost can’t keep up with them,” he

exclaimed. “I’m going to find myself left behind!” Delighting in the growth of the next generation, yet determined to continue progressing himself, Ba Jin’s voice was that of perpetual youth.

Because I was worried about his health, I took my leave early. But Ba Jin rose from his seat, determined to see me off. He took up his walking stick and, supported by his daughter Li Xiaolin, walked with me out of the house and through the garden. Though I repeatedly asked him not to trouble himself any further, he insisted on walking with me, through the gate, down the stone steps, all the way to the street. When I waved from the car window, I saw a scene that remains to this day a treasured memory: Ba Jin and his entire family, including his grandchildren, waving back to me.

Since I myself have walked the thin line between life and death, I sensed a communication between us that transcended words and speech. As I continue to pray for Ba Jin’s health and long life, I, like him, also see in the young the light of hope. And I pray that all my friends will remain forever young at heart.

The eternal warrior Ba Jin once said: “Young people should always fight their own battles and make what they win their own. That is what it means to be a youth!” □

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (11)

This series is based on The Dark History of the Fuji School: Revealing the Origin of the Nikken Sect (Ankoku no Fuji Shumonshi: Nikken Shu no Engen o Kiru) by Hajime Kawai, a vice senior advisor of the Soka Gakkai Study Department.

Last month's installment explained how the school capitulated to government decrees in matters of Buddhist tradition and the joining and splintering of the school with other Nichiren schools.

In 1912 the Fuji School renamed itself Nichiren Shoshu.

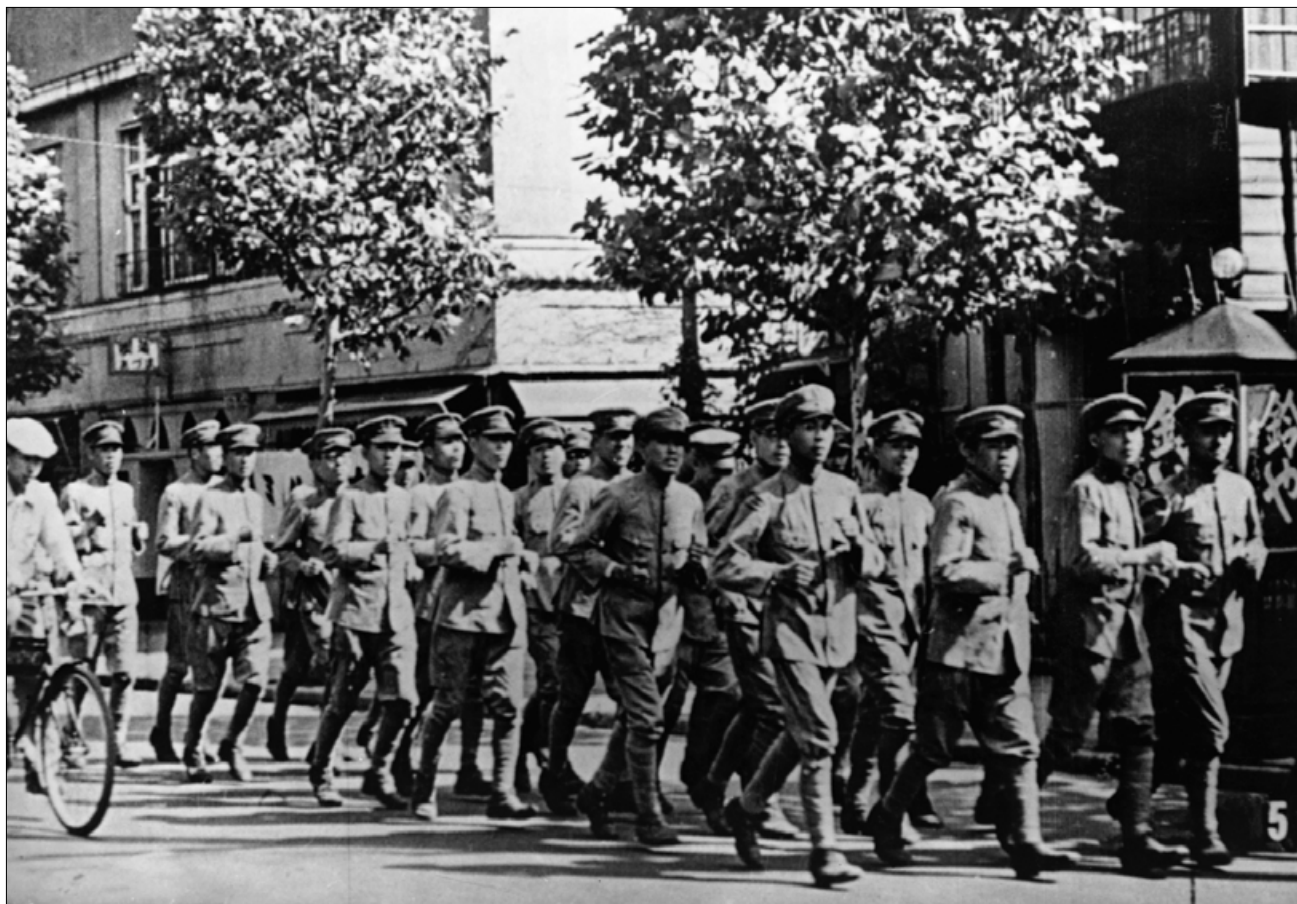
Chapter 11: The priesthood wartime behavior

(1) The distortion of the Daishonin's teaching

ON December 25, 1926, Japan's Emperor Taisho died. A new emperor, Showa—known to the world outside Japan by his given name, Hirohito—succeeded, and the era was renamed Showa. During Hirohito's reign Japan grew increasingly nationalistic, with the military gaining a growing influence in politics. As the nation ran headlong toward war, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood succumbed to pressure from the government and compromised

Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in support of the nation's war efforts and the state-supported Shinto religion, which promoted belief in the divinity of the emperor. The priesthood's behavior contrasted sharply with that of the newly formed Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, whose first and second presidents demonstrated uncompromising commitment to the integrity and spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism. (The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai or "the educational society for value-creation" was the name of the Soka Gakkai prior to the war and its postwar reconstruction.)

During the 1920s and 30s, Japan's militarist regime tightened its control over thought and religion. It



The rise of Japan's militarist regime in the 1920s and 30s brought about tightened control over its society, including religion. The response of the priesthood led by the high priest and the lay Soka Kyoiku Gakkai led by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi dramatically contrasted their respective understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

cracked down upon religious organizations deemed unfavorable to government policy. The Omoto, Hitonomichi and Honmichi sects were disbanded by the government. In 1941, the government revised the Maintenance of the Public Order Act in order to unify all religious organizations under the umbrella of state Shinto. The revised act stipulated "any blasphemous act against the dignity of a Shinto shrine" as punishable with the maximum sentence of death. The act became a pretext for the government to oppress religious organizations, especially newly established groups and Christian denominations.

The government also pressured the various Nichiren schools to delete passages from the Daishonin's writings it viewed as disrespectful toward the emperor and the Shinto deity. In June 1941, the

newly merged Nichiren School, which consisted of the Minobu, Kenpon Hokke and Hon'mon schools, decided to delete 208 phrases and passages from about seventy of the Daishonin's writings. The school also discontinued the publication and sale of any of the Daishonin's writings.

Following the lead of the combined Nichiren School, the Nichiren Shoshu administrative office issued a notice, dated August 24, 1941, stating that because the Daishonin's works were written over 700 hundred years ago in accordance with the social conditions of the Kamakura period, people of the present age in reading his writings might "doubt the Daishonin's desire to respect the emperor and protect his empire." Thus the priesthood decided to stop publication of the Daishonin's writings.

The notice also states: “The doctrine that the Buddha is true while deities are transient is a vulgar belief in Buddhism.... This school, therefore, shall not rely on this doctrine as it has been previously interpreted.” Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism views the positive and nurturing workings of the environment as “Buddhist gods” and regards them as ephemeral manifestations of the Mystic Law to which Buddhas are enlightened. In this sense, his teaching subordinates “deities” to “Buddhas.” Fearing oppression from the government, the priesthood thus abandoned one of the essential teachings of its founder.

Furthermore, on September 29, the Nichiren Shoshu study department issued a notice that instructed the deletion of passages from the Daishonin’s writings where the nation’s sovereignty or the Sun Goddess—which Shinto considered as the supreme deity and as the origin of Japan’s imperial lineage—is described as inferior or subordinate to the Buddha. For example, the priesthood deleted the passage where the Daishonin states, “I am the foremost sage in the entire world” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 259). Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, who restored the Daishonin’s teaching within the Fuji School by correcting erroneous doctrines advocated by his predecessors, considered the above passage one of those constituting scriptural proof of the Daishonin’s identity as the original Buddha. The Fuji School’s view of the Daishonin’s identity was a doctrinal mainstay that distinguished it from other Nichiren denominations, especially the Minobu School. The notice from the priesthood’s study department also prohibited the use of the deleted passages in sermons or lectures. The priesthood’s decision to delete key passages of the Daishonin’s writings and ban their usage was a serious doctrinal compromise.

In addition, Nichiren Shoshu revised the silent prayers of its liturgy in order to appease the military regime. Published in an August 22, 1941, notice, the new silent prayers extolled the nationalistic ideals of the military regime and promoted state Shinto. For example, the revised first silent prayer read in part, “I humbly thank the Sun Goddess, the ancestor of the emperor, and all emperors of the successive reigns since the time of first Emperor Jimmu for the great debt of gratitude I owe to them.” In the fourth silent

prayer, a prayer for the wide spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the priesthood inserted nationalistic expressions such as “the unity of government and people” and “the increase of the nation’s majesty.”

Behind the priesthood’s doctrinal compromise was one high-ranking official of Nichiren Shoshu. Jimon Ogasawara, then a director of propagation, strongly requested that the priesthood adopt the doctrine of the Buddha being subordinate to the Shinto deity. Also, regarding the silent prayers, Ogasawara sharply criticized the head temple administration. In the magazine *Sekai no Nichiren* (Nichiren of the world), he wrote: “To place the Sun Goddess after Brahma, Indra and the king devil of the sixth heaven is a great blasphemy. Heavenly deities worshiped in India such as Brahma and Indra must be deleted at once.” His criticism was heard, and the Indian deities were promptly deleted from the silent prayers while the Shinto deity and the emperor were given a more prominent place.

Ogasawara’s scheme was chiefly motivated by his desire to gain control within the head temple administration. Earlier in his career, he supported Nichikai (father of Nikken; later to become the sixtieth high priest) in order to remove Nitcho, the fifty-eighth high priest, from office. But when Nichikai campaigned for the high office in an election after the resignation of the fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko, Ogasawara supported his opponent, Koga Arimoto. Nichikai won the election, and Ogasawara lost his influence. Ogasawara was then forced out of the priesthood’s ruling faction. By advocating a doctrine that subordinated Buddhism to Shinto, Ogasawara attempted to regain his influence.

Through his close associations with military officials, Ogasawara caused the government to apply pressure on Taiseki-ji. He also sent a letter to High Priest Nikkyo, asking him to clarify his stance regarding the relative merits of the Buddha and the Shinto deity. Ogasawara attempted to lure Nikkyo into making a statement offensive to the military regime, thus placing the high priest in a vulnerable position. Ogasawara’s scheme, however, was not successful. He underestimated the priesthood’s willingness to compromise its doctrinal integrity to protect itself.

On September 14, 1942, the priesthood expelled Ogasawara, charging him with minor violations of the priesthood’s rules and regulations such as failing to pay administrative dues. The decision, however, was

political, not doctrinal. The fact that the priesthood continued to support the military regime's nationalistic propaganda based on state Shinto after Ogasawara's expulsion indicates that the head temple administration's decision was motivated by its desire to remove a hostile element to the controlling faction, not by its intent to punish Ogasawara for advocating an erroneous doctrine.

On December 7, 1941, with its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan declared war against the United States and Great Britain. At the start of the Pacific war, High Priest Nikkyo issued the following message: "Today His Majesty declared war on the United States of America and Great Britain. I can hardly suppress my awe and joy at this.... I ask that all believers summon forth the faith and practice they assiduously developed thus far and ensure victory in this great, unprecedented battle, through their resolve to endure any hardship and exert their utmost in their respective positions and capacities."

As the nation plunged into war, the priesthood's support for the military regime became even more enthusiastic. The January 1942 issue of *Dai-Nichiren*, the priesthood's official magazine, carried Nikkyo's New Year message in which he repeated nationalistic propaganda in support of the nation's war efforts. In this message, Nikkyo declares, "It is the purpose of the founder's advent for us to realize the principle—'The world is the Japanese nation'—through loyally dedicating our lives to the nation." On October 10, 1942, one month after Ogasawara's expulsion, the Nichiren Shoshu administrative office issued a notice instructing believers henceforth to face and worship in the direction of the Ise Shinto Shrine at 10:00 a.m. every October 17, when an important annual Shinto harvest festivity was customarily held there.

This act by the priesthood would certainly have been viewed as an abomination by Nikko Shonin, who instructed his disciples as follows: "Lay believers should be strictly prohibited from visiting [heretical] temples and shrines. Moreover, priests should not visit slanderous temples or shrines, which are inhabited by demons, even if only to have a look around. To do so would be a pitiful violation [of the Daishonin's Buddhism.] This is not my own personal view; it wholly derives from the sutras [of Shakyamuni] and the writings [of Nichiren Daishonin]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1617).

On November 19, 1942, the priesthood established the Nichiren Shoshu Association for Serving the Nation (Jpn. Nichiren Shoshu Hokokudan) "in order that priests and lay believers in each parish cooperate and unite for the promotion of the movement to serve the nation." The association's chief purpose—to serve the nation—meant to support the national war effort. The association raised money for the war and encouraged its members to pray for Japan's victory as well as for the success and good fortune of the Imperial Army. The high priest became the association's first secretary general.

While the priesthood supported the nation's war efforts, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai continued to uphold the Daishonin's teachings and refused to accept Shinto. The priesthood grew nervous about the lay organization's stance. In June 1943, the priesthood summoned Gakkai leaders to the head temple. With Nikkyo, the sixty-second high priest, and Nichiko, the retired fifty-ninth high priest, in attendance, Jikai Watanabe, then director of general affairs, instructed Gakkai members to accept a Shinto talisman, a small paper religious object depicting the Sun Goddess that the government was urging all households to enshrine and worship. President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi refused. Later that same month, Makiguchi returned to the head temple to remonstrate with the high priest on this point. His warning, however, fell on deaf ears.

Instead of heeding Makiguchi's warning, the priesthood attempted to discipline the Gakkai leaders for their disobedience by barring them from the head temple. In July, twenty-one Soka Gakkai leaders, including President Makiguchi and General Director Josei Toda, were arrested. Shortly before the crackdown on June 16, Renjo Fujimoto, a Nichiren Shoshu priest was arrested for treason. Fujimoto died in prison in January 1944. Alarmed by the arrests, the head temple administration expelled Fujimoto from the priesthood and stripped the Gakkai leaders of their status as believers in the school. The priesthood denied all ties with those who had offended the military regime on account of their belief in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Still Nichiren Shoshu's support for the nation's war efforts and its disciplinary measures against those who disobeyed were not enough to put the minds of Nichiren Shoshu priests at ease. During priests' seminars



The attack by Japanese forces on Pearl Harbor in 1941 brought the United States into World War II. The battleships U.S.S. West Virginia and Tennessee sit low in the water and burn. The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood supported the Japanese war effort with prayer and raw materials from its head temple grounds. The lay leaders—of what would become the Soka Gakkai—strongly opposed the folly of Japan’s militarist regime and were imprisoned.

held at Taiseki-ji on August 21 and 22 and again on August 25 and 26, the head temple administration instructed participants to enshrine a Shinto talisman in their living quarters at their branch temples. On November 1, the head temple’s administrative office issued a notice instructing all believers to visit a local Shinto shrine for a Shinto festivity to commemorate the birth of the late Emperor Meiji and to pray for Japan’s victory in the war.

The priesthood also contributed head temple properties to the military regime. Giant cedar trees on the temple grounds were felled for lumber, and a large

bell was removed for military use. The priesthood’s official magazine, *Dai-Nichiren*, reported in 1944:

The contribution of good timber from our sacred grounds was made so that it may be turned into ships to crush the United States and Great Britain, and this accords with the honest desire of the Buddha to secure the peace of the land through establishing the truth (*risho ankoku*).... These old cedar trees and the large bell, which have been donated,... shall respectively become a ship to carry the soldiers, supplies and weapons of the imperial

army and bullets to penetrate the breasts of fierce enemies as intended by the Buddha.

In December 1944, the priesthood made a grand lodging hall on the head temple grounds available for a regiment of the Korean Volunteer Army. Despite its euphemistic name, the “volunteer army” consisted of Koreans brought to Japan as farm laborers from their occupied country, under the command of Japanese military officers. Soon after the regiment came to the head temple, a Shinto talisman was enshrined in the Grand Lodging Hall next to the high priest’s living quarters. The enshrinement of a Shinto talisman at the head temple was emblematic of the priesthood’s distortion of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

(2) The martyrdom of Makiguchi

WHILE the priesthood at Taiseki-ji was plagued with corruption and factional infighting in the early 1900s, an important event, though unnoticed at the time, took place in the history of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. In 1928, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi took faith in the Daishonin’s teaching, soon followed by his disciple Jogai Toda, who later renamed himself Josei.

Makiguchi was both an educator in practice and an educational scholar. An elementary school teacher, he later he served as a school principal where he gained experience in school administration. A pioneer of pedagogy in Japan, Makiguchi established a unique theory, which he named “the value-creation educational system.” At the core of his educational theory was his philosophical belief that the purpose of life was the pursuit of happiness, which he equated with the creation of value.

In November 1930, with help from his disciple Toda, Makiguchi formed a group of educators dedicated to educational reform based on Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. The group was called the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai or “Society of Value-Creation Education.” As Makiguchi’s understanding of the Daishonin’s teachings deepened, the Gakkai gradually broadened its scope from that of an educational reform movement to one aimed at building a peaceful

society through the reformation of the individual based on Buddhism.

In 1937, the Gakkai held an official inaugural meeting and started conducting steady activities. Makiguchi himself attended discussion meetings and communicated the Daishonin’s Buddhism to a broader audience. As a result, people from walks of life other than education started to join the Gakkai. In 1941, the organization began publication of its newspaper *Kachi Sozo* (Value-creation). By this time, the membership had grown to two thousand.

As Japan plunged further into war, government control of religious organizations became more intensive. In 1942, the government ordered the Gakkai to cease publication of its newspaper. Despite this pressure from the government, Makiguchi continued to uphold the Daishonin’s teachings. At the same time, he was often critical of the priesthood for its unwillingness to protect the integrity of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

At the fifth general meeting of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai held in November 1942, Makiguchi said, “The Tendai School during the days of Nichiren Daishonin corresponds to today’s Nichiren Shoshu among Nichiren denominations” (*Complete Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi*, vol. 10, p. 151). By the thirteenth century, Japan’s Tendai School, which had been viewed as an orthodox school based on the Lotus Sutra, descended into esotericism similar to that of the Shingon School. Makiguchi indirectly pointed out that despite Nichiren Shoshu’s claim to the orthodoxy of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, its substance had degenerated through currying favor with the military regime. In the same speech, Makiguchi went on: “We must ask who among the existing believers of Nichiren Shoshu is experiencing the three obstacles and four devils” (*Ibid.*, p. 152). Makiguchi no doubt made this statement with the following passage from the Daishonin in mind:

If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. Were it not for these, there would be no way of knowing that this is the true teaching. One passage from the same volume reads, “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should neither be influenced nor frightened by them. If you fall under their influence, you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism.” This quotation not only applies to

Nichiren but also is the guide for his disciples. Reverently make this teaching your own and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations. (MW-1, 145)

Clearly his statement was directed toward the priesthood, which was compromising the Daishonin's teachings to avoid government persecution. In this regard, Makiguchi also said: "Those who are instructing others without experiencing persecutions themselves are none other than the jailers of hell leading people to the evil paths."

Inspired by Makiguchi's strict guidance, Gakkai members refused to accept the Shinto talisman promoted by the Government. But the Gakkai's uncompromising stance made the priesthood uneasy. As a result, the priesthood summoned Makiguchi and other Gakkai leaders to the head temple and instructed them to accept the Shinto talisman.

As mentioned before, Makiguchi rejected the priesthood's order. In his essay titled "The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai," Josei Toda describes the incident as follows:

The head temple feared persecution if it supported Mr. Makiguchi's contention that unless they follow the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, any country, family or individual would experience punishment. It seemed that the head temple was more frightened of the possible persecution it would face from the military if believers did not obediently enshrine the Shinto object of worship.

In June 1943, Soka Gakkai leaders were ordered to the head temple.... Jikai Watanabe, on behalf of Nichiren Shoshu, suggested that the Gakkai members receive this Shinto talisman in the meantime and follow the direction of the military for awhile. This suggestion was made with the current and retired high priests on hand as witnesses.

Again, Nikko Shonin states in his 'Twenty-six Admonitions' that we should not follow even the high priest if he takes actions that oppose the teachings of true Buddhism. In this spirit, President Makiguchi resolutely rejected the idea of accepting the Shinto talisman and left the head temple. On the way home, he said to me: "What I lament is not that one sect will be ruined, but that our nation will perish. I am afraid that the Daishonin is indeed sorrowful about this

plight. Isn't this the time to admonish the entire nation? I don't know what the head temple is afraid of." (*Seikyo Times*, June 1991, p. 31)

When Makiguchi and other Gakkai leaders were arrested on charges of treason and other violations of the Maintenance of Public Order Act in July 1943, Nichiren Shoshu stripped them of their status as lay believers. In the same essay, Toda comments on the reaction of the priesthood as follows:

We should take to heart the strictness of the Daishonin's golden teachings without fearing authority. President Makiguchi had such vehement spirit. Nevertheless, the warped military government treated him like a criminal, even though he had committed no crime. Twenty-one Soka Gakkai leaders were imprisoned solely because they refused to enshrine talismans of the Sun Goddess. At that time, many believers and priests at the head temple were shocked and at a loss as to what to do. When I heard about this, I was ashamed of them. President Makiguchi, myself and our followers were barred from visiting the head temple, and the whole country criticized our families as being enemies of the nation. Those were very strange days." (*Ibid.*, p. 31)

Makiguchi, despite intimidation from the government and inhumane conditions in Japan's wartime prison, upheld his belief to the end. He asserted the correctness of the Daishonin's Buddhism to the interrogating prosecutors. The August 1943 issue of *The Special Police Monthly Report* published some of Makiguchi's responses during the interrogations. When asked about the Gakkai's treatment of the Shinto talisman, Makiguchi responded:

Nowadays a talisman of the Sun Goddess is enshrined in almost every home. So, above all, I have been encouraging [Gakkai members] to remove them. The reason for their removal is that if individual members enshrine [the talisman] as an object of devotion, it will confuse their faith in the Gohonzon, thus slandering the Law. Furthermore, to enshrine a talisman of the Sun Goddess at home will instead amount to committing treason for the reason I mentioned before. Needless to say, to visit and offer a prayer at

those shrines and temples would be to slander the Law. Since the retribution from slandering the Law is weighty, I have been instructing [Gakkai members] not to pay a visit.

When asked if he thought Japan was an evil society of the Latter Day in light of the Lotus Sutra, Makiguchi responded: “[The Daishonin] states that a nation will experience disasters—such as internal strife, revolution, famine and pestilence—and be led to ruin [if it slanders the Lotus Sutra]. Our past history indicates that we experienced such incidents and similar national disasters. The cause for the current Japan-Sino conflict and the war in greater East Asia lies in the nation’s slander of the Law.” It should be noted that Makiguchi made these statements at a time when the emperor was considered divine, and war declared under his name as just and sacred. Makiguchi was well aware that his statements were clearly in violation of the Maintenance of Public Order Act, whose maximum sentence was capital punishment.

EMACIATED from malnutrition and old age, Makiguchi died in Tokyo detention center on November 18, 1944. He was 73. The day before, he had been moved out of solitary confinement. Having refused any help from the guard, he dressed himself and walked to the prison’s infirmary. Soon afterward he lay down, fell unconscious and the next morning breathed his last.

Later Toda eulogized Makiguchi: “My mentor gave his life to the Lotus Sutra. As he always quoted the Daishonin, saying that it is a wise man’s dishonor to be praised by a fool, he at last was praised by the greatest man of wisdom [Nichiren Daishonin]” (*Complete Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 1, p. 529).

Makiguchi’s martyrdom stood in contrast to the high priest’s tragic death in a fire at Taiseki-ji on June 17, 1945. Around 10:30 p.m., a fire broke out in a meeting hall of the building that housed the high priest’s residence and quickly spread through his living quarters, the adjacent study, the Mutsubo Hall and the Reception Hall. It continued to burn until 4:00 a.m. next day. The fire was caused by a student priest’s cigarette.

A gruesome discovery was made in the charred ruins. High Priest Nikkyo was found dead—his lower

body trapped in an open hearth located in the temple employees’ cafeteria. He was the only one who died in the fire. The high priest had been resting in his quarters directly above the cafeteria. The floor burned through and gave out, and the high priest fell and was trapped in the hearth below.

Several unfortunate coincidences contributed to his death. On the day before the fire, Nikkyo had returned to the head temple from a retreat where he had been convalescing. Obesity combined with illness apparently hindered his escape. During a service at Myoko-ji, a branch temple in Tokyo, in September 1945, Kosei Nakajima, then an acting chief executive of Nichiren Shoshu, made the following remark about the circumstances surrounding the incident:

In the study, three hundred farming corps members were staying. But for some reason, they were unable to assist in fighting the fire. A fire engine parked in front of the gate was not working. Another fire engine at a [military] tank school in Kamiide was out of gasoline. In Fujinomiya, upon hearing of the fire, an engine was quickly readied for duty. But [the fire-fighters] received no order from the department chief, who was absent, and so they remained idle. By the time they received a request from the Ueno Police Station and rushed to the fire, it had already spread through the reception hall, and not much could be done. There were so many adverse conditions that I can only say that [the fire] was truly karmic.

Before an assembly of believers, Nakajima also referred to Nikkyo’s death as “a compassionate admonishment from the Daishonin.” Furthermore, he acknowledged that a student priest caused the fire. Later, however, the priesthood distorted the facts. It announced that the fire was set by Korean Volunteer Army soldiers dissatisfied with Japanese military officers and that the high priest took responsibility for the fire and committed an honorable suicide (from *On Refuting the Counterfeit Dai-Gohonzon Theory* [Jpn Akusho Ita Honzon Gisaku Ron o Funsaisu], published by the Nichiren Shoshu Propagation Society in 1956, pp. 92–95). □

(Translated and edited by
SGI-USA Study Department)

DIALOGUE

on the *Lotus Sutra*

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

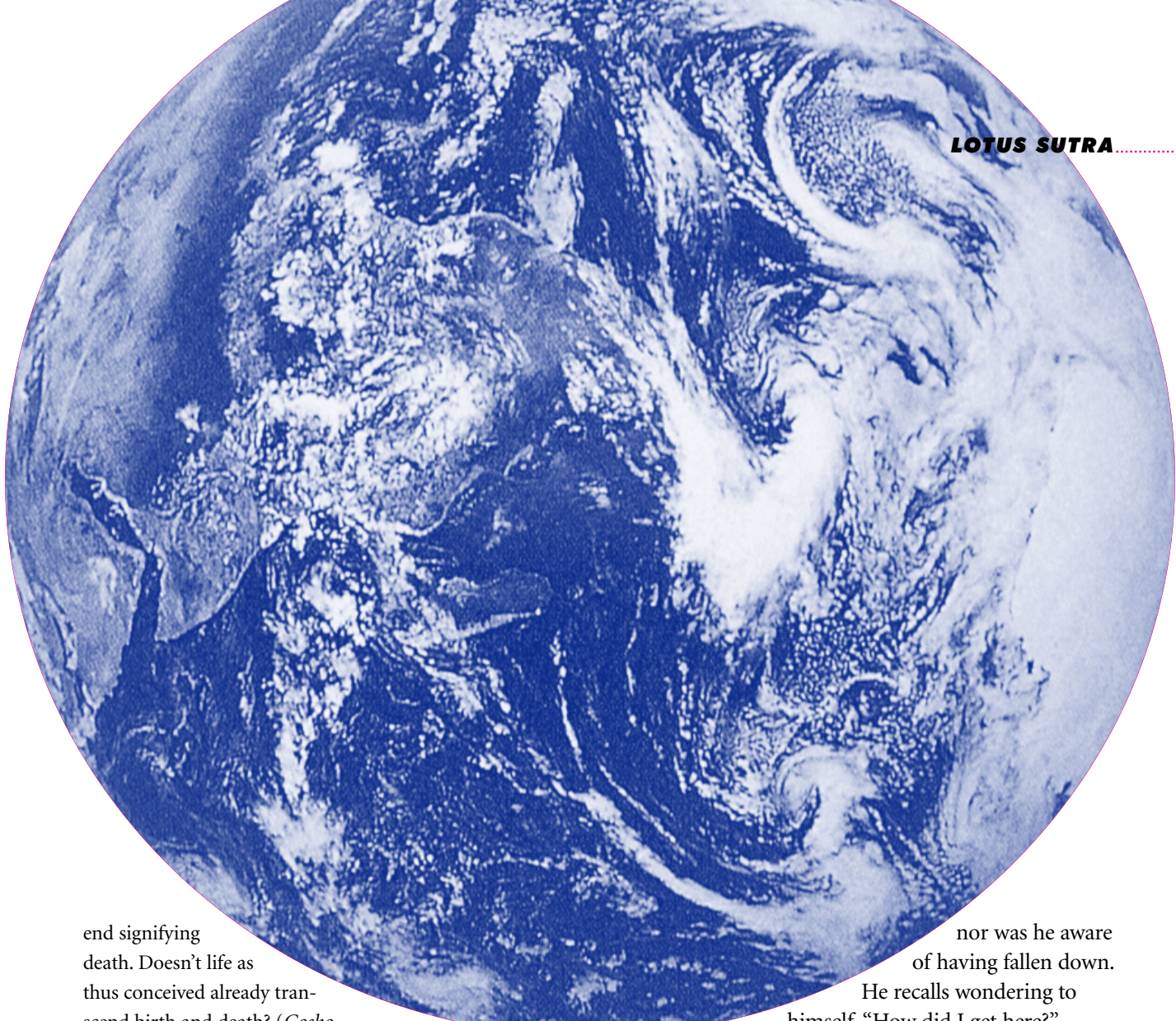
This is the thirty-fourth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra with SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and vice chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the November 1997 issue of *The Daibyakureng*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

Part nine of the discussion on the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra reveals the eternity of life. This time, participants discuss the significance of near-death experiences; the view of life prevalent in the modern world; the relationship of the mind to the brain; and other matters pertaining to the issue of life after death. The discussion points to the urgent need of modern society to establish a correct view of life and death.

34 The “Life Span” Chapter—Testimony to the Eternity of Life

“All that I preach is true and not false. “Why do I do this? The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction. It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse. Nor is it what those who dwell in the threefold world perceive it to be. All such things the Thus Come One sees clearly and without error.” (LS16, 226)¹

To conceive of life and death as separate realities is to be caught in the illusion of birth and death. It is deluded and inverted thinking. When we examine the nature of life with perfect enlightenment, we find that there is no beginning marking birth and, therefore, no



end signifying death. Doesn't life as thus conceived already transcend birth and death? (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 563)

HARUO SUDA: I heard about the experience of Richard Yoshimachi, a vice general director of the SGI-USA. On April 10, 1993, Mr. Yoshimachi suffered a myocardial infarction while at the SGI-USA Headquarters in Los Angeles and was immediately taken to a nearby hospital. He complained of a tightness in his chest. Told that they would draw some blood, he responded, "Okay," and then immediately blacked out. When he came to, he found himself surrounded by doctors and nurses. The head nurse was holding his hand. While he was unconscious, his heart had stopped beating for about twenty seconds.

In that time, Mr. Yoshimachi had a remarkable experience. He explained that he found himself surrounded by total darkness in a world of complete silence. He felt no pain and sensed nothing unusual about his heart,

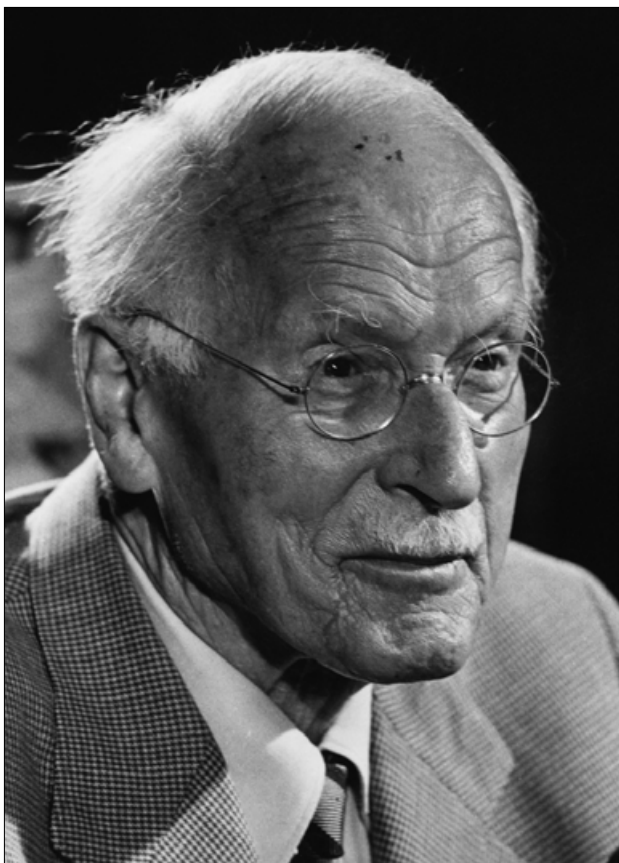
nor was he aware of having fallen down. He recalls wondering to himself, "How did I get here?"

Looking down, he could see his bare feet, but could discern no surface on which he was standing.

He surveyed the scene around him. To the right he could see nothing, but when he turned to the left, he could make out a faint light coming from somewhere behind his left shoulder. It was far away. It seemed to him as though this faint light was filtering through an opening in a wall.

He immediately walked toward the light. As he did so, it increased in intensity. The light was a tunnel. Following it, he came out in the main auditorium at the SGI-USA Headquarters. The auditorium was a place he had been on many occasions, attending to matters on stage. He now saw himself there. A meeting was going on.

Looking to his right, he saw the smiling faces of members who were seated. On stage, he saw you, President Ikeda, giving a speech. You also wore a bright smile. It then occurred to him that this was the SGI-USA



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General Meeting held three months before on January 27, 1993. At that moment he opened his eyes to find everyone staring down over him as he lay in bed.

DAISAKU IKEDA: I recall that general meeting well. At the time, Mr. Yoshimachi was the SGI-USA youth division leader. Just before that, his mother, who was living in Japan, had passed away. But rather than return immediately to Japan for the funeral, he resolutely stood at the head of the youth division, saying, “I feel that to work for kosen-rufu together with President Ikeda in America is the greatest memorial I can give my mother.”

TAKANORI ENDO: Mr. Yoshimachi’s experience sounds like a dream. But seeing light in darkness and observing things from outside one’s body are in fact typical of the experiences of people who have been close to death.

SUDA: That’s true. After undergoing a week of intensive therapy, Mr. Yoshimachi told the attending physician, who was a heart specialist, what he had felt while he was unconscious. The doctor responded that

In 1944 psychologist Carl Jung lost consciousness due to a heart attack. During the subsequent near-death experience, he found himself floating high in space and “saw the globe of the earth, bathed in a glorious blue light. I saw the deep blue sea and the continents.” It would be many years later in the age of space travel before people enjoyed such a view.

he knew of a number of cases where people recounted similar experiences.

IKEDA: In recent years, quite a bit of research has been done on near-death encounters. I understand that full-fledged statistical surveys are being conducted.

KATSUJI SAITO: Yes. A United States survey revealed that fifteen percent of Americans sampled reported having had a narrow brush with death. Of these, one in three, or as many as eight million people in the U.S. population, reported having had some kind of “other-worldly experience” at that time.²

ENDO: Eight million people—that’s a phenomenal number.

IKEDA: It would be a waste to let such experiences simply go unnoticed. In the future, I hope to see a similarly rigorous survey conducted worldwide.

In a sense, whether there is an afterlife, and, if so, what kind of place it is, is of far more importance than space exploration. It is one of humankind’s greatest issues, for an answer to this question could completely change the thinking and way of life of people everywhere.

I seem to recall that the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875–1961) describes his encounter with death in his autobiography.

ENDO: Yes. In 1944, Jung suffered a myocardial infarction and collapsed, consequently breaking a leg. He writes that, as he lost consciousness, he then had an incredible experience:

It seemed to me that I was high up in space. Far below I saw the globe of the earth, bathed in a gloriously blue light. I saw the deep blue sea and the continents. Far below my feet lay Ceylon, and in the distance ahead of me the subcontinent of India. My field of vision did not include the whole earth, but its global shape was plainly distinguishable and its outlines shone with a silvery gleam through that wonderful blue light. In many places the globe seemed colored, or spotted dark green like oxidized silver....

Later I discovered how high in space one would have to be to have so extensive a view—approximately a thousand miles! The sight of the earth from this height was the most glorious thing I had ever seen.³

IKEDA: He remarks that the Earth appeared blue. That was before the time of the Soviet cosmonaut Yury Gagarin (1934–68), wasn't it?

SAITO: Gagarin [the first person to travel in space] orbited the Earth in 1961, so it was seventeen years before that. In 1944, when Jung wrote this, no one had ever seen the Earth from outer space.

ENDO: Jung says that after viewing the Earth, he began to drift through space with the Indian Ocean behind him. He saw a large black boulder. The middle of the boulder was hollowed out, and it became a Hindu temple. Jung entered. While there, he describes feeling as though he had discarded all he ever knew and thought, and everything existing on the earth.

IKEDA: It must have been a very vivid experience. This became a major impetus behind Jung's broad-ranging investigations into the world of the spirit.

ENDO: In fact, it seems that Jung was convinced that there is life after death.

The Last Moment: A Settling of Life's Accounts

IKEDA: Being close to death is of course not the same as being dead. Still, it is doubtless an instant in which we powerfully sense the reality of death. As a result, for many people, having a near-death experience completely changes the way they live the remainder of their lives.

ENDO: Certainly it seems there are many cases where such people became more tolerant toward and actively concerned about the well-being of others.

SUDA: Mr. Yoshimachi describes having wondered, "Can it be that we really have so little control over ourselves at the time of death?" He recalls saying to himself, "Life is so fleeting and fragile," and being left with a powerful awareness of the need to spend each day so that if he were to die at any moment he would have no regrets.

SAITO: That's the spirit Nichiren Daishonin described as regarding the present as the last moment of one's life.

Though different from what's been termed a near-death experience, it seems that many people who live through major disasters also find their view of life greatly changed by the ordeal. I have heard of a number of such accounts from survivors of the Great Kobe Earthquake (January 1995), many of whom reported that they realized there is something far more precious than material possessions, status, fame and honor—namely, life. Some said that, though intellectually they had understood this before, surviving the disaster left them with a profound understanding of this truth gleaned through actual experience.

IKEDA: Confronting death enables us to clearly see what is most important.

I heard the following account of a mother in the United States. She had suffered a stroke and spent several weeks in a coma. Just before dying, she suddenly opened her eyes and, smiling, reached out to something that was invisible to everyone else. With her gaze downward, she made a gesture with her arms as though cradling a baby. Her face at that moment shone with genuine joy and happiness. She then passed away.

As a matter of fact, it turned out that her first child had died shortly after birth. She later gave birth to five children and raised them all into fine adults. She would never talk about the baby she had lost when she was young. Her surviving children were all convinced that at the moment of death, their mother had met that child and had died with that child in her arms.⁴

SUDA: That's very moving.

IKEDA: People who have had near-death experiences often report seeing their entire life flash before them in a succession of panoramic scenes. In terms of Buddhist doctrine, we could say that this is equivalent to all of one's karma (consisting of one's thoughts, words and deeds) that has been etched into the *alaya* consciousness—the eighth of the nine consciousnesses, which is likened to a storehouse—appearing before one's eyes in an instant. At any rate, the moment of death is a final settlement of accounts for one's life.

SAITO: I think there is deep significance in the Daishonin's conclusion that one should "first learn about death, and then learn about other matters" (GZ, 1404).



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IKEDA: Shakyamuni lost his mother shortly after he was born and consequently turned his thoughts to death at a very early age. The Daishonin, too, thought about death from the time he was a child.

He writes:

From childhood, I, Nichiren, studied Buddhism with one thought in mind. Life as a human being is fleeting. An outgoing breath does not wait for an incoming one. Not even dewdrops on the verge of being blown off by the wind suffice to describe this transience. No one, wise or foolish, young or old, can escape death. Therefore I thought that I should first learn about death, and then learn about other matters. (GZ, 1404)

The instant just before we die could perhaps be compared to the summit of a mountain. Having completed our climb of the mountain of life, it is from that vantage point that we can look back and for the first time take in the whole of our life. We can survey

our accomplishments, what we are leaving behind, how much good or harm we caused, and whether we were kind to others or hurt them. And we can assess which of these was greater. We may also ask ourselves to what did we attach the greatest importance in our lives. At that crucial moment one's mind is bombarded with such questions.

This is one aspect of the last moment of our lives.

ENDO: While someone on the brink of death may be lying still, a tumultuous drama may well be unfolding in that person's heart. The only reason it does not appear externally is the lack of physical vigor to express it.

IKEDA: Though there are of course cases where people meet their end peacefully, one prisoner reports having had quite a different near-death experience. Because he wanted to get transferred to the hospital ward within the prison, he swallowed a large amount of soap to make himself sick. His plan was successful, but he became a lot sicker than he would have liked. Writhing in excruciating pain, he saw his entire life

Disasters like the Great Kobe Earthquake (left) can cause people to reevaluate life's priorities. This also occurs among people who have had near-death experiences. This and other commonalities were revealed in the pioneering research of psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (right). Kübler-Ross herself had a near-death experience of which she says she could sense the pulse of life in all living beings, even in insentient things such as rocks.

spread out before his eyes in successive images. He said he relived in minute detail his long criminal career and felt every pang of suffering he had inflicted on others.⁵

ENDO: It sounds like a frightening experience. This illustrates the strictness of the principle of cause and effect.

IKEDA: Opinions may vary as to how such experiences should be interpreted, but I believe that, if we set aside all our preconceived ideas regarding life and death and then closely examine actual near-death experiences through surveys and research, we will learn that there are essential elements that simply cannot be explained by the current view that life ends with death. But research in this area has only just begun.

Near-Death Experiences Have a Universal Content

SAITO: Yes. Dating from ancient times, there have been a number of instances in Japan of people nearly dying and then regaining consciousness who have reported various mysterious phenomena. These include seeing the River of Three Crossings,⁶ having an “out-of-body” experience and meeting deceased parents. While there have been similar accounts from people in all parts of the world, it is only with the pioneering work of psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross that this subject has become a focus of scholarly investigation. In her 1969 work *On Death and Dying*, Dr.



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Kübler-Ross details a number of actual examples of near-death experiences that she encountered in the course of providing spiritual care to the dying.

ENDO: Dr. Kübler-Ross herself had a near-death experience. Describing the incident, she recounts feeling the pain of death and immediately thereafter going through a kind of rebirth. She says that her second self watched as her body approached a light and became engulfed in it, and that the instant it became one with the light, she enjoyed a state of profound peace and tranquillity. When she opened her eyes, she says, she could sense the pulse of life in all living beings, even in insentient things such as rocks.

I was in total love and awe of all life around me. I was in love with every leaf, every cloud, every grass, every little creature. I felt the pulsation of the pebbles on the path and I literally walked above the pebbles, conveying to them, “I cannot step on you. I cannot hurt you.”⁷

SUDA: After Dr. Kübler-Ross had broken ground in this area, Dr. Raymond Moody, a specialist in internal medicine, collected a number of accounts of people who had been declared clinically dead and then came back to life (which he published in 1976).⁸ This had a major impact, causing scholarly research to get under way in earnest. Today interest has developed such that there is an international research body devoted to studying the issue.

IKEDA: Up until then, near-death experiences had been written off as simply dreams or fantasies. But as more data accumulated, the scientific community began to think that perhaps it could not be taken so lightly.

SAITO: Yes. Near-death experiences have a number of features that seem to be universal, transcending any cultural and religious differences. Moreover, it seems there were quite a few cases in which people underwent something that directly contradicted religious beliefs they'd held for a lifetime.

What could account for the high degree of similarity in the experiences of people from totally different cultures? From that standpoint, it is logical to infer that there is some universal fact of existence that all people encounter upon death. Furthermore, there are things about these experiences that disciplines such as psychology, pharmacology and neurology cannot adequately explain.

IKEDA: At this stage, researchers have not yet come to any definite conclusion as to the meaning of near-death experiences.

ENDO: That's right. Broadly speaking, there are two schools of thought. One postulates that some form of consciousness continues after death. The other holds that all near-death experiences can be explained as neurological phenomena. Scientists who adopt this latter position argue that near-death experiences do not point to the existence of an afterlife.

IKEDA: Certainly, any discussion of the hereafter can amount to nothing more than speculation since the existence of such a realm cannot be proven empirically—it is but a theory. Conversely, there are no grounds to assert that a materialist view of life is any more scientific or less speculative than a view which holds that life continues after death. Both views are essentially on the same level, in that neither can be fully substantiated.

The Claim That There Is Nothing After Death Cannot Be Proven

SAITO: It is a fact that many who receive a modern education blindly accept the tenet that belief in the afterlife is superstitious and non-scientific. However, in that it cannot be proven, this assumption itself is a “superstition.”

IKEDA: The question then becomes which of these theories is the more logical and persuasive. The answer can only be found through investigation of the many examples of near-death experiences or the accounts of people who claim to remember their past lives, and see which theory can more adequately explain these phenomena.

As was mentioned a little earlier, it seems that the core content of people's experiences at the time of death is not greatly influenced by culture or religion or personal factors. On the contrary, there appears to be a surprisingly high degree of similarity, such as reports of out-of-body experiences. This in itself is rather mysterious.

SUDA: An extraordinary number of people who have been close to death have recounted leaving their bodies, hovering in the air, and gazing down on themselves and the people gathered around their bedside. This is of course not to say that everyone has such an experience.

ENDO: What happens to people at the moment of death may vary considerably depending on their state of life.

SUDA: In that light, keeping in mind that this is the personal account of one individual, I would like to introduce the experience of a Soka Gakkai member. Suffering a recurrence of meningitis, she lost consciousness, developed a high fever and a very irregular pulse, and finally her pupils dilated, indicating that she was about to die. Those around her evidently began discussing funeral arrangements, going so far as to begin talking about what photo of her to use at the funeral.

However, she later came to, saying:

At that time, I felt a cone-shaped object emerge from my head and my mind went completely blank. The object attached itself to a corner of the ceiling of the

room and watched the scene below. The part of me looking down from above had left the self that was lying on the bed. And I could see the forms of everyone in the room moving back and forth. The moment I thought, “I am dying,” I was reminded of the Daishonin’s passage: “When one dies, if he is destined to fall into hell, his appearance will darken and his body will become as heavy as a stone that requires the strength of a thousand men to move. But in the case of a devotee of true faith, even if she should be a woman seven or eight feet tall and of dark complexion, at the hour of death, her countenance will become pure and bright, and her body will be as light as a goose feather and as soft and pliable as cotton” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 288).

She continues: “Then I was not afraid to die, but I was very much afraid of not attaining Buddhahood. Thinking over and over, ‘I have to attain Buddhahood!’ in this dreamlike state I began trying to chant daimoku, although I could not produce any sound.”

Her mother and others chanted much earnest daimoku, and three days later she regained consciousness.

SAITO: Her experience indicates that people in a near-death state can see things that we wouldn’t expect them to if they were actually in a coma. In a number of cases, “unconscious” people have later proven that they could “see” by identifying, for example, the clothing worn by relatives and people who had come to visit them.

ENDO: Stranger still, there are instances of blind people relating that they saw the people around them perfectly well. Dr. Kübler-Ross reports on the case of a blind person who could explain in detail the clothing of all the people gathered at his bedside.

IKEDA: Although these occurrences would be extremely difficult to explain from a physiological standpoint, I think a great many such examples could be cited. However, once people make up their mind that life after death is superstition, they often close themselves off to any such evidence.

ENDO: Even in the SGI, there are many people who, prior to taking faith, would have discounted as irrational the notion that through practicing the



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Both French mathematician Blaise Pascal (above) and German philosopher Immanuel Kant (right) concluded that the question of whether there is an afterlife could not be solved by intelligence.



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Daishonin’s Buddhism you can, for one, strengthen your life force and heal illness. And probably all attempts at explanation, however reasonable, would have at one time been lost on them.

SAITO: Dr. Kübler-Ross notes that people will bring forth countless arguments to refute something they are not prepared to accept. But when it comes to the question of dying, she adds, “If you are not interested in knowing about it, it doesn’t make any

difference because once you have died you will know it anyway.”⁹

IKEDA: Certainly, the only way to really know is to actually die. At that point, however, it may be too late! In any event, from a logical standpoint, it is clear that as of yet there is no explanation with a decisive claim to truth. In this connection, I am always reminded of the argument put forward by Blaise Pascal (1623–62).

SUDA: Pascal was the French thinker and mathematician who described human beings as “thinking reeds.”

IKEDA: Yes. He is well known for his work in probability theory. True to his intellectual proclivities, Pascal discusses the matter of life after death in terms of a wagering theory.

He asserts that intelligence cannot provide an answer to the question of whether there is an afterlife. This was also the conclusion reached by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). On this premise, Pascal says that if people gamble their lives on the chance that there is life after death, then, even if they are wrong and the reality is that there isn’t, they haven’t lost anything. On the other hand, if they gamble their life on the chance that there is no afterlife, and it turns out that in fact there is, then they are powerless to do anything to alter the course they have taken. Even if at that point they wish to have done more good things while alive for the sake of the hereafter, it is too late.

Therefore, Pascal reasons that gambling on a belief in the afterlife brings fortune if you win and costs nothing if you lose. Losing a wager on the opposite belief, however, leaves you helpless and empty-handed. He therefore concludes that it makes the most sense to lay one’s stakes on the belief that there is life after death, i.e., to accept religion; and that this is the choice that any rational person would make.¹⁰

This argument may be controversial, but I nevertheless find Pascal’s reasoning persuasive.

ENDO: His view of this issue as a gamble is interesting. I suppose that no important life decisions would be made if we insisted on always knowing how things were going to turn out; there simply are no guarantees.

IKEDA: No one can avoid death—this is the only thing of which we can be absolutely certain. But it’s also true that there are few people who give any

earnest thought to this most fundamental issue of life and death. Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Having received life, one cannot escape death. Yet though everyone, from the noblest, the emperor, down to the lowliest commoner, recognizes this as a fact, not one person in a thousand or ten thousand truly takes the matter seriously or grieves over it. (MW-5, 41)

These days, in particular, it seems that people increasingly adhere to the position on the matter that Buddhism describes as the “doctrine of annihilation.”

SAITO: The doctrine of annihilation refers to the view that upon death life reverts to non-existence. Perhaps it can be said that modern hedonism and intemperance, as well as the underlying sense of unease and pessimism that accompany these conditions, have their roots in this doctrine.

SUDA: If you believe that life finishes with death, then the idea of merely seeking to enjoy oneself in the present would be quite seductive. There are of course those who resolve, “Since I only have one life, I will strive to live it to the fullest,” but I think that in reality there are very few people who can truly face death without a sense of foreboding.

Overcoming the “Suffering of Death”

IKEDA: This is an extremely important theme in the field of terminal care. The way we spend our final days when confronted with the prospect of our imminent demise will differ dramatically depending on our view of life and death.

ENDO: That’s right. A book on this subject titled *After Death* was recently released. The book was written by the American psychotherapist Dr. Sukie Miller. Over the course of many years of caring for patients facing death, she apparently pursued research on the theme of life after death. In the book, the author chronicles her work as one of the first researchers to study the cross-cultural dimensions of life and death issues, and what happens after death.

IKEDA: Her keen sense of responsibility in helping patients grappling with the prospect of their own death is probably what started her thinking seriously about the issue.



The desire for immortality is deep-seated. The first Chinese emperor, Shih Huang Ti, of the third century B.C.E., sought an elixir for perennial youth and eternal life. Hundreds of terracotta warriors guard his tomb in Xian, China.

ENDO: That's right. Through observing many such patients, she understood that a patient's attitude toward death differs dramatically depending on his or her view of life and death.

IKEDA: When confronted with death, a person's vanity and pretensions are stripped away. Status, honor, wealth—these all count for nothing. We have no choice but to face death with nothing but our naked, unadorned selves.

The Buddhist scriptures describe demons who take one's clothing after death. I think this symbolizes the idea that worldly trappings and adornments lose all meaning when we die. Buddhism therefore urges that we polish and develop our lives through faith while we're healthy.

ENDO: Dr. Miller talks about the death at age 45 of a friend of hers of some twenty years. She writes that he thought much of intellectual achievement, and viewed matters of the spirit and the like as "childish fantasies." And she explains how he came to doubt any explanation not based on logic and empirical proof:

When death became inevitable for James, he found—to the surprise of all who cared for him—that he had no tools, no comforts, no healing thoughts. Far from wondering what he faced, what aspect of reality he was entering, James trembled and shied away. Regarding death, he had no access to meaning and certainly none to comfort or reassurance.

Dr. Miller writes that “the idea of his inevitable demise inspired nothing but sheer terror in his heart.”¹¹

IKEDA: That is the stern reality of death. There may be some who live out their lives convinced that death is the absolute end of their existence. But what kind of comfort could such a person give to a close relative or family member who is suffering in the face of imminent death? Would such a conviction and view of life and death ultimately provide any hope?

The Buddhist perspective of life as existing eternally over the three existences of past, present and future not only brings hope to oneself, it can also encourage and give strength and hope to others.

ENDO: It may well be that people seek some kind of “immortality.” In the United States, the process of cryogenics is being applied to preserve the human body in a frozen state. There are reportedly a number of facilities that offer this service.

When a person who has contracted in advance with one of the facilities dies, his or her body is frozen, the idea being that future scientific advances might some day make to bring that person back to life.

SAITO: That sounds incredible, but I wonder if it is really possible to revive a human body that has been frozen. The entire scheme depends on future developments in medicine.

ENDO: That’s true. At present, experiments on animals haven’t been successful. Even so, despite the considerable contract fee, there is a steady stream of applicants.

A procedure also exists where just the brain is removed and preserved in a frozen state. It attracted a lot of attention recently when a big-name celebrity signed up for this service.

IKEDA: This suggests just how deep-seated is the desire for immortality. I recall, incidentally, that the first Chinese emperor Shih Huang Ti (259–210 B.C.E.) of the Ch’in dynasty sought an elixir of perennial youth and eternal life.

Removing just the brain and preserving it is a thoroughly modern approach, in that it reflects the assumption that the brain is the storehouse of the mind and personality.

ENDO: This is the notion that we took up in our first discussion on the “Life Span” chapter, that the mind is solely a neurological phenomenon.

The Brain Is the Mind’s “Venue of Manifestation”

IKEDA: It is clear that the mind is closely related to the body, and to the brain in particular. But it is debatable whether the mind exists only within the brain.

The British biologist Rupert Sheldrake uses a simple analogy to explain the relationship between memory and the brain. He likens it to the connection between televised images and sounds and the television receiver. You might, for instance, view something impressive on television; but once it passes you will not be able to find the same scene anywhere in the television. The television merely receives radio waves. An image will not appear without a receiver, but that doesn’t mean that the image exists inside the television.

SAITO: This analogy suggests that the mind, even if it functions through the mediation of the brain, is not housed in the brain itself.

IKEDA: That’s correct. The mind and the brain cannot be separated. In that sense, there is a oneness. This is not to say, however, that they are the same or identical.

The relationship is perhaps best characterized as “two but not two.” The spiritual aspect, which is the mind, and the physical aspect, which is the neurological phenomena, while distinct (“two”), function together as one (“not two”). This is the viewpoint of Buddhism. It could be said that the brain is the venue where the activity of the mind becomes manifest.

ENDO: If a television set isn’t in good working condition, the picture will not appear clearly. Likewise, someone whose brain is damaged will experience abnormal psychological phenomena. If a television set is completely broken, there will be no image at all. In the same way, when the brain cells are destroyed upon death, the venue where one’s psychological and spiritual activity takes place is also destroyed. I think it can nevertheless be postulated that this merely represents the disappearance of their venue of manifestation, and that the functions of the mind actually continue even after death.

SUDA: People with unflinching belief in the advance of science seem to think that with further

advances in research on the brain it will eventually become possible to explain all spiritual functions in terms of the neurological activities of the brain, even in areas that at this point defy explanation. But no matter how meticulously brain cells are studied, I don't think it will ever be possible to pinpoint the mind.

IKEDA: Take, for example, the case of someone thinking about the melody of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." This psychological state would probably be accompanied by some kind of neurological phenomena. But even if that neurological activity were examined in great detail, one would not discover in it the melody itself of "Ode to Joy."

SUDA: Still, there are many scientists who believe that this will someday become possible. Such belief is part and parcel of modern science. Often termed elementalism, this is the idea that you can get to the heart of anything by analyzing its minute constituent parts.

But, regardless of how closely the matter is probed, human life cannot be explained by analyzing the human body, just as simply combining together all the necessary organs and tissues will not produce a human being.

ENDO: One scholar criticizes this approach of science, saying, "Who could understand music only from an analysis of the composition of the instruments of an orchestra?"¹²

Neither Annihilation nor Eternity

SAITO: It seems that many people view life and death based on this "doctrine of annihilation," or what we might call "annihilationism." At the same time, the concept of an immortal soul is also prevalent in many different forms. This is the "doctrine of eternity," the idea that there is an unchanging "soul" distinct from the body and which continues on forever. Both concepts, however, are rejected by Buddhism.

IKEDA: Yes. There is no such thing as a spiritlike entity that flutters through the air. All that really exists is the oneness of body and mind. When we die, our life, in a state of non-substantiality, becomes one with the universe. Both the doctrine of annihilation and the doctrine of eternity are flawed. Each is a

biased view that accounts for only one side of the truth.

What, then, is the "eternal life" that the "Life Span" chapter explains? Let us take up that question next time.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "The essential teaching for solving the suffering of life and death is to be found only in the 'Life Span' chapter" (GZ, 1022).

How we perceive the meaning of death and the meaning of life hinges completely on whether we are able to establish a correct view of life and death. Goethe says, "those who have no hope of another life are already dead in this one."¹³

We study Buddhism to live vibrantly and with eternal hope. Will death, which inevitably comes to each of us, be a time of dignity and honor? Or will we end in pitiful demise? This is completely reliant on how we live our lives right now, today. In that sense, the "moment of death" truly exists in the present.

To be continued

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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 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. Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death*, third edition (New York: Hastings House, 1997), p. 15.
 3. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), pp. 289–90.
 4. Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1992).
 5. Susan Blackmore, *Dying To Live: Near-Death Experiences* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993), p. 190.
 6. River of Three Crossings: A river that the dead are said to cross after their demise. It has three points of crossing, shallow, deeper and deepest, and the place where a person crosses depends on the individual's karma.
 7. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death Is of Vital Importance: On Life, Death and Life after Death* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1995), p. 103.
 8. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life after Life* (New York: Stackpole Books, 1976).
 9. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Life after Death* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1991), p. 10.
 10. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. H. F. Stewart (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950), pp. 117–21.
 11. Sukie Miller, *After Death* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 29.
 12. Erwin Chargaff, *Heracleitean Fire: Sketches from a Life before Nature* (New York: The Rockefeller University Press, 1978), p. 170.
 13. J. P. Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, trans. Gisela C. O'Brien (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1964), p. 33.

GLOBAL FRIENDSHIPS FOR PEACE

SGI ACTIVITIES REPORT

***D**ESPITE social and cultural differences, SGI President Ikeda is convinced that people throughout the world share a universal humanity and a common desire for happiness. Numerous works, many based on dialogues he has held with leading figures and dignitaries, have been translated into more than twenty languages. All of his dialogues, lectures and writings—along with the various institutions he has founded—have been directed toward the promotion of peace and understanding. Throughout the year of 1998, the SGI leader continued his peacemaking activities, actively promoting cross-cultural exchange. In the following pages, we have highlighted some of his visits with leading figures from around the world in the past year.*

(All photos courtesy of Seikyo Press)

On July 29, 1998, SGI President Ikeda met with former United Nations secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali in Tokyo. Dr. Boutros-Ghali now serves as the first secretary-general of La Francophonie, an organization of fifty-two French-speaking countries dedicated to peacemaking through dialogue.



On October 17, 1998, SGI President Ikeda and his wife, Kaneko, received honorary citizenship from Ullung County of Kyongsangbuk Province, South Korea at Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall. They were presented with a Plaque of Special Commendation and an official invitation to visit the area by Ullung County Governor Chung Jong Teh, Assembly Chairperson Lee Joong Chul, among other delegates. This was a precedent-setting event because Mr. and Mrs. Ikeda were the first non-Koreans to be officially honored by the country. Governor Chung lauded the SGI of Korea for their efforts in promoting harmonious relations based on cultural exchange. He further commended President Ikeda's support of efforts to gain the right to vote for Korean residents of Japan, and for the introduction of the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum's "Masterpieces of European Oil" exhibition to Seoul in 1990, and resolved to actively assist the SGI leader in fostering a new era of Korea-Japan friendship.





(Above) On September 19, 1998, after attending an SGI Youth Peace General Meeting in Tokyo, noted American futurist and activist Dr. Hazel Henderson presented Daisaku Ikeda with a copy of her book, *Building a Win-Win World: Life Beyond Economic Warfare*, and discussed the outlook for grassroots movements in the twenty-first century.

(Right) The Sakha Republic, part of the Russian Federation, elected its first president, Mikhail E. Nikolaev, in 1991. He successfully developed a policy of independence and democratization, achieving for his country a state of economic self-reliance and autonomy. SGI President Ikeda and Mr. Nikolaev met on October 20, 1998 in Tokyo, where Mr. Nikolaev received an honorary doctorate from Soka University and an invitation from President Ikeda to visit the university the next time he's in Japan.





Rector Iván Rodríguez Chávez of Ricardo Palma University bestowed an honorary doctorate upon SGI President Ikeda on July 24, 1998 in Tokyo. Rector Rodríguez hailed the SGI leader for his endeavors to restore people's sense of humanity as well as his efforts to improve education. Mrs. Ikeda was also honored for her forty-six years of unflinching support of President Ikeda and as a representative of women working for the future of humanity the world over.





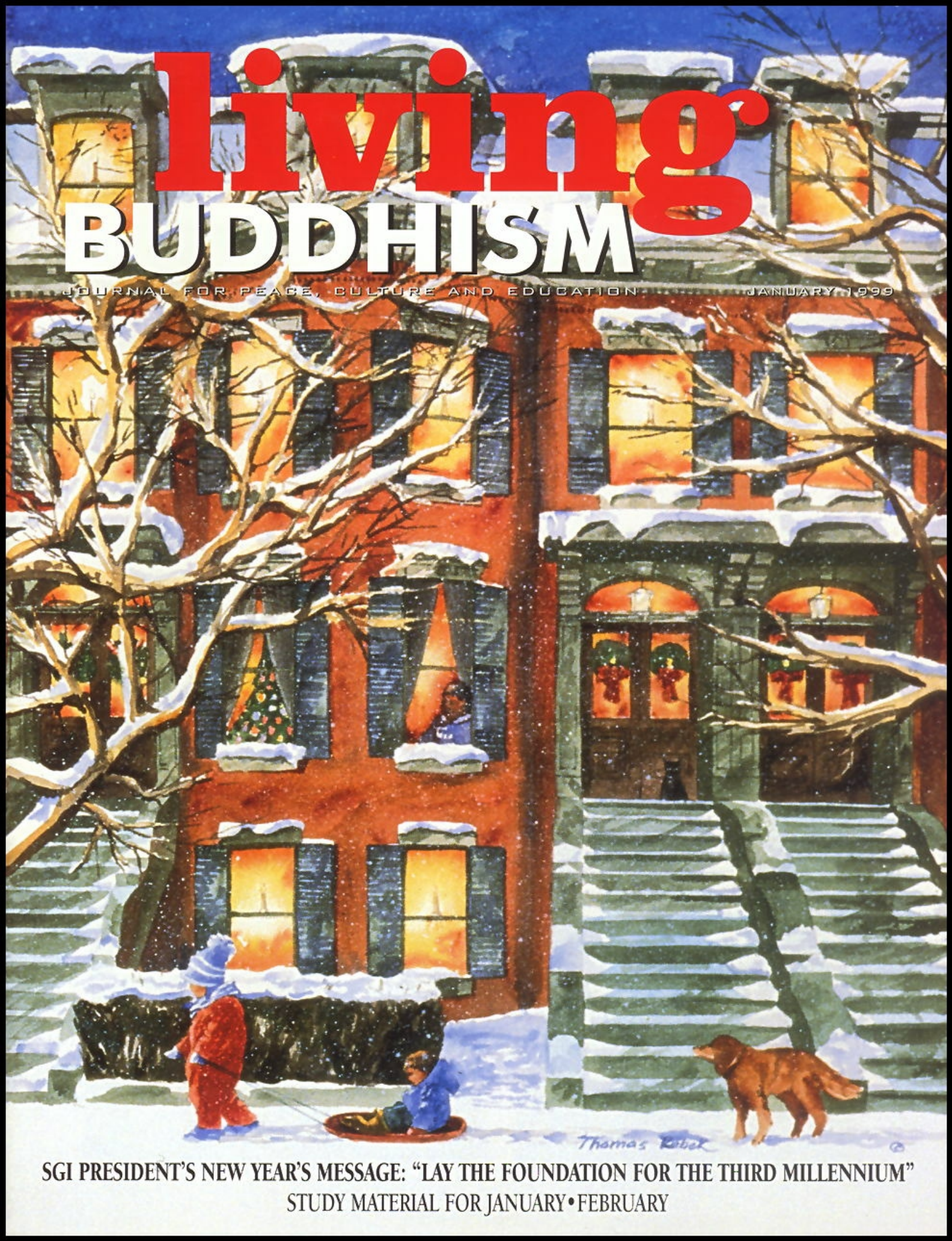
Winter Pond Reflections, 1998
watercolor on paper, 14 x 20 in.
by Thomas Rebek

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JANUARY 1999



SGI PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE: "LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM"
STUDY MATERIAL FOR JANUARY • FEBRUARY

SAN FRANCISCO CULTURE CENTER

SAN FRANCISCO members' dream was brought to fruition when the San Francisco Culture Center was opened April 16, 1989. Originally, the building was the site of the first women's junior college, Lux College, which opened in 1915. The five-story structure overlooks the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, as well as the famous Coit Tower—the location where SGI President Ikeda's historic first visit took place to the United States in October 1960 atop Telegraph Hill.

In February 1997, the Ikeda Auditorium was officially dedicated as the most recent addition to the center. The newly built auditorium is three-storied, and features a pyramid-shaped skylight at the apex of the reception area, with conference rooms and a Gohonzon room that seats more than 500. The culture center and auditorium are ideally suited for the many cultural festivals, lectures, art exhibits and community events sponsored by the SGI members of San Francisco.

