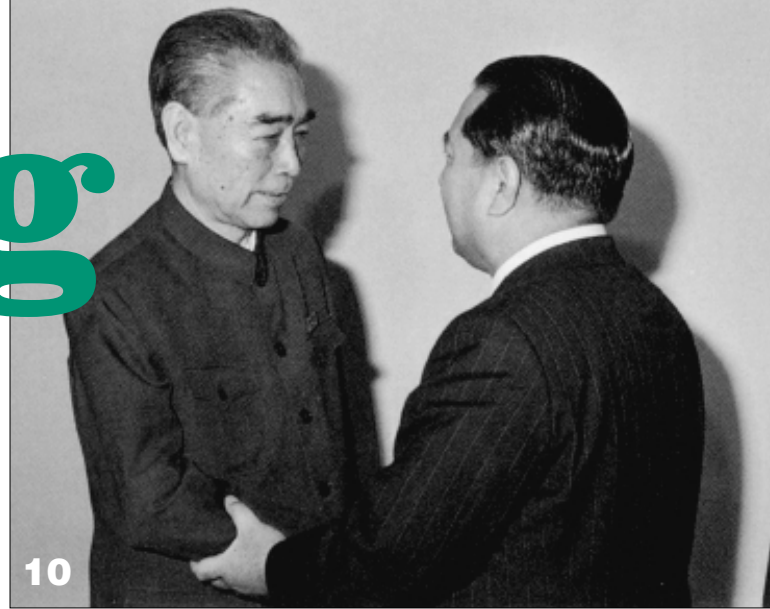


# living BUDDHISM

March • 1999

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



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## FROM OUR READERS

Due to the volume of letters we receive, not all can be printed, and all letters are subject to condensation. Letters printed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the SGI-USA or *Living Buddhism*. Please include signature, mailing address and telephone number with all correspondence. Mail to: Letters, Living Buddhism, 606 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail: [LivingB1@aol.com](mailto:LivingB1@aol.com)

### ADMIRING THE SPIRIT OF NICHIMYO

Thank you for reminding me of the writing about Lady Nichimyo ("Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen"; January 1999). The only thing I had remembered about it was the quote, "You are undoubtedly the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan."

However, I did not really understand what it meant. Your explanation of it and the inclusion of "My Story" helped

me. I cried when I read pp. 10–21.

Even though I am struggling financially, I rent a car each month to make the twelve-hour-round-trip drive to the Florida and Nature Culture Center for Kosen-rufu Gongyo [World Peace Prayer Meeting]. Driving twelve hours in an air-conditioned car is nothing compared to what Nichimyo did to visit Nichiren Daishonin.

Thank you very much for your encouragement.

ANGELA PASSARO,  
Port Richey, Florida

### Frequently Cited Sources

*For purposes of convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:*

- *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*: MW, followed by the volume and page number.
- *Gosho Zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese): GZ, followed by the page number.
- *The Lotus Sutra*: LS, followed by the chapter and page number.

**Living Buddhism** is the monthly journal of the SGI-USA, an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of Nichiren 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 90401-1503: (310) 451-8811. Check out our Web page at: <http://www.sgi-usa.org>

# Living What We Teach

WHILE in Los Angeles last year to speak at Soka University, Arun Gandhi, the grandson of India's Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, related the following story about his grandfather:

A woman whose son was suffering the effects of a severe sweet tooth brought the boy to see the Mahatma. After the woman explained her son's affliction, Gandhi told her, "Please bring your son back in fifteen days."

When she returned fifteen days later, Gandhi called the boy into his office. From the time the boy emerged from his meeting with Gandhi, he stopped eating sweets altogether.

The woman had apparently tried in vain to get her son to stop eating sugar and was astounded at Gandhi's success. Later, Gandhi told her: "Before I talked to your son, I wanted to refrain myself from eating sweets for fifteen days.... I told him that I, too, would continue to eat no sweets until his condition was cured."

How can we really inspire youth to excel, to surpass us?

Civilizations and movements have either prospered or decayed based on whether this question was seriously addressed.

As Gandhi's example shows us, only by first living fully the principles we wish young people to learn can we hope to impart anything of value. Then, hoping and praying for their growth and victory, we must open our hearts to them, trust them, and watch over them; listen to them, share with them our own experiences, and sincerely offer our support. This is the spirit and tradition of the Soka Gakkai International in fostering young people, a tradition exemplified by its three founding presidents.

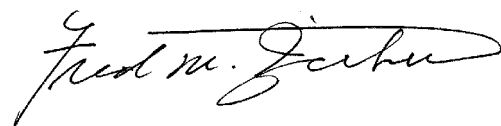
Recently, SGI President Ikeda has written of the founding of the Jr. and Sr. High School divisions in Japan in *The New Human Revolution*. He begins: "Youth hold limitless possibility. In their hearts spread the wings of boundless hope, passion surges and the desire to improve themselves flows forth like an abundant spring. Humankind's inestimable treasure is the

power of those young people who are to shoulder responsibility for the next era."

I believe the youth of the SGI-USA are such a treasure. But in our organization there is also a generation gap, just as there is in every human group, community and society. It is a natural gap that is spanned only by wholehearted trust and sincere, determined interest. On the other hand, criticizing the youth with statements like "They're never around" or "I don't know what the youth are doing" demonstrates a kind of arrogant disinterest. If we truly care—if we are truly interested in their well-being, growth and future—we will find out.

Today, youth programs are springing up across the country, most spearheaded by adults who care about the future of young people and society. And it is natural that when those adults live by the ideals they wish to impart to the next generation, they will have the most success.

In a previous commentary, I mentioned creating an atmosphere in our organization that will allow young people to feel welcome and free to exhibit their potential. But in any setting, it is the adults who must create an environment in which youth can prosper. Then, as young people become inspired and grow, they inspire one another. I believe that President Ikeda's establishment of the Junior High, High School and Student divisions arose from his desire to do just that. Wherever we adults cherish hope for the future while seriously working at our own growth as well, young people will come around and amaze us with their ability and passion.



Fred M. Zaitso  
SGI-USA General Director

# “Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen” Part 2

*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, p. 132.*

Among the many disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, there were ten known as the ten major disciples. Among these, Maudgalyayana<sup>1</sup> was the foremost in supernatural powers. He could travel anywhere in the four continents<sup>2</sup> and in the entire realm beneath the sun and moon, in less time than it takes to cut a single hair. When we inquire into the cause for his gaining such powers, we find that in a past life he would travel as far as a thousand miles in order to hear Buddhism being expounded.

Also, Chang-an, the disciple of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, managed to make his way 10,000 miles<sup>3</sup> to become the apprentice of T’ien-t’ai and to hear about the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Dengyo journeyed 2,000 miles<sup>4</sup> in order to study the *Maka Shikan*.<sup>5</sup> The Tripitaka Master Hsüan-tsang<sup>6</sup> traveled 200,000 miles [from China to India] and acquired the Prajna (Hannya) sutras. [When we consider these examples,] it seems that the length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents the strength of seeking spirit. These people were all men. They were regarded as reincarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas. But you are a woman. And, moreover, you probably are unfamiliar with the comparison between provisional and true Mahayana and other such doctrinal matters.

Your having come all the way here to Sado despite this must be due to the roots of goodness you created in past lives. It is said that in the past there was a woman who so longed for the man she loved that she walked a thousand miles. There are also examples of others who, driven by such passion, transformed themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes.<sup>7</sup>

Nichiren

The third day of the eleventh month

[Postscript:] How Oto Gozen must have grown! Your efforts in service to the Lotus Sutra will no doubt fill Oto Gozen’s entire life with happiness.<sup>9</sup> (*Goshō Zenshu*, pp. 1222–23)<sup>8</sup>

## We Gain Fortune With Every Step We Take for the Mystic Law

HAVING faith produces benefit and good fortune not limited to this lifetime but spanning past, present and future. The eternity of life, the eternal law of cause and effect, is a solemn reality. Believing in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra means living with confidence in this reality.

People who use their legs, who move around for the sake of Buddhism, gain the good fortune and benefit with which to freely travel the world. People who prepare places for Buddhist meetings, including those who clean the community and training centers, develop the state of life to dwell in “bejeweled houses” in the future. These examples are not fairy tales. The Mystic Law is wondrous and inscrutable. This is a function of the law of the simultaneity of cause and effect.

Actions taken for kosen-rufu cannot fail to produce effects. If we are confident of this—and to the extent that we have this confidence—effects will manifest without fail. But if our confidence is partially clouded by doubt, then we will only see vague or indistinct results, like the light of a half moon.

The path that the mother and her daughter, Oto Gozen, traveled was not simply a road. It was the path for attaining Buddhahood, the path for accumulating boundless good fortune and benefit.

“The length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents

the strength of seeking spirit,” the Daishonin says. Even though it might be difficult, when you thoroughly advance in pursuit of Buddhism, with every step you plant more seeds of good fortune and benefit in your life. These will, as a matter of course, eventually flower and bear fruit.

All of you have worked hard for many years to achieve kosen-rufu. And you continue to take action. How the Daishonin must praise your spirit!

To illustrate how our daily efforts accrue, take the case of someone who delivers the *Seikyo Shimbun* every day to a mailbox on the fourth floor of a building. In just climbing those stairs every day for two years, this person will have ascended to a cumulative height greater than Mount Everest.

Or if a district women’s division leader walks for activities a mile every day for ten years, she will have walked approximately 3,650 miles. In fifteen years she will have covered more than 5,475 miles.

As for the journey from Kamakura to Sado, while there will be some variance depending on how you calculate it and how you determine the specific route taken, the distance, including ascents and descents over mountainous terrain, probably came to between 250 and 300 miles. All the women’s division members are present-day mothers of Oto Gozen. They are people with a mystic mission.

Our spirit changes our being. It changes our lives. Why does the Buddha have an indestructible, diamond-like life? Shakyamuni explains it is because he has steadfastly

and thoroughly protected the true Law. Having a strong spirit for kosen-rufu enables us to develop diamond-like lives. The boy who offered a mud pie to Shakyamuni was later reborn as King Ashoka.

There are now many members who have developed the state of life with which to freely travel the world, thanks to having painstakingly walked countless narrow lanes and alleys to encourage friends during the early days of our movement. It may be that those responsible for the sound system at meetings, as a result of the good fortune and benefit they gain thereby, are creating the cause to be reborn as great musicians.

In activities for kosen-rufu, absolutely no effort is wasted. Everything is engraved in our lives and enables us to establish a diamond-like and totally free state of life. In overcoming our weaknesses and exerting ourselves daily for our friends, we have already achieved victory as human beings. Ultimately, our victory or defeat in life is not decided by someone else—we decide it. A person who steadfastly adheres to the path he or she has chosen is a winner.

**These people were all men. They were regarded as reincarnations of Buddhas or bodhisattvas. But you are a woman. And, moreover, you probably are unfamiliar with the comparison between provisional and true Mahayana and other such doctrinal matters.**

**Your having come all the way here to Sado despite this must be due to the roots of**

## **goodness you created in past lives. (GZ, 1223)**

The individuals the Daishonin mentions, whose names shine in Buddhist history, were courageous people who sought the Law even at the cost of their lives. He says that the mother of Oto Gozen has joined the ranks of these great predecessors. What a landmark teaching this is!

His words fly completely in the face of the accepted beliefs of his day. They erase the formidable distinctions between men and women and among reincarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and ordinary believers who aren't well schooled in Buddhist doctrine. The Daishonin says that the mother of Oto Gozen is certain to become a Buddha. Differences in gender and social status have nothing to do with it, nor is fame a factor. Faith, a seeking mind, is what counts.

Buddhism is a teaching beyond the secular realm. *Realm* in this case means difference or distinction. *Beyond the secular realm* means Buddhism transcending such superficial distinctions. It means seeing the truth of life directly, setting aside all differences. It is to observe one's mind, to see the human being.

Human society, as viewed with this eye of Buddhism, takes on a completely different meaning from that discerned by secular eyes. No longer are the powerful above and ordinary people below. Status does not make people great, and authority does not make them noble. Instead, it is people wholeheartedly dedicated to a lofty ideal who shine the brightest.

Again, as the Daishonin indicates, through "roots of goodness" the bond uniting those who advance together along the path of kosen-rufu is not solely of this lifetime.

**It is said that in the past there was a woman who so longed for the man she loved that she walked a thousand miles. There are also examples of others who, driven by such passion, transformed themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes.**

**Nichiren**

**The third day of the eleventh month (GZ, 1223)**

The Daishonin mentions here a woman who longed so much for a man that she walked a thousand miles—and there are other accounts of women turning themselves into stones, trees, birds or snakes owing to such intense yearning. These didn't actually happen, but it seems to me the point is that the person's inner state of life became a rock, a tree or a snake. In this sense, you can think of countless examples of the same thing happening today. These images might seem overly dramatic, but they convey the extreme pain that people go through.

Here the Daishonin is making a comparison: While women of legend turned into stones or snakes because of their longing for someone of the opposite sex, the mother of Oto Gozen will become a Buddha because of her longing for the Lotus Sutra.

In "Letter From Sado," the Daishonin writes: "[Human beings]

give their lives for shallow, worldly matters but rarely for the noble cause of Buddhism. Small wonder they do not attain Buddhahood" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 34). Not only have we been lucky enough to be born as human beings, but we have had the rare fortune to encounter the correct Buddhist teaching. By firmly establishing in our hearts a strong yearning for kosen-rufu, we can manifest a state of happiness in the eternal dimensions of past, present and future. We can each become a Buddha.

And if we succeed in becoming Buddhas, then we can lead our loved ones to enlightenment, too. Together we can enjoy lives of boundless happiness.

## **A Mother Sows the Seeds of Happiness for Her Children**

**[Postscript:] How Oto Gozen must have grown! Your efforts in service to the Lotus Sutra will no doubt fill Oto Gozen's entire life with happiness. (GZ, 1223)**

The Daishonin was always concerned about Oto Gozen's development. In a letter several years later ("The Supremacy of the Law"), he says, "I would imagine your daughter, Oto, has become a fine and intelligent young girl" (MW-3, 202). This child had been brought up by a true "mother of kosen-rufu." Surely the growth of such a child is a source of great anticipation and joy.

Elsewhere, the Daishonin expresses delight at the fine growth of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro's son Nanjo Tokimitsu, Abutsu-bo's son Tokuro Moritsuna, Toki Jonin's son Iyo-bo and others.

The Daishonin means here that the mother's good fortune and benefit in having devoted herself to the Lotus Sutra has become her daughter Oto Gozen's good fortune. The good fortune and benefit we create by exerting ourselves in faith will definitely manifest in the lives of our children, grandchildren and all our family members.

Buddhism is the supreme medicine. The Daishonin says that the benefit of faith extends to the "preceding seven generations and the seven generations that followed" (MW-7, 172).

How the Daishonin's words must have put Oto Gozen's mother at ease! For a mother, the future of her child is a matter of the greatest concern. That was probably all the truer for Oto Gozen's mother, because she was raising her daughter alone. The

original Buddha promises this mother that her daughter, whose life she certainly held as dear as her own, would become happy. Thus embraced in the Daishonin's mercy, she must have felt as though all her troubles and sufferings had vanished instantly.

Oto Gozen's mother steadfastly maintained her faith. When the Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu, she undertook another journey to visit him. And later, according to one source,<sup>10</sup> with Oto Gozen she visited the Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin, after his painful departure from Mount Minobu. Mother and daughter possessed a pure and honest seeking spirit.

When people were filled with apprehension at the impending second Mongol invasion of Japan, the Daishonin called out to the mother and daughter: "Should any calamity befall us, you should immediately come to visit me here [Mount Minobu], where you will be welcomed wholeheartedly. Should the

worst happen, then let us starve together among these mountains" (MW-3, 202).

"Let us suffer this calamity together," he is saying in effect. "Let us eternally share the joys and sufferings of life together."

The Daishonin never forgot the immense sincerity and concern Oto Gozen's mother showed when he was undergoing the greatest of hardships on Sado. He indicates here that he would put his life on the line to protect her and her daughter. Bonds of the heart forged in times of great difficulty are eternal. Could there be any greater honor? Could there be any greater treasure? This mother and daughter undertook a journey over mountains and across the sea, and in the end possessed a brilliantly shining jewel in their lives.

As we cross mountains and rivers together in the journey of kosen-rufu, every step of the way a symphony of eternal jewels, eternal dramas and brilliant paintings resounds in our hearts. □

1. Maudgalyayana: Also known as Mahamaudgalyayana.
2. Four continents: Those situated respectively to the east, west, north and south of Mount Sumeru, according to the ancient Indian worldview. They represent the entire world.
3. The distances in this paragraph are intended figuratively, not literally.
4. Some sources indicate that he traveled three thousand miles. In China, Dengyo became a disciple of Tao-sui of the T'ien-t'ai school.
5. *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight): One of T'ien-t'ai's three major works, compiled by his disciple Chang-an. It elucidates, among other things, the principle of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms.
6. Hsüan-tsang (602–64): A Chinese priest of the T'ang dynasty and a translator of

Buddhist scriptures. He journeyed to India in 629 to study Buddhism.

7. There are many Japanese fables and legends that portray women whose love or yearning for a man was so powerful that they turned themselves into some nonhuman or inanimate form. This is done either to be close to that person or to wreak revenge on him for being spurned.
8. "Oto Gozen no Haha Goshö" (*Goshö Zenshu*, pp. 1222–23), thought to have been written in November 1273, when the Daishonin was 52.
9. This translation is based on new research on the original writings of Nichiren Daishonin. It differs substantially from the version in the *Goshö Zenshu*.
10. *Goshö Zenshu* appendix, "Deshidannato Retsuden" (List of Disciples and Followers), compiled by the fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko, p. 8.

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

## Study Material Commentary

# 'What Matters Is One's Heart': Sincerity Is a Key

A KEY to personal happiness is acting out of genuine sincerity for the happiness of others. Since Buddhism exists ultimately for people's happiness, such altruism is the basis of our Buddhist practice. Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly stresses this in his writings. For example, describing the importance of sincerity, the Daishonin often uses the Japanese word *kokorozashi*, which can be translated as spirit, faith, heart or will, depending on the textual context, yet literally means "the orientation of one's heart." According to one calculation, he uses the word more than 160 times throughout his known writings. In "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen," the Daishonin—using the same word, here translated as "seeking spirit"—states: "The length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents the strength of seeking spirit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1223). The Daishonin praises the mother of Oto Gozen for her sincerity in having traveled a long distance to visit him in exile. In the same letter, the Daishonin tells her that because of such sincerity, she is

"a woman who is certain to become a Buddha" (ibid., p. 1222). Here the Daishonin stresses the sincerity of one's heart as a decisive cause for enlightenment and happiness.

Elaborating on the practical meaning of the word *kokorozashi*, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda states that it "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 [i.e., *kokorozashi*] 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" (*Learning From the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 128). He also explains the word, which is here translated as "spirit," as follows: "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" (ibid., p. 129). President Ikeda reiterates the Daishonin's emphasis on sincerity of spirit,

expressed in prayer and action, as a key to one's happiness.

SINCERITY, however, is an elusive concept. Simply doing nice things for others does not equate with sincerity. Some people seem to engage in actions that are selfless, yet are primarily motivated by selfish concerns. Seeming is different from being, and Buddhism is about being. When doing something for others, people often expect something in return, such as praise, recognition, money or love. Sometimes they become resentful when they do not get what they expected. In the worst case, what is expected far outweighs what is given.

One longtime SGI member related an experiment he conducted to test his own sincerity. He cleaned the kitchen and resolved not to say a word about it to anyone in his family. He was happy to see his wife and children pleased, but disappointed when none of them asked who had done it. He decided to remain silent, but by the end of the day, his patience ran

out and he revealed his “big secret” to his family, who responded rather nonchalantly. He realized how difficult it is to give of oneself fully without expectation or seeking even a simple acknowledgment for what we do for others.

**I**N fact, it may well be impossible to be totally neutral to recognition or praise, or to divorce ourselves completely from self-concern. The Daishonin writes: “When praised, one does not consider his personal risk, and when criticized, he can recklessly cause his own ruin. Such is the way of common mortals.” (MW-1, 92). In today’s world, most would agree that those who are at least as concerned about others’ well-being and happiness as they are about their own are sincere people. This is perhaps why the Daishonin responded to any show of sincerity with the utmost sincerity. Deeply appreciating the workings of the human heart, he never held back in expressing his praise and gratitude for each heartfelt gesture of support. In this sense, the Daishonin teaches us that to respect and appreciate others’ sincerity is itself sincerity.

True caring is essentially selfless; it is without affectation. But selflessness does not mean a lack of self-identity. Those lacking a strong self-identity sometimes devote themselves to others to fill a spiritual void or merely to feel needed. Sincerity is neither self-sacrifice nor self-disparagement. Sincere people are confident, regardless of what

others may say; they seek reward for their efforts not in praise, recognition or profit, but in the joy of simply seeing others win and become happy. Such a genuine spirit gives rise to profound personal growth and enrichment.

For this reason, when the Daishonin sensed Oto Gozen’s mother’s great sincerity, he assured her that she would attain enlightenment. The mother traveled with her infant daughter for days and days over mountains and seas to visit her teacher in exile on a remote northern island. She made her trip with no expectation of reward; she was simply concerned about the Daishonin’s well-being and wished to offer any support she could provide. Her concern was never forced or demanded by anyone; it was spontaneous.

Unlike most priests of his day, who sought to profit from their parishes, the Daishonin never took believers’ sincerity for granted. Nor did he ever demand sincerity from them.

In the exchange between the Daishonin and the mother of Oto Gozen, we can see the importance of acting out of sincerity as well as of recognizing, appreciating and responding to others’ sincerity.

It is certainly easier to talk about sincerity than practice it. After all, it is easier to be motivated by self-interest than by altruism—real concern for others. Through our consistent practice of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, however, we steadily expand our lives’ capacity so that

we may one day regard the happiness of others as our own and experience genuine richness in our lives.

**W**HENEVER we contribute to our Buddhist movement and for the happiness of others—whether it takes the form of a financial contribution to the SGI or driving a long distance to encourage fellow members—the true reward lies in our state of life. Our inner condition becomes refreshed and enriched the moment we take such altruistic action. We do not have to wait to reap the fruit of our good deeds. Nor do we have to frustrate ourselves wondering how much benefit we will receive when we do act (that is, there is no need to make a “deal” with the Gohonzon, such as “I’ll do this, if you give me that”).

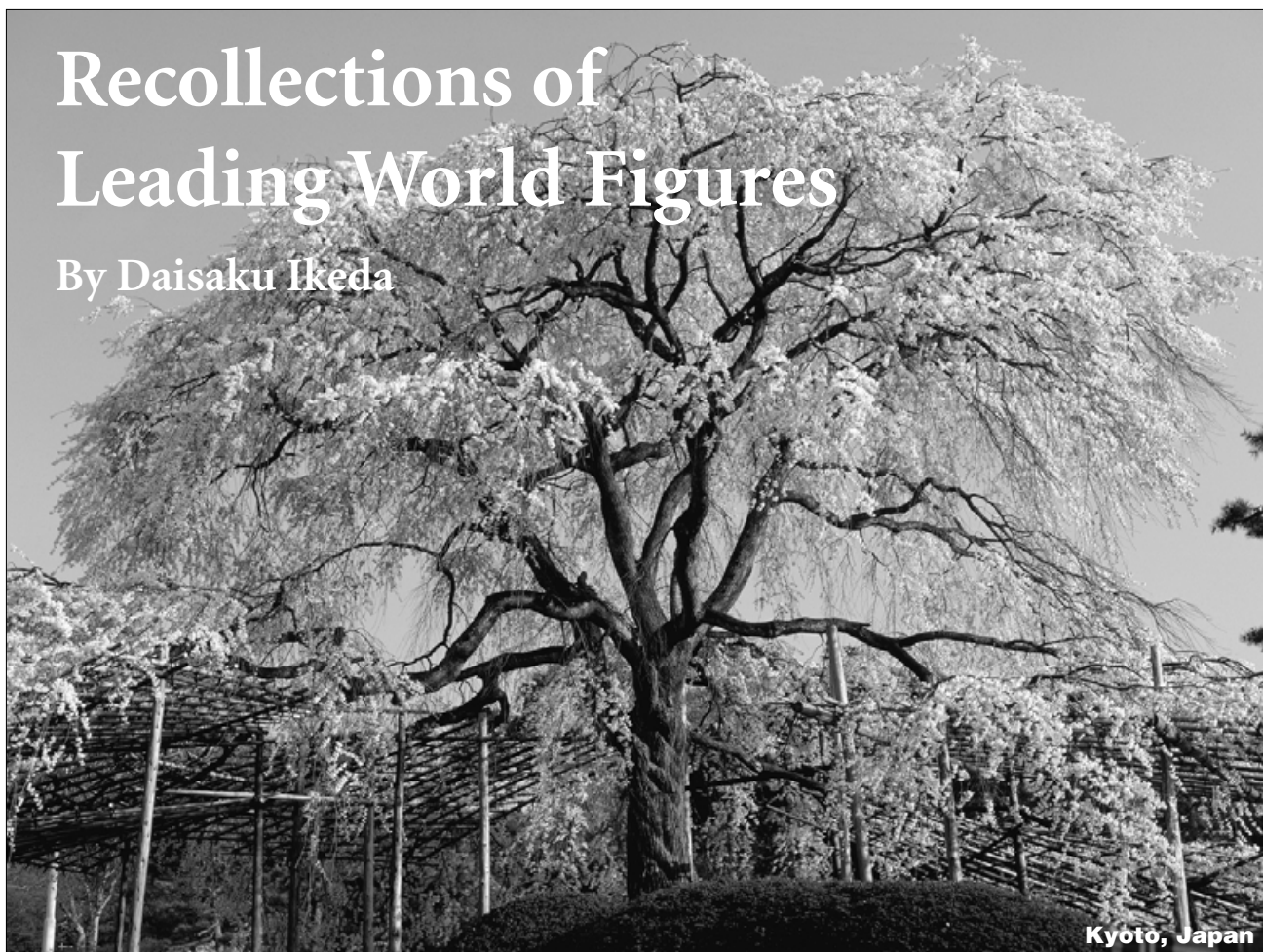
To pray, ponder and move for the sake of people’s happiness is to awaken real sincerity. And engaging meaningfully in SGI activities while studying the Daishonin’s writings—into which he has infused his profound sincerity—provide a most excellent basis for doing this. This is what it means to live the Daishonin’s words, “What matters is one’s heart” (MW-5, 289). □

*SGI-USA Study Department*



# Recollections of Leading World Figures

By Daisaku Ikeda



COURTESY FRANK LEATHER, EYE UNBROUGHTOUS

## A Great Leader of the People: Zhou Enlai

**I** WAS in Kansai, Japan, when I received the news of Zhou Enlai's death. That inevitable moment had finally come, I thought. I offered a silent prayer for him: "How tired you must have been, Premier. Please, rest quietly now."

On that day, January 9, 1976, I was on my way from Osaka to a meeting in Kyoto. At that meeting, one thousand members and I prayed with all our hearts for Zhou Enlai's eternal happiness. (Zhou Enlai died on January 8,

and his death was announced the following day.)

In his youth, Zhou Enlai had studied in Kyoto. Before leaving Japan, the 21-year-old Zhou visited Kyoto's Arashiyama and Maruyama parks. It was the spring of 1919. Arashiyama Hill was blanketed in a cloud of rain. The banks of the river flowing through the surrounding park were lined with deep green pines, and the rain poured down.

What could he do to save his suffering nation? the young Zhou

wondered. He had come to Japan in search of solutions, but he soon discovered that behind Japan's apparent prosperity lay the shadow of an exhausted, depleted people. And a racist scorn for other Asians was strong among the Japanese.

"It's time to return," he decided, "to return to my homeland!"

The young man looked up. The rain had ceased, and there amidst the carpet of deep green a small cluster of blossoming cherry trees glistened in the sun. It was like a torch illuminating the darkness.

Maruyama Park, too, was bustling with people enjoying the cherry blossoms at night. The trees were in full bloom, and the light pink of the flowers glowed with an otherworldly beauty in the lamplight.

The premier's words came back to me: "Fifty years ago, I left Japan when the cherry trees were blooming." Surely the cherry blossoms he spoke of were those in Kyoto.

"Please come to visit Japan again when the cherry trees are in bloom," I invited him.

"I would like that very much," he said, "but it is impossible. My body no longer obeys my wishes."

This exchange took place on December 5, 1974, just a little more than one year before Premier Zhou passed away. He was already gravely ill at that time.

The first thing he said to me when we met was how sorry he was that he couldn't meet me the first time I visited China. He confessed that he had simply been too ill.

**M**Y first visit had occurred six months earlier. On June 1, two days after I arrived in Beijing, Premier Zhou was hospitalized for surgery. He had been diagnosed with cancer two years earlier in the summer of 1972. In 1973, he spent seventy-two days in the hospital, keeping up his grueling work schedule in between. From the beginning of 1974, his condition became unstable. But he could not afford to rest. He continued to work eighteen-hour days and sometimes thirty hours straight without sleeping.

In April, he suffered an acute shortness of breath. In May, it

happened on three occasions, each time necessitating that he rest and inhale oxygen. This is what finally led him to consent to surgery, and he entered the hospital on June 1. But even in that condition, he made careful preparations for my first visit to China. He inquired, through his staff, into all the details of my personal habits—what foods I liked and disliked, whether I smoked, and so forth—to make my stay as comfortable as possible.

I protested that there was no need to go to any trouble, that the premier's good wishes alone were sufficient, and that I would be happy to follow the customs and directions of my Chinese hosts during my visit. Even so, Premier Zhou had the curtains in the room where I stayed changed to heavier ones so that I might sleep better. Wherever I went, I encountered signs of his thoughtfulness; my entire visit was full of his kindness and consideration.

A few months later, in September, I visited Moscow for the first time and met with Soviet Premier Aleksey N. Kosygin. This was a period of heightened tensions between China and the Soviet Union. Still, Premier Kosygin clearly recognized the outstanding caliber of his Chinese counterpart and expressed the view that as long as Zhou Enlai was alive, China would prevail over any problem.

But the "great tree" that protected and shaded China was ailing. From his first hospitalization in June 1974 until his death some eighteen months later, Premier

Zhou was operated on fifteen times—an average of once every forty days. Seven were major operations. He received more than a hundred blood transfusions. In spite of all this, he turned his hospital room into an office and continued to drive himself mercilessly to keep working on behalf of China's one billion people. "I can hear, I can still think," he declared. He refused to take any painkillers because he wanted to remain clearheaded. In a monumental display of iron will and determination, he silently bore the excruciating pain of his affliction.

**C**HINA was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, and he was needed. The so-called Gang of Four was seeking to destroy the new China that the premier and the people—united in a joint struggle—had fought for with their lives. The Gang of Four and their followers resorted to every sort of scheme, to violence, treachery, extortion, personal attack—anything to have their way. The cries and pleas of numberless suffering people assailed the premier's ears. Ill as he was, he did everything in his power to help his fellow citizens. The people came to him because they knew he was the only one who could stand up to the Gang of Four.

For the Four, Zhou was a bitter enemy. His continuing presence was a thorn in their side. If it were not for him, they could rule the day. They tried every underhanded scheme conceivable to bring about his downfall. Their relentless campaign against Lin Biao<sup>1</sup> and

China's Premier Zhou Enlai (left) meets with SGI President Ikeda December 5, 1974 in Beijing.

Confucius around this time was actually directed at Zhou, for Confucius was an indirect reference to him.

The Gang of Four even tried to disrupt Premier Zhou's medical treatment. On one occasion, one of them phoned him while he was undergoing a blood transfusion. The caller demanded: "Put me through to the premier right now. It can't wait." Though Premier Zhou had just been sedated and had fallen asleep, the medical staff woke him, stopped the transfusion, and helped him to the phone so that he could take the call. On another occasion, one of the Four came to the hospital demanding to see the premier, even though he was in the middle of treatment. It turned out to be a ruse, for the person had nothing urgent to say and, after some aimless chatter, left. Their motive was to wear down and undermine the ailing premier's mental and physical strength.

**W**HEN I met Premier Zhou, this tempest was at its height. From December, the attacks on him had intensified. The first National People's Congress in ten years was scheduled to be held the following month, January 1975, and the Gang of Four was doing everything in its power to wrest complete control of the nation. If that were to happen, all would be lost. The premier was gravely ill. There



was so much he still had to do, but so little time left. The only one who knew of his painstaking efforts and undying dedication was his wife, Madame Deng Yingchao.

Our 1974 meeting was decided upon at the last moment. It may have been that Premier Zhou had been waiting for his condition to take a turn for the better. However, before that happened, the last day of my stay in China arrived.

The banquet that my colleagues and I had arranged at the Beijing Hotel to show our appreciation to our hosts was nearing its end. Liao Chengzhi, president of the China-Japan Friendship Association, leaned over to me and said quietly in my ear, "President Ikeda, I need to talk to you for a moment." I followed him into a separate room, and it was there he told me: "Premier Zhou is waiting to see you."

Knowing how ill the Chinese leader was, I declined, saying: "No, no, I really can't. I don't want to

endanger his health. I don't wish to impose. But please tell him I am deeply grateful for his generosity." I didn't know the precise details of his condition, but when I had met with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping that morning, I had learned that the premier's health was very poor.

Hearing my response, Mr. Liao's face clouded with disappointment; devoted as he was to the premier, it was unthinkable that he should fail to fulfill his request. When he explained that to me, I decided to accept the premier's invitation. "I will go," I said, "but I don't wish to disturb him for more than two or three minutes."

**A**CCOMPANIED by Mr. Liao, my small party and I drove by car for fifteen or twenty minutes before stopping in front of a surprisingly plain building. This turned out to be Hospital 305, where Premier Zhou was staying.

Later, Madame Deng recalled the evening during a conversation with a Japanese friend: "At that

time, Comrade Enlai really wanted to meet President Ikeda. But the entire medical staff who were caring for him at Hospital 305 were against it, fearing what it would do to his already grave condition. They said if he were determined to go ahead with the meeting he must do so at his own risk, bearing full knowledge that it could cost him his life. But Comrade Enlai replied that he must meet President Ikeda, whatever the cost.

“The doctors didn’t know what to do, so they came to me. They wanted me to persuade Comrade Enlai to listen to them. But I replied that if Comrade Enlai was so insistent on meeting President Ikeda, they should permit him to do so. And so it was that the meeting took place that night.”

Such was the deep understanding that Premier Zhou and Madame Deng shared.

It was cold in Beijing—so cold that even during the day our Chinese interpreter Lin Liyun had insisted on giving my wife her coat to wear. Now after nightfall, the mercury had dropped even lower. But in spite of the frigid weather outside, Premier Zhou was standing there waiting for us, just inside the hospital entrance. I approached him. “Thank you for coming,” he said. He extended his arm and shook my hand firmly.

He looked at me long and intently. His gaze was extremely penetrating and at the same time infinitely kind. It was the gaze of a man who misses nothing. He exuded an ineffable aura, a presence. I felt as if we had already met, even before that first face-to-face

meeting. Our lives had touched and communed. He was exactly as I had imagined.

“Let’s take a photograph,” he said. The preparations had already been made and my party and I were arranged on a platform for a photograph with the premier.

FOR a period of ten years before our meeting, Premier Zhou had been sending kind messages to me, keeping in regular contact through such intermediaries as the noted statesman and Economic Planning Agency Director Tatsunosuke Takasaki and popular author Sawako Ariyoshi—both of whom had long been working to promote friendly ties between Japan and China. Premier Zhou had recognized that the Soka Gakkai was an organization that had arisen from among the people. “Among the people, with the people,” was one of Premier Zhou’s mottoes. He no doubt appreciated the fact that the Soka Gakkai had resisted Japanese militarism during the war and suffered government oppression as a result. In his dealings with Japan, he paid keen attention to whether the individuals or organizations involved could rise above the narrow framework of nationalism.

He believed that the people at the grass roots were the key ingredient for amicable China–Japan relations. Treaties and paper promises could always be violated or disregarded when national interests shifted. True friendship between China and Japan, he knew, would only be achieved when the people of both countries understood and trusted each other.

This belief was also the basis upon which I urged the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China in 1968. The reality of the situation was in fact not a question of two nations but of two peoples, and no reconciliation could take place until their views were taken into consideration. The reaction to my suggestion was immediate and harsh. One person even wrote, “Why is a religious leader suddenly donning a ‘Red’ necktie?”

Then, in March 1970, the Japanese political leader Kenzo Matsumura asked me to accompany him on a visit to China. He was insistent. I refused, reminding him that I was a religious leader, and that the Soka Gakkai was a Buddhist lay organization. The restoration of diplomatic relations, I recognized, must be carried out in the political realm. I suggested that he contact members of the Komeito (Clean Government Party), which I had founded, and ask them to accompany him. Mr. Matsumura replied that he would brief Premier Zhou in detail about me and the Komeito. As the party’s founder, I will always regard it as a great honor that Premier Zhou trusted the Komeito representatives and assigned them the crucial role of serving as a bridge in the restoration of diplomatic relations.

After the photographs were all taken, Premier Zhou said, “Please, come this way,” and he rose and began walking. Beneath his coat I could see as he proceeded ahead of me that he was painfully thin. He was standing on willpower alone.

To prevent him from tiring any more than necessary, I decided that only my wife and I would join him in the room to talk. The room he led us to was simple and uncluttered, and the light had been dimmed to keep his eyes from tiring. Out of concern for him, I also tried to keep our conversation to a minimum.

He spoke of many things, but whatever the subject, he remained passionately concerned about the future, about the coming century. He was completely focused on what would happen after his death. “These last twenty-five years of the twentieth century are the most important for the world. All nations will have to cooperate and help one another as equal partners.” He was determined to forge a solid path to peace in this final quarter-century for Asia and the world, and he fervently desired peaceful and friendly relations between China and Japan in the coming century. I listened to his words as if they were his will and testament.

In a speech he once gave many years earlier, Premier Zhou said:

When that day comes, we shall all treat each other as equals and help fulfill each other’s needs. All people, regardless of geographic location or skin color, are brothers and sisters. When that time comes [when all countries gain independence], imperialism will have vanished, and harmony will prevail in the world. But that probably won’t come about until the twenty-first century. I will not live to see

it... Yet our younger generation will probably see it.<sup>2</sup>

To me, he said: “You are young, and that is why I value our relationship.” At the time, Premier Zhou was 76 and I was 46.

He also said, “China will never become a superpower, I believe.... But if some day in the future it should, and if it seeks to dominate the world, the people of the world should rise up and join hands with the people of China to topple that regime.” He also admitted, “China today is still not economically affluent.” But behind those words was the solid belief that China would change, that China’s future would be different.

A month after our meeting, in January 1975, Premier Zhou announced his program of the Four Modernizations that he believed must take place to prepare China for the twenty-first century. A very important part of his political legacy was his determination to make the lives of his beloved people more prosperous.

PREMIER Zhou had the telescopic vision to grasp the vast panorama of human history on a grand scale, and also the microscopic vision to penetrate the subtle workings of people’s hearts. I have often called him a modern-day Chuko K’ung-ming, after the brilliant and heroic prime minister who appears in the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Premier Zhou bore a heavy load of responsibility without seeking personal power or position. He was at once an invincible general, a flexible and

skilled diplomat and a consummate administrator—all accomplishments arising from his strong sense of duty and commitment.

He was the pivot, the axle, that would carry his nation into a new age. He was determined to change the landscape from a “China in chaos” into a “China of peace and prosperity.” And though he suffered under the weight of this enormous burden, he bore it bravely and gladly. He cared nothing for personal glory. Everything he did, he did for the people. For them, he gave his entire heart and being.

During our meeting, he clearly stated that he wished to see the early conclusion of a China–Japan peace and friendship treaty. I promised that I would make his opinion known to the appropriate people in Japan. I find it significant that he didn’t simply use the term peace treaty but rather peace and friendship treaty. It was five years from the time I had proposed such a treaty in my novel *The Human Revolution*, and it was to be another four years before the treaty was actually signed.

Through our encounter, I felt firsthand the incredible energy and vibrant spirit of Premier Zhou. Such were his inner resources that he might easily continue speaking for another hour, or even two. But I kept looking at my watch and nodding to Mr. Liao, signaling my concern that we were tiring the premier and should now be on our way. Each time, Mr. Liao would signal that we should stay a little longer. We ended up meeting for nearly thirty minutes. I will never forget how the premier, ill as he



**Zhou Enlai Cherry Tree, Soka University**

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was and after having spent so much time with us, arose and accompanied us to the entrance of the building when we left.

As the famous saying goes, “Treasure every meeting, for it will never recur.” Our first meeting was also our last opportunity to speak to each other.

**D**URING our meeting, I presented Premier Zhou with a painting. I was later told that he hung it in his hospital room, replacing the one that had been there. He spent the last year of his life gazing at that Japanese painting.

A few short months later, in the spring of 1975, we welcomed the first exchange students from the People’s Republic of China to Soka University. When Premier Zhou came to Japan in his youth, he had a difficult time and was unable to

study at a Japanese university. I wanted to make that up to him somehow.

There were six Chinese students. I made a proposal to them and the other Soka University students: “Premier Zhou told me that he would like to visit Japan again when the cherry trees bloom, but that he is unable. Why don’t we plant a cherry tree in his honor on campus? With this as a first step, let’s foster a lasting friendship between Japan and China throughout our lives—a friendship that will endure through the generations.”

And in November of that year, the Zhou Cherry Tree was planted.

Two months later, the news of Premier Zhou’s death raced around the world.

Pinned on his chest as he lay in state was a badge inscribed with the words: “In the service of the people.”

Even on the operating table, Premier Zhou had managed, while gasping for breath, to give instructions concerning the health and welfare of coal miners in a certain region in China. The great are selfless. The only thing in Premier Zhou’s mind, in his heart, was his concern for the people. In the final days of his life, he said to his doctors: “There’s nothing more you can do here. Don’t waste your time on me. Please go and see to the other patients who need you more.”

**M**EN and women alike wept at the news of his passing. He had been like a parent to the people. Who would ever care for them as deeply and as well? The grief of the Chinese people shook the mountains and rivers; the cold winter wind wailed over the earth. No matter how hard the Gang of Four tried to suppress it, the people’s mourning filled the land.

When the Qingming Festival (a festival to honor the deceased) came in April, huge numbers of people gathered in Tiananmen Square to leave floral wreaths for Premier Zhou. The Gang of Four ordered the flowers cleared away, but the people just made new wreaths and gathered together in even greater numbers in an outpouring of grief. “We have made wreaths for you, dear Premier, in our hearts, wreaths of love and gratitude that no one can carry away!” That was their spirit.

The more the Gang of Four attacked Premier Zhou, the more they roused the people’s anger. The people would not allow his reputation to be sullied. A cry went up

around the nation to topple the Gang of Four, and no one could hold back the wrath of the people once it was awakened. The premier, in death, finally defeated his living enemies. Love for the people was all that mattered to him. His entire life, every fiber of his being, was devoted to this, and this alone.

**B**ACK in 1962, representatives of Buraku Liberation League<sup>3</sup>—an alliance of one of Japan’s most oppressed minorities—visited China. When the head of the delegation expressed gratitude to Premier Zhou for taking time out of his busy schedule to meet them, the Chinese leader responded: “What are you saying? Any premier who did not meet with the most oppressed and suffering of all the Japanese people when they’ve come all the way to China would not deserve to be China’s premier!”<sup>4</sup>

To Premier Zhou, “the people” were not only the Chinese people. This was evident in his attitude toward the issue of Japanese war reparations to China. The Japanese invasion of China resulted in 35 million Chinese casualties and direct and indirect economic losses totaling an estimated \$600 billion. If a certain amount of that tremendous loss had been paid by Japan to China as reparations, how much it could have helped the devastated Chinese nation! After the war, many in China urged that Japan should not be allowed to rebuild its heavy industry freely, but that seventy percent of its industrial plants be dismantled and shipped to China to revive its industrial base.

But Premier Zhou disagreed: “China does not seek reparations. The Japanese and Chinese people alike were victims of Japanese militarism. If we seek reparations, we will be inflicting pain and suffering on our fellow victims.”

As a matter of fact, the best estimates suggest that paying even a modest \$50 billion reparation would have taken Japan fifty years. In so doing, Japan would not have become the economic power it is today. No Japanese should ever forget this. And given this truth, it is utterly unspeakable for Japan to pride itself on its economic might and fail to pay proper respect to China, to which it owes its prosperity!

In 1978, a little more than two years after Premier Zhou’s death, I met again with Madame Deng in Beijing. It was as if I were talking to the late premier’s other self, so similar was her spirit. With a smile, she said to me, “I would like to visit Japan next year when the cherry trees are in full bloom.” She meant to tell me that she would finally fulfill her husband’s wish.

And she came just as she had promised. She was an official guest of Japan in the spring of 1979—exactly sixty years after her husband had bid farewell to the cherry blossoms of Kyoto.

Unfortunately, the cherries had bloomed early that year in Tokyo, and a spring storm had blown most of the blossoms away by the time of Madame Deng’s visit. Wishing to share with her the beauty of that year’s cherry blossoms, I brought her some branches of blossoms from the

later-blooming double-flowered cherries when I called upon her at the State Guest House. In addition, I presented her with an album of photographs of the Zhou Cherry Tree and also of the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees—a pair of trees I had planted on the Soka University campus for her and her late husband—along with some snapshots of the happy Chinese exchange students studying at the university.

When she saw the pictures of the cherry trees at Soka University, Madame Deng beamed and declared that they were beautiful symbols of our friendship.

**T**HE Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees stand side by side. In the past, Premier Zhou and Madame Deng had a similar pair of cherry trees growing in their garden, but one withered and died. Madame Deng confided her regret that she and her husband never had their picture taken together beneath those cherry trees. In the wish that it might bring some small joy, I planted a pair of trees for the two of them on the Soka University campus.

I met Madame Deng again on several occasions after that visit to Japan, the last being at her home in Beijing in May 1990. A painting of her and Premier Zhou that I had presented to them hung on the wall. “Whenever I receive foreign friends here in this room,” she explained, “I show them this picture and talk about my memories of Premier Zhou as well as the friendship between you and the premier. I have never received a



SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda meet with Madame Deng at her home in Beijing in May 1990.

more wonderful gift in my entire life. I am sure that the premier is just as pleased with it as I.”

When I showed her new photographs of the Zhou Cherry Tree and of the Zhou Enlai and Deng Yingchao Cherry Trees, she expressed surprise at how they’d grown. And then, when I was about to leave, she presented me with an ivory paper knife that had belonged to the premier. I made to decline this all too precious gift, but she said: “I know the strong feelings of friendship the premier had for you, and that is why I have decided to present this personal item of his to you. Please accept it as a keepsake of your friendship. When you look at it, please remember him.” And she also presented me with a jade pen stand of

her own. She knew that this was the last time we would meet.

There is an old Chinese saying: “When you communicate with a person, communicate with his heart; when you want to water a tree, water its roots.” Premier Zhou knew the secret to true government: Cherish the people’s hearts and gain their trust.

To this very day I remember with great vividness Premier Zhou’s voice, his gaze, his spirit. He was a “Giant of Asia” who pressed forward despite storms of opposition. When he died, he was surrounded by enemies. But he is the one who triumphed in the end. He made superhuman efforts to prepare his country internally for reform and liberation, and at the same time he carved out a

space for China in the world, readying it for friendly relations with Japan and the United States. Only after achieving these great deeds did he leave us.

Today, at last, China is shaking off 100 years of oppression and suffering and taking giant steps forward toward a prosperous twenty-first century—following the path that Premier Zhou devoted his life to creating. He has triumphed. His selfless dedication, weathering all trials and tribulations, prevailed.

The stone monument that designates the Zhou Enlai Cherry Tree at Soka University faces the direction of China. When I look up at the western sky toward that vast land, I see there the bright smiles of Premier Zhou and Madame Deng. □

1. Lin Biao (1907–71) A hero of the Communist struggle for power under Mao Tse-tung, he was one of modern China’s outstanding military leaders who made substantial contributions to the Communists’ eventual triumph in 1949. Before his death in 1971, Lin Biao was considered most likely to be Mao’s successor.
2. Zhou Enlai, *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1989), vol. 2, p. 324.
3. The Buraku Liberation League is a grassroots organization formed by descendants of members of the old Japanese “untouchable” caste, which was comprised of those who were engaged in so-called unclean occupations such as butchers and tanners and who were known as *burakumin*. For centuries, contact with *burakumin* was shunned, and they were forced to live in segregated ghettos (Jpn. *buraku*).
4. Saichiro Uesugi, *Jinken wa sekai o ugokasu* (Human Rights Move the World) (Osaka: Kaiho Shuppansha, 1991), pp. 127–28.



# The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (13)

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

*The last installment addressed the postwar reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai and the great propagation effort of the second president, Josei Toda.*

## Chapter 13: The ‘Second Chapter of Kosen-rufu’ and the Temple Issue

### (1) The global spread of Buddhism under Daisaku Ikeda’s leadership

WHEN Josei Toda died in 1958, many critics in the Japanese media were confident that the Soka Gakkai would not survive without his leadership. Instead, the Gakkai remained united under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda, who was then chief of staff. On May 3, 1960, he became the third president of the Soka Gakkai.

Inheriting his mentor’s will to spread Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism both far and wide, President Ikeda brought about unprecedented growth on a global scale. In October 1960, soon after his inauguration, he visited North and South America. The following year, he accompanied Nittatsu, the sixty-sixth high priest, to India. Ikeda traveled around the globe—to

the Americas, Europe and Asia, including China and the former Soviet Union. Through those visits, he encouraged and nurtured the faith of those living outside Japan while promoting peace, culture and education based on the Daishonin’s Buddhism. By 1997 he had visited 54 nations.

In January 1975, the First International Buddhist League World Peace Conference was held in Guam. On that occasion, what later was named the Soka Gakkai International was formed, and Ikeda became its first president. Under his outstanding leadership the SGI continued to develop. As of 1997, about 1,360,000 members were practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism in 128 countries and territories outside Japan, contributing to their respective communities and nations.

In his writings, the Daishonin expresses his hope for the global spread of his teachings. For example, he states in “On the Buddha’s Prophecy”: “[The votary of



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the Lotus Sutra] will establish the true object of worship represented by the five characters of Myohorenge-kyo and bring it to the entire world” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 113). He goes on to state: “The moon appears in the west and gradually shines eastward, while the sun rises in the east and casts its rays to the west. The same is true of Buddhism. It spread from west to east in the Former and Middle Days of the Law, but will travel from east to west in the Latter Day” (MW-1, 114). Here the Daishonin indicates that his teaching, which he compares to the sun, will spread from Japan to the rest of the world and save all humanity in the Latter Day.

The Daishonin’s vision has been realized through the dedicated efforts of President Ikeda and his fellow SGI members. When the SGI was formed, Nittatsu stated: “The propagation of Buddhism depends on the time. But the time for propagation will not come by itself. It is President Ikeda who has made this the right time for the worldwide growth of true Buddhism. I am certain that Nichiren Daishonin would praise the

May 3, 1960—A 32-year-old Daisaku Ikeda becomes the third president of the Soka Gakkai. He immediately embarks on the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

great accomplishment and tireless dedication of President Ikeda” (March 1975 *Seikyo Times*, p. 15).

## (2) The construction of the Grand Main Temple

WHILE spreading the Daishonin’s Buddhism, Ikeda and the Soka Gakkai continued to support the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. In April 1964, the Soka Gakkai donated to the head temple the Grand Reception Hall, which was built with the finest materials from around the world. On that occasion, the priesthood appointed Mr. Ikeda as chief representative of all Nichiren Shoshu lay believers. Every year the Gakkai built and donated branch temples. Also more lodging temples were built on the head temple grounds by the Gakkai. And, as the membership outside Japan increased, the Gakkai donated branch temples both in the United States and Brazil.

In October 1972, the Grand Main Temple (Jpn Sho-Hondo) was completed and donated to the head temple to house the Dai-Gohonzon. The huge cost of this construction project was financed by more than 8 million Gakkai members. At the October 1 completion ceremony, Ikeda elaborated on the purpose and nature of the Grand Main Temple: “The Grand Main Temple has been built through the passionate sincerity of more than 8 million people. Put simply, this is not an edifice symbolic of religious authority, but a facility for the people.... This Grand Main Temple is a building in which to pray for the lasting peace of humanity and for the sound progress and development of global culture. Such prayer will be offered by all those who visit here; that is, men and women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. This is the most prominent feature [of the Grand Main Temple].” Here Ikeda explains that the Grand Main Temple was built for the peace of all humanity and thus open to everyone, transcending the narrow sectarian concern of prosperity for only Nichiren Shoshu.



January 1962—President Ikeda tours several nations to encourage people in their practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and also to gather materials for the construction of the Grand Reception Hall, which would begin later that year. Above left, standing in front of the Parthenon in Athens. Right, meeting with Iraqi youth in Baghdad.

Nittatsu, in his “Admonition” dated April 28, 1972, explains the significance of the Grand Main Temple as “the actual high sanctuary of this time” and “the supreme edifice that shall be the high sanctuary of the temple of true Buddhism at the dawn of kosen-rufu.” He clarified that when the Daishonin’s Buddhism is spread widely in accordance with the Daishonin’s will, Taiseki-ji would be renamed Hon’mon-ji (Temple of the True Teaching), and the Grand Main Temple would become the high sanctuary of that temple, the temple of true Buddhism (i.e., the actual high sanctuary). In a certificate of appreciation presented on October 12, 1972 to Ikeda, who chaired the construction committee, Nittatsu praises his contribution, calling the construction “unprecedented in the school’s history and an immortal monument to be exalted by the entire priesthood.”

While the Grand Main Temple was being built, one parish group called Myoshinko, which belonged to Hodo-in, a temple in Tokyo, vehemently opposed the construction. They claimed that the high sanctuary must be built only by the sovereign or national government. The idea of a “national high sanctuary” was originally propounded by Chigaku Tanaka (1861–1939), who founded an ultra nationalistic lay Nichiren Buddhist group called Rissho Ankoku Kai (Society for securing the peace of the land through the establishment of true Buddhism) in 1885. He renamed his group the Kokuchukai (‘Pillar of the

Nation Society’) in 1914. During the early 1900s, he promoted the idea of a national high sanctuary.

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood had also used the term national high sanctuary. The expression, however, was deemed inappropriate because the scope of the Daishonin’s teaching should not be confined within one nation and the expression often invited criticism that Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai were aiming to establish a state religion. So, at the thirty-third Soka Gakkai Headquarters general meeting on May 3, 1970, Nittatsu announced: “From now on, there shall be no use of such terminology [as the national high sanctuary] in this school” (*Seikyo Shimbun*, May 4, 1970).

The Myoshinko, however, insisted on the idea of a national high sanctuary and criticized the priesthood and the Gakkai for rejecting the term. After failing to persuade the group to change its stance, Nittatsu expelled them from Nichiren Shoshu in 1974. On October 4 of the same year, about 100 youth, members of the Myoshinko, demonstrated in front of the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo. Using car-mounted loudspeakers, they demanded a meeting with Hiroshi Hojo, then the general director. Several dozen demonstrators forced their way into the building. Soka Gakkai staff and police officers pushed the demonstrators out of the building and closed the gate to the property. The demonstrators, however, drove a car through the gate and forced their way into the

building once again, injuring more than a dozen Gakkai staff members and vandalizing the facility. The demonstrators were arrested by riot police who had responded to the scene. The Gakkai lodged a criminal complaint against the demonstrators for trespassing, assault, vandalism and other acts, leading to the conviction of three Myoshinko leaders. Later the Myoshinko renamed itself the Kenshokai, and today it is an independently incorporated religious organization. Recently, the Kenshokai has been criticized for aggressive and sometimes violent proselytizing methods that target minors.

Since the Grand Main Temple symbolized the Soka Gakkai's contribution, it later became an object of resentment for the priesthood as animosity toward the Gakkai grew within its ranks. In January 1991, Nikken, the sixty-seventh high priest, disputed the significance of the Grand Main Temple as defined by his predecessor, Nittatsu. Ultimately, in April 1998, he removed the Dai-Gohonzon from the Grand Main Temple and announced his plan to demolish the structure. Nikken proclaimed that he would destroy the building "to completely refute the great slander of Ikeda and others."

### (3) Issues between the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and the Soka Gakkai in the 1970s

**M**ANY issues arose between the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai during the 1970s. These were, for the most part, rooted in the priesthood's fundamental mistrust of the Soka Gakkai and its deep-seated insecurity about its role and purpose. This was greatly complicated and aggravated by the machinations of a single person, Masatomo Yamazaki, then chief legal counsel for the Soka Gakkai.

Seen from another perspective, the Gakkai's progressive ideals and openness to society, which had become more apparent in the 1970s, caused a backlash within a priesthood constrained by its own conservative traditions and institutional authoritarianism. The temple's inability to understand and embrace the breadth and depth of the Gakkai's movement led to deep frustration among priests, which was born out in repressive action.

After the Grand Main Temple was completed in 1972, the Gakkai began conducting its activities and spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism in a broader and more flexible manner than it had during its period of extremely rapid growth during the fifties and sixties.

This new phase of development was referred to as "the second chapter of kosen-rufu." In his speech delivered on November 2, 1972, Ikeda remarked: "We now greet a new sunrise. It is the dawn of the second chapter of kosen-rufu, a voyage toward realization of true global peace" (January 1973 *Seikyo Times*, p. 13). In this new phase, the Gakkai began communicating the Daishonin's teaching as a philosophy that elucidates the profound workings and potential of human life.

Later in the same speech, Ikeda stressed this very point: "It is not too much to say that the Soka Gakkai begins and ends with the philosophy of life. To be more specific, the Soka Gakkai has as its essential foundation the enlightenment that Mr. Toda attained in prison. The theory of life, however, is not one formulated by the Gakkai organization. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is in itself the philosophy of life that the Soka Gakkai inherited in its purest form. Thus the kernel of the Soka Gakkai's teaching lies in Nichiren Daishonin's writings and in the enlightenment of Mr. Toda who interpreted these documents as revealing the philosophy of life" (Ibid., pp. 15–16).

The priesthood could not appreciate the fact that lay believers were now gaining a profound enough grasp of Buddhist principles to interpret the writings of Nichiren Daishonin on their own, without clerical instruction, thus successfully convincing many others of the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism. The priesthood's inability to explain Buddhism to a broad and diverse audience and its diminishing role in guiding lay believers exacerbated the priests' insecurity. This greatly contributed to friction with the Gakkai in the 1970s.

Furthermore, after the completion of the Grand Main Temple in 1972, the Gakkai, with Nittatsu's approval, began to build more community centers. Until that time, the Gakkai's resources had been mainly devoted to the development of the head temple and its branch temples. Besides building the Grand Main Temple and many branch temples, the Gakkai donated the following buildings to the head temple grounds: the Daikejo Hall in 1960, the Daibo Hall in 1962, the

Grand Reception Hall in 1964, the Mutsubo Hall in 1965 and the Tenrei-in Hall in 1969, not to mention many lodging facilities.

Conversely, during this time, the Gakkai's rapidly growing membership suffered from a shortage of adequate facilities for its own use. While the Gakkai's desire to build more centers for the benefit of its members was understandable, the organization nonetheless never stopped building temples for the priesthood. Rather, it simply shifted its emphasis from funneling nearly all of its available resources to the priesthood to dedicating a portion of those resources to building community centers and related facilities. Young priests who had not yet been assigned to their own branch temples were not pleased by this decision. They were concerned about their financial prospects and felt that they were being deprived of the prosperity and comfort that should have been afforded them by the lay organization. These young priests, who had been ordained under Nittatsu, later formed a core of anti-Soka Gakkai sentiment within the priesthood.

The Gakkai also started to improve its organizational structure and procedures, especially in terms of its legal and administrative aspects. The Gakkai's efforts to improve itself as a religious corporation made many priests apprehensive, and some concluded that the Gakkai was preparing to separate itself from the priesthood. Furthermore, the priesthood had become completely dependent upon the Gakkai. Their resulting sense of insecurity led them to misinterpret the Gakkai's sincere intentions at every juncture during the mid to later 1970s.

Keenly aware of this atmosphere of mistrust, the lawyer Yamazaki took steps to aggravate the situation with his personal gain in mind. For this reason, an understanding of Yamazaki's role in manipulating the priesthood is essential to gaining insight into the problems that occurred between the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai in the 1970s and, more important, into the fundamental nature of the priesthood itself. It also sheds light on the enormous influence of the media on people's perception of a religious movement that seeks to establish deep roots into society.

For the first time in its history, the Soka Gakkai experienced extensive, ongoing media attacks, most of which were concentrated on Ikeda himself. Yamazaki

cleverly took advantage of this media influence and used it to undermine the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism. In this sense, the temple issue during the 1970s was a painful yet valuable experience for the Gakkai in terms of promoting its Buddhist movement in an increasingly information-oriented society. (For a more detailed explanation of what took place in the 1970s, please refer to the following timeline.)

Yamazaki became legal counsel for the Soka Gakkai in May 1970. In dealing with legal issues regarding the Myoshinko, Yamazaki developed close contacts with the Nichiren Shoshu administration. He saw an opportunity to amass wealth through his actions as an intermediary between the priesthood and the Gakkai. Yamazaki started to manipulate the tension between both parties. Throughout most of the late 1970s, he fueled the priesthood's antagonism toward the Gakkai by feeding it misinformation.

Yamazaki's greed and corruption may be summed up in his view of the Soka Gakkai as a moneymaking opportunity. For example, in 1975, Yamazaki earned a handsome profit from a real estate deal involving the priesthood and the Gakkai. As he gained trust from the priesthood administration, he had Taiseki-ji sell a large tract of land in Fujinomiya City to his own paper company at a low price. Yamazaki then sold the property to a developer who, in turn, sold it to the Gakkai for a cemetery park.

Each time the land was bought and sold, the price was inflated. From this real estate deal, Yamazaki amassed a profit of some 50 million yen, which he did not properly report as income. When the Gakkai bought another property for a memorial park from the same developer, Yamazaki received a kickback of about 400 million yen from the developer for having arranged for an affiliate company to be involved in the construction. Yamazaki clearly demonstrated his perception of the Gakkai as a business opportunity to be exploited.

By leaking misinformation to the priesthood, he also aroused its distrust of the Gakkai and then contrived to position himself as a mediator to resolve the conflict. Since the mid-1970s, he had created the impression within the priesthood that the Gakkai was trying to gain control over it. Throughout the rest of the seventies, while still in the role of mediator, he continued to leak misinformation in an attempt to

sabotage the Gakkai's efforts to bridge the gap and create harmony with the priests.

Yamazaki also encouraged a group of disgruntled young priests to attack the Gakkai. Those priests refused to perform funeral services for Gakkai members, while at the same time asserting that unless lay believers have their funeral conducted by a Nichiren Shoshu priest, they would be damned to the hell of incessant suffering. With those threats, assuming a degree of insecurity and ignorance among the laity, those priests encouraged members to quit the Gakkai and join a temple parish. Those anti-Gakkai priests later formed a group called the Shoshinkai (The Group of Correct Faith).

In January 1978, when the situation started to improve, Yamazaki wrote a document titled "Letter From a Certain Believer," which he submitted to the priesthood. In it, he alleged that the Gakkai was systematically promoting the view that its president was the true Buddha, and instructed the priesthood in detail as to how to control the Gakkai by using its authority as leverage. As this document was read and circulated within the priesthood, the situation intensified.

Despite additional complications, the Gakkai continued to try to mend its relationship with the priesthood. The situation proceeded toward a resolution when Nittatsu stated on November 7, 1978: "From now on, let us realize true harmonious unity between the priesthood and laity and protect our school" (*Seikyo Shimbun*, November 8, 1978).

Disgruntled priests, however, continued to attack the Gakkai and encouraged its members to leave the organization and directly join temple parishes. To end the priesthood's attack on the Gakkai and avoid further confusion, Ikeda announced his resignation as Soka Gakkai president on April 24, 1979, and Hiroshi Hojo became the fourth president of the Soka Gakkai. On July 22 that year, Nittatsu died suddenly, and Shin'no Abe, then the general administrator of Nichiren Shoshu, claimed to have received the lineage of high priest from Nittatsu on April 15, 1978. With no one contesting his claim to the high office, Abe changed his first name to Nikken and became the sixty-seventh high priest on August 6, 1979.

Yamazaki at first carried favor with Nikken so that he might continue to manipulate the priesthood and

exert his influence over the Gakkai. After his attempts failed, however, Yamazaki started questioning the legitimacy of Nikken's succession and attacking him in the media. For example, in the weekly tabloid *Shukan Bunshun* dated November 20, 1980, Yamazaki alleged that Nikken never received the lineage of high priest from his predecessor. Furthermore, the Shoshinkai priests started to attack Nikken's legitimacy as high priest. In January 1981, priests of the Shoshinkai filed a lawsuit against Nikken, seeking to nullify his status as high priest. Starting the following year, Nikken expelled about 180 Shoshinkai priests from the priesthood.

Meanwhile, Yamazaki resigned his position as legal counsel for the Gakkai in March 1980. After his resignation, he started to attack the Gakkai overtly in the media and incited the priesthood to do the same. At that time, he was in possession of a large volume of the Gakkai's internal documents, which had been stolen by Takashi Harashima, the former Study Department chief who betrayed the Gakkai in league with Yamazaki. Yamazaki, burdened with large business debts, decided to extort money from the Gakkai by threatening to use the contents of those internal documents to fuel attacks by the priesthood and the media.

The circumstances surrounding the Gakkai at this time were complex. Around the end of 1979, Yamazaki brought several of those stolen documents to the attention of the media and the priesthood. One of them was a memorandum written in June 1974 by Hiroshi Hojo, then Soka Gakkai vice president. In 1974, the Soka Gakkai proposed to the priesthood the establishment of a Nichiren Shoshu International Center to better support its rapidly increasing overseas membership. The priesthood, however, vehemently opposed the idea, suspecting that the Gakkai was attempting to control the priesthood under the umbrella of the proposed NSIC.

Hojo, out of deep frustration, wrote a report to Ikeda, characterizing the priesthood as "a serious obstacle to kosen-rufu." He also wrote in the report: "I think that in the long run, we have no choice but to separate wisely. [The difference between the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai] is essentially similar to that of Catholicism and Protestantism." Ikeda admonished Hojo at that time for emotionalism and rejected his idea, and the Gakkai continued to support the

Daisaku Ikeda is confirmed president of the International Buddhist League January 26, 1975 by 158 delegates representing 51 countries.

priesthood as previously mentioned. When this memorandum was leaked to the media and the priesthood around the end of 1979, the Gakkai found itself in an awkward position since, in order to fully explain the context of Hojo's document and defend itself, the Gakkai would have to reveal the obstinate emotionalism exhibited by the priesthood administration regarding the NSIC. Bound by its role to support and protect the priesthood, the Gakkai was thus ineffectual in the face of the onslaught from the media and the anti-Gakkai priests.

So when Yamazaki attempted to blackmail the Gakkai with a threat to leak more of the Gakkai's internal documents in April 1980, the bitter experience of the Hojo report was still fresh in the minds of the organization's senior officials. By this time, they had also become keenly aware of Yamazaki's cunning at mixing factual information with falsehoods, and engineering information leaks to elicit a negative response. As its relationship with the priesthood was still fragile, the Gakkai could expect a more virulent attack from the media and the priesthood, one that would ultimately hurt the membership. So Soka Gakkai senior officials made the painful decision to comply with Yamazaki's demand and pay him 300 million yen.

When Yamazaki demanded another 500 million yen, however, the Gakkai leadership decided to report the incident to the authorities and pressed charges against Yamazaki for extortion. In January 1981, Yamazaki was arrested and, on March 26, 1985, convicted of extortion in the Tokyo District Court. He was sentenced to three years in prison, which he served from February 25, 1991, until April 27, 1993.

After his release from prison, Yamazaki allied himself with Nikken, whom he had previously attacked, as well as with certain anti-Gakkai politicians and journalists, in order to advance his vendetta against the Gakkai.

From before the time Nikken assumed the role of high priest and after, although his succession had been marred with scandals and internal conflicts, the Soka Gakkai maintained its dedicated support of the priesthood. With this support and cooperation from the



Gakkai, the priesthood held major events, such as a weeklong service in October 1981 to celebrate the 700th year after the Daishonin's passing. There was also the observance of the 650th anniversary of Nikko Shonin's passing in March 1982, and one in December of the same year to mark the 650th anniversary of third high priest Nichimoku's passing.

Furthermore, the Gakkai proposed the building of 200 branch temples for the priesthood. In following this plan, the Gakkai donated to the priesthood many branch temples every year throughout the 1980s. With the Gakkai's enormous contribution, the priesthood, although it had lost many priests and branch temples through its conflict with the Shoshinkai, started to enjoy once again an unprecedented level of development and prosperity.

In his New Year's message for 1991, even as he was hatching his plan to disband the Gakkai, Nikken wrote: "Also worthy of special mention about President Ikeda's leadership is that he has greatly advanced worldwide kosen-rufu.... The many offerings to the head temple and the donation of local temples begun by the Soka Gakkai around the time of President Toda have been



Participants from fifty-one nations gather in Guam on January 26, 1975, to form the first international lay organization of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda. The International Buddhist League was later named the Soka Gakkai International (SGI). Outside Japan, the SGI currently comprises some 1,360,000 people in 128 countries.

diligently carried on by President Ikeda, whose contributions have earned numerous words of praise from my predecessor" (January 1991 *Seikyo Times*, p. 3). As evident in his message, Nikken could not deny Ikeda's unprecedented contributions to the global spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism and to the priesthood's prosperity although, when he wrote this message, he had already decided to expel Ikeda and destroy the Gakkai.

Although it had witnessed numerous unmistakable signs of corruption and authoritarianism within the priesthood, especially during the late 1970s, the Gakkai continued to increase its level of support for the priesthood. In this regard, Ikeda talks about the basic stance of the Gakkai before the most recent outbreak of the temple issue at the end of 1990: "We protected the priesthood with the utmost sincerity. In recent years, as well, even while confronted with the reality of the decadence and runaway greed of priests, we have all along made known our wish that the priesthood purify itself" (from his speech on May 3, 1992, in the June 8, 1992 *World Tribune*, p. 5). Unfortunately those years of tolerance by the Gakkai toward the priesthood were completely betrayed the

moment Nikken declared his true intentions to disband the Soka Gakkai. □

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# TIMELINE FOR THE TEMPLE ISSUE: 1972 – 1985

1972

**October 12:** The dedication ceremony for the Grand Main Temple is held. After the completion of the Grand Main Temple, the Soka Gakkai embarks on “the second chapter of kosen-rufu” in which it engages in the construction of community centers, a broad-based approach to the Daishonin’s Buddhism as a philosophy of life and the development of the Gakkai as a religious corporation. The priesthood misinterprets the Gakkai’s “second chapter” as a preparation for its independence. Concerned about possibly fewer future assignments to branch temples as chief priests, many young student priests in particular react negatively to the Gakkai’s emphasis on the construction of community centers.

1973

**June:** The priesthood’s mismanagement of its property is revealed in a land dispute. The deputy chairperson of the Fujinomiya city council and others file a complaint against Nittatsu and Ikeda over Taiseki-ji’s illegal use of a city highway for the construction of the Grand Main Temple. This legal problem raises concerns over the priesthood’s management procedures.

1974

**May–July:** The priesthood misconstrues the Gakkai’s proposal to establish a Nichiren Shoshu International Center (NSIC) as a step toward control over the priesthood. Later, Ikeda meets with Nittatsu twice to explain the purpose of the NSIC, which is to support overseas members. Nittatsu’s misunderstanding is gradually resolved, and he agrees to the establishment of the NSIC and attends the first International Buddhist League (later renamed SGI) World Peace Conference held in Guam on Jan. 26, 1975.

1975

**August:** The Gakkai offers to help the priesthood conduct an internal audit of its accounting and property management procedures. The priesthood administration reacts strongly, however, alleging that the Gakkai is attempting to intervene in the priesthood’s finances and internal affairs. Ikeda’s explanations resolve Nittatsu’s misunderstanding.

**April:** Masatomo Yamazaki, then chief legal counsel for the Soka Gakkai, receives approval from the head temple administration to sell a large tract of its land to a paper company owned by Yamazaki. The property is then sold and bought again to inflate its price before the Gakkai purchases it for a memorial park. Yamazaki earns a large personal profit from these real estate transactions.

1976

Members of the Myokankai, a group of priests who were ordained under Nittatsu, start to criticize the Gakkai. Many priests who are active in the Myokankai will later form the Shoshinkai. With the backing of Nittatsu as their teacher, the Myokankai priests start to enjoy dominance over other factions within the priesthood.

1977

**January–March:** Soka Gakkai youth division members visit active Myokankai members, refute their criticism of the Gakkai and obtain statements of contrition for their mistreatment of its members.

**January 15:** Ikeda gives a speech titled “A Historical View of Buddhism” at the ninth general meeting of the Study Department. In the speech, he comments: “Anyone who sincerely devotes himself to the dissemination of Buddhist teachings and works for the salvation of the common people is qualified to receive offerings or support from the Buddhist community.... In general we of the Soka Gakkai who embrace the Gohonzon and chant daimoku are ‘great teachers of the Law.’ In other words, we are the true *shukke* or clergy of today. Lay believers and clergy members are in fact absolutely equal in rank” (April 1977 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 9–11). “We have seen that the temples were originally places where those engaged in the practice of Buddhism could gather together, study the Buddhist teachings, and prepare

themselves for the task of disseminating those teachings abroad....In this sense, the community and training centers of the Soka Gakkai are worthy of being called the ‘temple of the present’” (Ibid., p. 11). Many priests, outraged by those remarks, start to rebut them in the priesthood’s publications.

**Summer:** Active anti-Gakkai priests of the Myokankai provide the media with internal information to further attack the Gakkai. Weekly tabloids, such as *Shukan Shincho* and *Shukan Bunshun*, start to publish articles slandering the Gakkai. Yamazaki orchestrates these media attacks behind the scene. Using those tabloids, priests intensify their attack on the Gakkai in their sermons, encouraging Gakkai members to sever their affiliation with the Gakkai and join a temple parish.

**September 22:** Nittatsu issues a notice to chief priests of branch temples, expressing his “regret” over the publicized schism between the priesthood and the Gakkai. But the priests’ organized movement to entice Gakkai members to leave and join a temple parish continues to increase its momentum. The media attacks on the Gakkai continue as well.

**December 4:** Ikeda attends a completion ceremony of Jozen-ji’s main sanctuary in Miyazaki Prefecture. In his speech, he expresses his desire for harmonious unity between the priesthood and laity and pledges to support and protect the priesthood while asking for tolerance on the priesthood’s part. With Ikeda’s initiative and efforts, the situation starts to improve.

1978

**January 2:** Nittatsu issues an “Admonition” to urge both the priesthood and laity to advance in harmony. In the same month, however, active anti-Gakkai priests continue to denounce the Soka Gakkai in their monthly sermons.


**January 18:** Yamazaki sends his document titled “Letter From a Certain Believer” to Nittatsu. In it, Yamazaki alleges that the Gakkai is promoting the concept that its president is the true Buddha and attempting to control the priesthood. The document also offers a step-by-step plan to control the Gakkai with the threat of excommunication, and urges the priesthood to bring the Gakkai into submission within several years. The document is read at a meeting of young priests at the head temple the following day. The document undermines the possibility of reconciliation and incites priests to intensify their attacks on the Gakkai and to urge its members to join a temple parish.

**February 9:** The chairperson of the Nichiren Shoshu council, the chiefs of greater parishes and active anti-Gakkai priests meet at the head temple to discuss the possibility of excommunicating the Soka Gakkai. They decide to distribute a questionnaire among the priesthood concerning the subject.

**February 12 & 14:** Ikeda meets Nittatsu at the head temple. As a result of their talk, the Gakkai’s excommunication is averted, and the topic of the proposed questionnaire is changed to how the priesthood can cooperate with the Gakkai. Active anti-Gakkai priests express opposition to this accord.

**March 14:** At a nationwide meeting of priests at the head temple, Nittatsu instructs those present to work toward a harmonious relationship with the Gakkai.

**March 28:** The Nichiren Shoshu council passes a proposed agreement with the Gakkai, and the relationship between the priesthood and laity appears to be restored.



**End of March:** Yamazaki meets with Nittatsu and gives him a document titled “Future Strategy.” In the document, Yamazaki recommends that the priesthood continue to apply pressure on the Gakkai with an expressed threat to excommunicate or disband the lay organization. He also instructs the priesthood to demand that the Gakkai acknowledge what the priesthood asserts are doctrinal deviations. The priesthood’s response to the Gakkai henceforward proceeds according to Yamazaki’s plan. Yamazaki hints to Soka Gakkai officials that if they appoint him as a mediator, harmony with the temple will be restored. Meanwhile he continues to leak manipulated internal information of the Gakkai to the media. Encouraged by the intense media attack on the Gakkai, many priests begin to vehemently criticize it in their monthly sermons.

**May 8:** The Gakkai appoints Yamazaki as a mediator with the priesthood.

**June 30:** As demanded by the priesthood, the Gakkai publishes an acknowledgement of its doctrinal deviations in the *Seikyo Shimbun*. The article, titled “Basic Questions of Study,” cautions Gakkai members on the usage of various Buddhist terms and expressions. The issues raised in this article strongly suggest the priesthood’s frustration and insecurity toward a growing lay Buddhist movement. For example, the article discourages the application of the term Bodhisattvas of the Earth to lay believers (February 5, 1979, *World Tribune*). The article suggests that Gakkai members avoid using the expression “President Toda’s enlightenment in prison” or referring to this as “the prime point of the Soka Gakkai” (Ibid.). The article then reminds Gakkai members that “the teaching and legitimate formalities of Nichiren Shoshu” are the foundation of the Gakkai (Ibid.). Referring to Ikeda’s speech on January 15, 1977, the article also states: “We would like to correct the impression that a layman is qualified to receive offerings” (Ibid.). Regarding the definition of the “treasure of the Priest” or of the *samgha*, the article asserts: “Moreover we should not say, even in the broadest sense, that the Gakkai constitutes the ‘treasure of the Priest’” (Ibid.). Taking advantage of this article, many priests, in their sermons and other temple activities, continue to threaten and entice Gakkai members to leave the organization and directly join a temple parish.

**August 26:** The first Nichiren Shoshu temple members’ kick-off meeting is held at Taiseki-ji with approximately 6,000 temple members (Jpn *danto*) attending. At the meeting, the participants decide to promote a petition seeking Ikeda’s dismissal from the position of chief lay representative, a campaign to demand reimbursement of the financial contributions they had made while Gakkai members, as well as a movement to encourage Gakkai members to quit the Gakkai and directly join a temple parish.

**September:** Anti-Gakkai priests start to accuse the Gakkai of committing slander in having eight wooden Gohonzon made. Although these wooden Gohonzon are produced with Nittatsu’s approval, many priests use the event as a pretext to further attack the Gakkai. To appease these priests, the Gakkai returns seven of the wooden Gohonzon to the head temple. With Nittatsu’s approval, one wooden Gohonzon, produced from a Gohonzon transcribed for the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in 1951 by Nissho, the 64th high priest, remains enshrined at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters.

**September 25:** Yamazaki delivers two documents to Nittatsu. One is titled “On the Current Circumstances,” and another “Regarding the Overseas Membership.” In the first, Yamazaki instructs the priesthood to continue its campaign to disparage the Gakkai and bring its members to temple parishes. In the same document, he recommends that the priesthood administration exclude the Hayase and Abe family factions from key positions within the priesthood. In “Regarding the Overseas

Membership,” Yamazaki urges the priesthood administration to establish an overseas bureau to promote its campaign to increase temple parish members outside Japan as well.

**November 7:** A Soka Gakkai leaders’ meeting is held at Taiseki-ji. Hiroshi Hojo, then general director, states: “In this vein, we, the Soka Gakkai, frankly admit the next two points. 1) The fundamental principles which the Soka Gakkai must follow through as the lay organization of Nichiren Shoshu were somehow disregarded during the last several years in its orientation, in its direction of advance and in its application of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings. 2) The attitude the Soka Gakkai took toward Nichiren Shoshu last year was out of bounds. We, executives of the Soka Gakkai, deeply apologize for these two points” (February 5, 1979, *World Tribune*). At the same meeting, Takehisa Tsuji, then vice president, states: “As far as the wooden Gohonzon which the Soka Gakkai carelessly allowed to be inscribed, we have already dedicated them all to the Treasure House of the Head Temple based on the guidance we received from the high priest” (Ibid.). The manuscripts of the Gakkai officials’ speeches for this meeting have been checked in advance by the priesthood. According to Yamazaki’s instruction, the priesthood insists upon inserting the word “carelessly” into Tsuji’s statement regarding the so-called wooden Gohonzon incident. A nationwide meeting of priests is held after the Gakkai’s leaders’ meeting, after which Nittatsu makes a statement prohibiting priests from further attacking the Gakkai. Active anti-Gakkai priests, however, continue their slander toward the Gakkai and leak a variety of internal information to the tabloid media.

**November 14:** The priesthood forms its overseas bureau, following Yamazaki’s instructions.


1979

**January 28:** The second Nichiren Shoshu temple members’ general meeting is held at Taiseki-ji. Active anti-Gakkai priests continue their harsh criticism of the Gakkai. At this meeting, Nittatsu, in a tone rather critical of the Gakkai, states: “The priests have pointed out the Gakkai’s errors and united here with you temple members in order to protect Nichiren Shoshu. Their sincere intent is to widely spread the fundamental spirit of Nichiren Shoshu. I ask that you recognize their profound sincerity. Some priests, however, still remain nonchalant although erroneous teachings have been propagated. Yet so long as they are priests of Nichiren Shoshu, I will protect them magnanimously. I am protecting them as priests of Nichiren Shoshu. I ask for your understanding in this regard. I also ask that you please refute erroneous teachings to the best of your ability...” (*Complete Works of High Priest Nittatsu*, vol. 5, Part II, pp. 614–15).

**March 6:** Genjiro Fukushima, then Soka Gakkai vice president, openly criticizes the priesthood at the Omuta Community Center in Fukuoka Prefecture. In his speech, Fukushima comments: “When President Ikeda goes to the head temple, Gakkai members eagerly greet him, calling him ‘Sensei.’ But they do not go near the high priest. Nor do they yearn to see him. Even if the high priest walks by, they simply wonder, who is that old man? So priests are jealous and accuse us of treating the president as the true Buddha...” The priesthood is outraged by Fukushima’s speech, which has effectively nullified the Gakkai’s efforts for reconciliation thus far. (Fukushima later quits the Gakkai and becomes a vehement anti-Gakkai spokesperson, eventually lending support to Nikken.)

**March 12:** The Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office submits a letter of inquiry to the Gakkai regarding Fukushima’s comments.

**March 13:** On behalf of Nittatsu, Taiseki-ji’s Internal Affairs department submits a letter of inquiry to the Gakkai regarding Fukushima’s comments.



**March 31:** The Hokkeko Federation (an association of temple parishioners) holds an emergency board of directors meeting and passes a resolution requesting Ikeda's resignation from the position of chief lay representative.

**April 2:** Taiseki-ji's Internal Affairs Department, dissatisfied with the Gakkai's response to its initial inquiry, sends another letter of inquiry regarding Fukushima's statements and other matters.

**April 6:** Ikeda meets with Nittatsu in hope of restoring harmony. At the meeting, he communicates his decision to resign from the position of chief lay representative.

**April 8:** The Soka Gakkai publishes an apology in the *Seikyo Shimbun* for Fukushima's statements under the name of Hiroshi Hojo, then the general director.

**April 24:** To resolve the conflict and prevent Gakkai members from being subjected to further abuse from the priesthood, Ikeda announces his resignation from the position of Soka Gakkai president at a prefecture leaders' meeting. He becomes honorary Soka Gakkai president, and Hiroshi Hojo becomes the fourth Soka Gakkai president. The priesthood asks the Gakkai to no longer allow Mr. Ikeda to attend meetings and to refrain from covering his activities in its daily newspaper, the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

**April 26:** Ikeda resigns from the position of chief lay representative of Nichiren Shoshu. Nittatsu appoints him honorary chief lay representative.

**May 3:** The 40th Soka Gakkai Headquarters general meeting is held at Soka University in Tokyo. At this meeting, Nittatsu states: "For the last few years, truly regrettable incidents have continued and, to my sadness, have caused confusion.... In our Nichiren Shoshu, as you are aware, there are believers who belong to the Hokkeko and other temple groups, as well as to the Soka Gakkai. I ask that all of them be on good terms with one another as believers. Let bygones be bygones. Please cooperate in unity for the development of the priesthood as well as for kosen-rufu" (*Complete Works of High Priest Nittatsu*, vol. 5, part II, pp. 620–21). The closure of the conflict frustrates anti-Gakkai priests, who later become critical of Nittatsu and continue to slander the Gakkai.

**May 14:** Nittatsu appoints Yamazaki as a lay representative of Nichiren Shoshu along with Soka Gakkai President Hiroshi Hojo, General Director Kazuya Morita, Vice President Satoru Izumi, Vice President Takehisa Tsuji and Vice President Einosuke Akiya. Yamazaki's appointment indicates Nittatsu's trust in him.

**July 22:** Nittatsu dies. Shin'no Abe, then general administrator, claims to have received the transmission of the office of high priest from Nittatsu.

**August 6:** Shin'no Abe renames himself Nikken and becomes the sixty-seventh high priest.

**August–September:** Yamazaki meets with Nikken several times and recommends that the priesthood continue to undermine the Gakkai membership. Later that September, however, Nikken rejects Yamazaki, calling him a liar. (On January 5, 1991, at the outset of the most recent temple issue, Nikken delivers his apology to Yamazaki for having called him a liar and establishes an alliance with him to attack the Gakkai.)

1980

**November:** Yamazaki publishes an article in a weekly tabloid, questioning Nikken's legitimacy as high priest. Anti-Gakkai priests, who are mostly Nittatsu's disciples, start to criticize Nikken.

**January 9:** Nikken asks Ikeda to issue another apology to silence anti-Gakkai priests who are critical of Nikken.

**March:** Yamazaki resigns from the position of chief legal counsel for the Soka Gakkai.

**April 2:** The *Seikyo Shimbun* publishes an article titled "Reconfirming Our Fundamental Mission" under Ikeda's name, though he personally did not involve himself or condone its publication. The manuscript has been prepared by the Gakkai leadership at the priesthood's direction. The article reads in part: "It is true that the recent troubles with the priesthood occurred in the wake of the basic policy which the Soka Gakkai adopted for the second phase of kosen-rufu, specifically since 1972 when the Sho-Hondo was completed, and also as a result of guidance which I gave based on that policy during 1977.... Now I admit that some of the words I uttered were too self-righteous, too much Soka Gakkai centered, sounding as if the Soka Gakkai were primary and the priesthood secondary. This led some individuals of the priesthood to wonder if the Soka Gakkai might not be contemplating a break with Nichiren Shoshu. It is also true that some of the Gakkai members voiced emotional opinions. I deeply apologize for all this" (May 1980 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 20–22). With this apology published under Ikeda's name, Nikken attempts to placate anti-Gakkai priests who are questioning the legitimacy of his high office, thus solidifying his position within the priesthood.

**April:** Yamazaki extorts 300 million yen from the Gakkai in his attempt to bail himself out of large debts created by his failing frozen-food business. Yamazaki threatens Gakkai officials that he will leak more of the Gakkai's internal information to the media and incite weekly tabloids and anti-Gakkai priests to renew their attack on the Gakkai.

**June:** Yamazaki attempts to extort another 500 million yen from the Gakkai. The Gakkai lodges a complaint with the police.

An election is held for the sixteen-member Nichiren Shoshu council. The Shoshinkai, supported by Yamazaki, seeks to gain more than two-thirds of the council; that is, enough votes to change the rules and regulations of Nichiren Shoshu. Sixteen Shoshinkai priests and eight priests from other factions have declared their candidacy. Ten Shoshinkai priests are elected.

**July:** Anti-Gakkai priests officially form the Shoshinkai.

**September:** The Gakkai revokes Yamazaki's membership.

1981

**January:** Yamazaki is arrested for extortion. About 180 Shoshinkai priests file a civil lawsuit seeking to revoke Nikken's position as high priest.

**1981–1983:** Nikken expels more than 180 Shoshinkai priests, thus solidifying his position within the priesthood.

1985

**March:** Tokyo District Court convicts Yamazaki, sentencing him to three years in prison.



# DIALOGUE

on the *Lotus Sutra*

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

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

With this installment the participants continue their investigation into the meaning of eternal life as they explore the significance of death, and life and death in the world of Buddhahood.

## 36 The “Life Span” Chapter—Life after Death—Eternally Advancing with Great Life Force: The Meaning of Eternal Life

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** Let’s continue to explore eternal life. I hope that in this lifetime, we can prove this principle beyond any shadow of a doubt!

**TAKANORI ENDO:** There recently appeared in Japan a rather unusual book titled *The Truth About the Dead: The World of English Epitaphs (Shisha no Honne: Eikoku Bohime no Sekai)*. The author discusses numerous epitaphs on the gravestones in British cemeteries.

**KATSUJI SAITO:** Could you give some examples?

**ENDO:** Well, one epitaph for instance reads, “Here lies my wife. / Here let her lie! / Now she’s at rest / And so am I.”<sup>1</sup> (laughter)

**IKEDA:** What brutal honesty!

**HARUO SUDA:** From the sound of it, she must have been quite hard on him!

**ENDO:** There are also epitaphs expressing a wife’s feelings of bitterness at having been preceded in death



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A youthful Daisaku Ikeda with second president, Josei Toda, in 1958. The spirit of mentor and disciple is explained in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

many of the epitaphs found on English graves over the last more than two hundred years: “As I was so are you and as I am so shall you be.”<sup>3</sup>

**SAITO:** That’s quite philosophical. It says to the person viewing the headstone: “Someday you too will be dead.”

**ENDO:** Along the same general lines, another epitaph reads: “Don’t stare, / Pass me by. / You’ll soon lie here, / Same as I.”<sup>4</sup>

### From the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”

The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China states in his commentary that anyone who does not understand the text of the “Life Span” chapter is no more than a beast who has no understanding of the debt of gratitude one owes to sovereign, teacher and parent . . . Now Nichiren and his followers who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are the father of all living beings, for we save them from the torments of the hell of incessant suffering. The Nirvana Sutra says, “The varied sufferings of all living beings—all these the Thus Come One himself experiences as his own sufferings.” And Nichiren declares: The varied sufferings of all living beings—all these Nichiren himself experiences as his own sufferings!

The word *ji* [interpreted as the pronoun “one” or “one’s”] marks the beginning of the Jigage section, and the word *shin* [“self” or “body”] in “quickly acquire the body of a Buddha” marks the end. It starts and ends with “oneself,” and the words in between describe the “receiving” and “use” of this body. In other words, the Jigage section elucidates the “self that is freely received and used,” or the Buddha of absolute freedom. (*Gosho Zenshu*, 758-59)

by her husband. “To follow you I’m not content. / How do I know which way you went?”<sup>2</sup>

**SAITO:** She’s saying, “I don’t know whether you’ve gone to heaven or hell.” That’s very blunt.

**IKEDA:** Just because people are married doesn’t guarantee that they will be together in the afterlife. The fact remains that we are born alone and we have to die alone. It’s harsh, but true.

Buddhism, however, teaches that through the power of the Mystic Law we can be born along with our loved ones in lifetime after lifetime, over eternity.

**SUDA:** Surely there are also many epitaphs expressing endearing sentiments.

**ENDO:** Yes, of course.

**IKEDA:** What kind of epitaph is most common?

**ENDO:** I don’t know the exact statistics, but according to the book, the following is typical of

### Nothing Is As Certain As Death

**SUDA:** That epitaph is really a *memento mori*, a reminder of mortality. It calls to mind the oft-cited passage in the “Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life” where the Daishonin urges us to exert ourselves in



The panel begins this month's dialogue on the eternity of life with a brief examination of the epitaphs that appear on gravestones such as the ones in this cemetery at Dorset, England.

ILLUSTRATION: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS: BECCO/MAMA

faith “with the profound insight that now is the last moment” of our life (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 22). It would make more sense to me if he said “... with the *determination* that now is the last moment of our life.” What is the significance of the words “profound insight”?

**IKEDA:** That’s a very important point. Everyone knows that they will die “sometime.” But we tend to imagine that death is always still a long way off, an event that will occur in the indefinite future. That young people should think this way is only to be expected, but the same is true of those getting on in years. In fact, people’s tendency to ignore death’s imminence may actually increase with age.

What is the true aspect of life? The reality is that a person may be alive one moment and dead the next. The possibility of death—from earthquakes, accidents, sudden illness or other causes—exists at all times. People simply forget this.

**SAITO:** That’s very true. Even if one should flee to the ends of the earth or the furthest reaches of the universe, death cannot be avoided.

**IKEDA:** Someone once described the approach of death, saying, “Death who is not in front of us, but comes up on us from behind.” Years and years can slip

by while you say to yourself, “I’ll start practicing in earnest someday,” or “I’ll work harder once I get through my present difficulties.” Then, finally, it dawns on you that you will have to face death without having accumulated any real fortune in your life. I don’t think this is an uncommon human experience. However, once you realize what has happened, though you may wish you had done differently, it is too late to do anything about it.

**SUDA:** Certainly, if you were told that you would be dead in three days, you wouldn’t be able to just sit around idly watching TV.

**IKEDA:** But if you really think about it, whether it’s three days or three years or three decades, the issue is essentially the same. The only way, then, is to live in the present—so that no matter when we might die, we will have no regrets.

Also, from the standpoint of eternity, even a hundred years is but an instant. It is literally the case that “now is the last moment” of our lives. Soka Gakkai second president Josei Toda used to say, “In truth, we practice faith for the time of our death.”

**SUDA:** I see.

**IKEDA:** If we’re looking for certainty, nothing is more certain than death. Therefore, the important

thing is that right now, without hesitation, we do our best to accumulate “treasures of the heart” that will endure eternally.

Most people, however, live out their lives putting off this most important issue of all, spending their time in pursuit of momentary pleasure. Nothing is more important in life than the issue of life and death itself. Everything else is of little consequence by comparison. We will absolutely understand this at the time of death.

Someone who works as a caregiver to the terminally ill commented: “At the end of life, it’s as if all at once your entire existence comes back to you in a vast panorama. At that point, it’s not superficial matters like whether you were a company president or how much success you achieved in business that take precedence, but how you lived, how you regarded others. Did you show them love and kindness, or did you treat them with contempt? You feel a sense of satisfaction for having maintained your convictions, or know the pain and regret of having betrayed them. It is these human aspects of our lives that confront us all at once and with intensity as we face death. That is death’s true nature.”

**SAITO:** What that person refers to as “the human aspects of our lives” can be viewed in light of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds as our fundamental or underlying life tendency. Hearing such accounts really drives home the need for all of us to strive wholeheartedly to elevate our basic life tendencies.

**IKEDA:** In that sense, having an awareness and understanding of death actually raises our life condition. For it is when we are cognizant of the reality and inevitability of death that we begin to earnestly seek “something eternal,” and determine to make the most valuable use of each moment of life.

**ENDO:** It’s like having a deadline for a manuscript you are writing. It can be stressful, but the fact of the matter is that without a deadline it’s really hard to get it done; I at least would probably never get around to writing anything.

**SUDA:** The same could be said for exams. As far as Buddhist study goes, if there were no exams, then it would be easy to let time slip by without making any progress, thinking all the while, “I’ll get around to studying eventually.”

**IKEDA:** What would happen if there was no death? Presumably life would just go on and on, and might even become boring.

**SAITO:** Without any sense of pressure or urgency, people would probably just while away their time.

**ENDO:** We’d have a serious problem with overpopulation!

**SUDA:** Even if you were three hundred years old and totally infirm, you could not die. The first Chinese emperor Shih Huang Ti (259–210 B.C.E.) of the Chin dynasty is said to have sought an elixir of eternal youth and immortality. Under such circumstances, however, people might begin actively seeking an “elixir of death.”

## Looking Toward the Eternal

**IKEDA:** Because we know we are going to die, we strive to make the most of the present. Modern civilization has been described as a “civilization that has forgotten death.” And it’s no coincidence that it has at the same time become a civilization of unbridled greed.

Just as with any individual, when a society or civilization tries to avoid the fundamental issue of death, its people become decadent, seeking only immediate gratification.

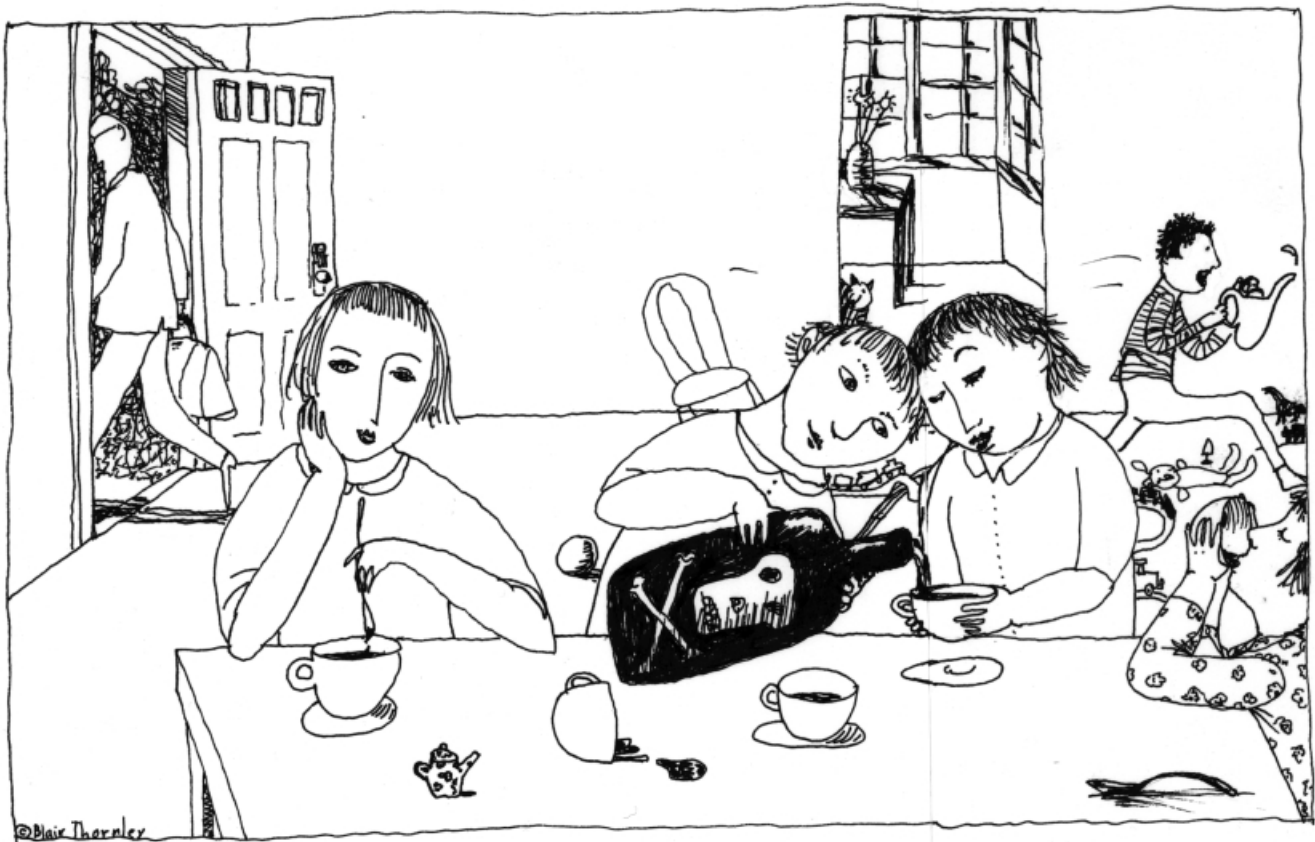
It is awareness of death that distinguishes people from animals, and that in fact makes us human. This point has been made in many scholarly writings, such as Edgar Morin’s *L’homme et la mort* (Man and Death [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970]). To ignore death is to lead a shallow, animalistic existence.

**SAITO:** This means that for both the individual and humankind as a whole, death is not something to dread or think of negatively; rather, it has a positive value in that it prompts us to search for “something eternal.”

**IKEDA:** That’s right. This is part of what is signified by the important doctrine of the “Life Span” (sixteenth) chapter indicated by the line, “as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana” (LS16, 229).<sup>5</sup>

**SUDA:** Simply put, “As an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana” means that death is an expedient or a means.

**ENDO:** Yes. It is a means for causing people to seek the eternal Buddha.



According to the “Parable of the Excellent Physician” in the Lotus Sutra, there is an excellent physician who has many children. While the physician is away on a journey, the children drink poison. When he returns, he finds them in great suffering. And so he prepares “highly effective medicine” to cure them.

**IKEDA:** The Buddha, out of compassion, uses even his death as a means to lead his disciples to enlightenment. We should probably reconfirm this point from the standpoint of the text of the sutra.

**SAITO:** Yes, in the “Life Span” chapter, Shakyamuni explains that although his life is in fact infinite, through the power of expedient means he appears to enter nirvana in order to lead people to enlightenment. The rationale, here, is that if the Buddha were to continue to abide in the world indefinitely, then people would cease to seek out his teaching.

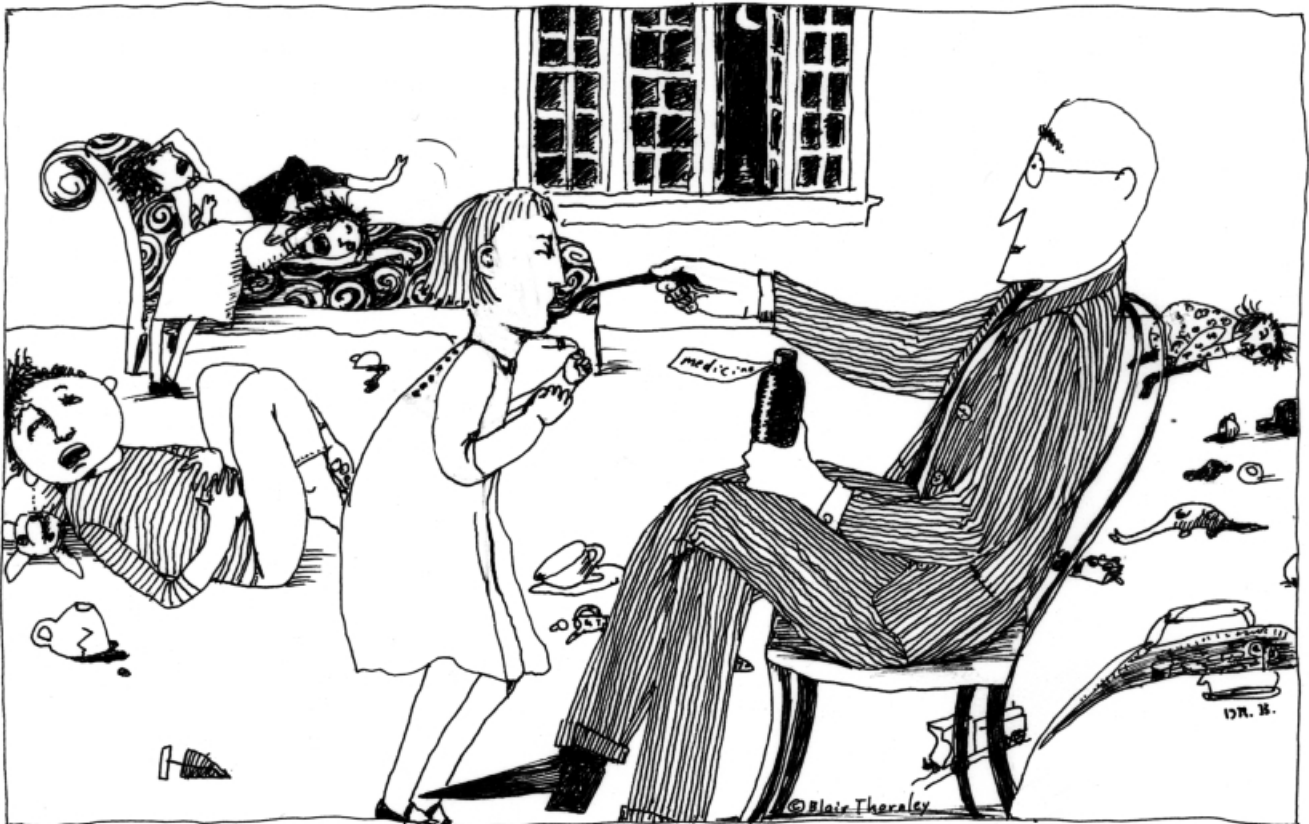
**ENDO:** One passage of the sutra reads:

**If the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, those persons with shallow virtue will fail to plant good roots but, living in poverty and lowliness,**

**will become attached to the five desires and be caught in the net of deluded thoughts and imaginings. If they see that the Thus Come One is constantly in the world and never enters extinction, they will grow arrogant and selfish, or become discouraged and neglectful. They will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind. (LS16, 227)**

**SUDA:** I think in my case this is definitely true!

**ENDO:** Even a person with strong faith would probably grow lazy, thinking, “In the end the Buddha will somehow lend me a hand.”



Although their father has given them the best medicine, some of the children, because the poison has “penetrated deeply,” do not drink it. Those who do take the medicine are immediately restored to health. But nothing can be done for those who refuse to take it, and they continue to writhe in agony.

### The Parable of the Excellent Physician and His Sick Children

**IKEDA:** The significance of the passage, “as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana” will probably become more clear if we view it in terms of the parable of the excellent physician and his sick children.

**ENDO:** To summarize the parable: There is an excellent physician who has many children. While the physician is away on a journey, the children drink poison. When he returns, he finds them in great suffering. And so he prepares “highly effective medicine” to cure them.

**SUDA:** The excellent physician represents the Buddha, and the children represent the people. The highly effective medicine corresponds to the Lotus Sutra and to the “eternal Mystic Law,” which is also

the teacher of Shakyamuni. In the Latter Day of the Law, it is the Gohonzon.

**ENDO:** Although their father has given them the best medicine, some of the children, because the poison has “penetrated deeply,” do not drink it.

Those who take the medicine are immediately restored to health. But nothing can be done for those who refuse it, and they continue to writhe in agony.

**IKEDA:** These children represent “befuddled” people. They are called “befuddled” because, even though they are sick and desire to be cured, they refuse to take the medicine. The poison has penetrated so deeply that they have lost their ability to reason. They refuse the great beneficial medicine because they think it will taste bad. The “Life Span” chapter says that their “minds no longer function as before” (LS16, 228). They cannot think rationally. This is the state

The gate to the prison in Tokyo where first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi died. President Ikeda states, “We can say that President Makiguchi’s death in prison functioned as the ‘expedient means’ that set the stage for kosen-rufu.”

the Lotus Sutra is describing when it states “their heads will split into seven pieces” (LS26, 310).

**SAITO:** Broadly speaking, it seems to me that most people today are “befuddled.” While many talk about how society is ill and something must be done to rectify the situation, when it comes to the issue of fundamental change in people’s lives—which offers the only genuine cure for society’s problems—they do not pursue this path in earnest. Confining themselves to abstract arguments or superficial approaches, they make no effort to understand the principle of human revolution. As a result, nothing really changes.

**IKEDA:** That’s probably a fair statement. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, was very strict in his stance toward such social ills.

**SUDA:** He concluded that human society was afflicted by what he termed “symptoms of higher psychosis.”

**ENDO:** Taking pity on such “befuddled” people, the excellent physician, representing the Buddha, causes them to think that he has died in order to show them the way.

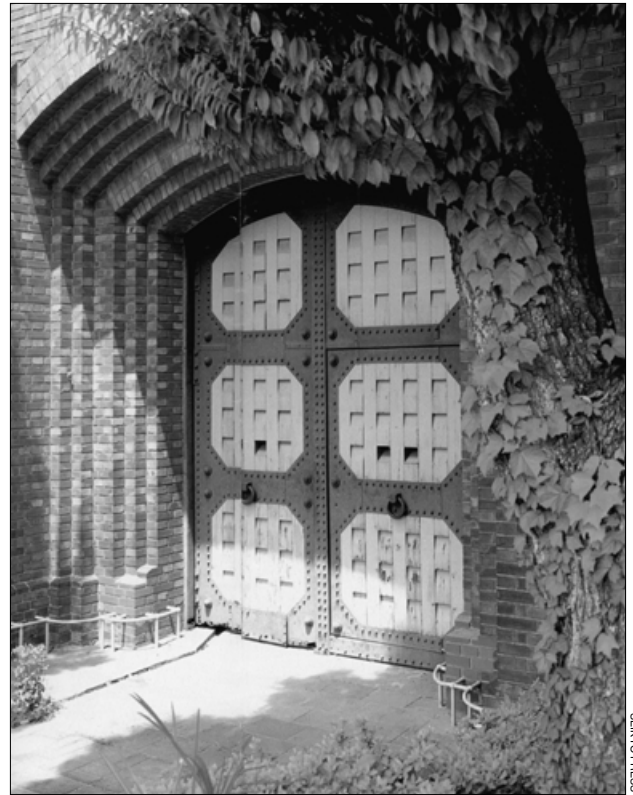
**SUDA:** After setting out again, he dispatches a messenger with instructions to tell the children that their father has died in a distant land. When they hear this, the children are filled with grief and sadness, and agonize at the thought that they now have no one they can depend on. It is then that they finally open their eyes.

“That’s right!” they think, “We have the medicine that our father left behind for us.” They decide to drink it and are immediately cured. When the father receives word that his children are all well, he immediately comes back and appears before them.

That is the substance of the parable.

## Single-mindedly Seeking the Teacher

**IKEDA:** When we have access to something all the time, then, no matter how lofty and sublime it may be, we tend to forget our sense of appreciation. It



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isn’t until we lose it that we begin to truly appreciate how important it was and the extent to which it had benefited us.

**SAITO:** When the children hear of their father’s death, the sutra says, “All harbor thoughts of yearning and in their minds thirst to gaze at me [the Buddha].” It further describes them as “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives” (LS16, 230). In response to this “single-minded” seeking spirit, the eternal Buddha appears before them.

**IKEDA:** That’s another way of saying that they awaken to the eternal world of Buddhahood within their own lives. And single-mindedly seeking the Buddha is the key to this awakening.

Nichiren Daishonin says that he manifested the world of Buddhahood in his own heart and became enlightened to the Three Great Secret Laws through reading with his life the passage, “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 205 ).

As we have noted before, regarding the term “single-mindedly,” the Daishonin remarks, “Single-mind-

edly desiring to see the Buddha' also means to see the Buddha in one's own mind, to concentrate one's mind on seeing the Buddha, and that to see one's own mind is to see the Buddha" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 205). In other words, the mind of an ordinary person who seeks the Buddha becomes the mind of the Buddha itself.

The heart is what really matters. One simply cannot understand Buddhism without a pure seeking spirit stemming from the depths of one's heart. When we practice with the awareness that we might only encounter the Gohonzon once in a hundred million or ten billion years, a profound sense of appreciation fills our heart each time we perform gongyo.

Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, manifested the world of Buddhahood in his own heart through living the passage "single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives." We should deeply reflect on what this means.

The only way for us to attain Buddhahood is to manifest a spirit of utter selfless devotion, of "not hesitating even if it costs us our lives." Without this spirit, there can be no Buddhism. To arouse such a spirit in people, the Buddha leaves this existence. This is what is meant by "as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana."

## What Is the "Moment of Death"?

**IKEDA:** President Toda once remarked: "Whose 'last moment' do you suppose the line 'now is the last moment of this life' refers to? It's the last moment of the Buddha's life. How forlorn we would feel if the Buddha ceased to exist. We should summon resolute faith and practice with the sense that we now have to part with the Buddha."<sup>6</sup>

After President Toda died, those who had not listened carefully to these words were filled with regret, wishing that they had done more while he was still alive.

"Now is the last moment of this life" is an exhortation to struggle intensely for kosen-rufu with the thought that now is the last moment of the mentor's life. It is a truly fortunate thing to work for kosen-rufu together with and supported by a mentor. Someone who doesn't understand this point cannot be called a true disciple.

Those who realize this and devote themselves in earnest while the mentor is alive correspond to the

children in the parable who have not lost their senses. Those who fail to realize this correspond to the children in whom the poison has penetrated deeply.

**SAITO:** I see now that I hadn't fully grasped the significance of this parable. The principle of mentor and disciple is indeed the very soul of the "Life Span" chapter.

**IKEDA:** The "Life Span" chapter is the crystallization of the Buddha's immense compassion to try to teach us about the oneness of mentor and disciple. The mentor is the Buddha enlightened since the remote past. The disciples, made up of all people, are also Buddhas from the remote past. How can people be made to realize this?—that is the Buddha's constant thought as expressed in the chapter's closing lines, *Mai ji sa ze nen.*<sup>7</sup>

There is no such thing as a mentor who does not wish for his disciples to become truly outstanding in their own right. However, it is difficult for the disciples to grasp the mentor's spirit. No matter how much a parent is concerned about a child, the child rarely shares the same degree of concern for the parent. They become one only when they share mutual concern.

President Toda's spirit of concern for Mr. Makiguchi was truly awesome. Though strong and bold as a lion, near the end of his life when his long years of exertion had finally taken their toll, Mr. Toda would often say, "Without President Makiguchi I feel lonely. I would really like to return to his side." Whenever his thoughts turned to President Makiguchi, Mr. Toda exuded an air of the greatest solemnity. And when he talked about his mentor's death in prison, he would burn with intense indignation. He would sometimes shed bitter tears from the depths of his heart, and other times lash out in anger. He constantly reminisced and spoke about his mentor.

I believe it was when President Toda learned from one of his interrogators in prison of Mr. Makiguchi's death that he determined to wage a relentless struggle throughout his life against the devilish nature of power that had driven his mentor to his death.

In that sense, we can say that President Makiguchi's death in prison functioned as the "expedient means" that set the stage for the kosen-rufu movement in the post-war era. It could not by any means have been possible without the single-minded seeking spirit of the disciple for the mentor.

**Regarding life and death with abhorrence and trying to separate  
oneself from them is delusion, or partial enlightenment.  
To clearly perceive life and death as the essence of  
eternal life is realization, or total enlightenment.**

*Myo* (or Mystic) corresponds to death and *ho* (or Law) to life. The mentor corresponds to death and the disciple to life. Mentor and disciple are themselves the Mystic Law; and the Mystic Law is itself life and death. This is truly the oneness of life and death and the oneness of mentor and disciple.

President Toda composed a poem:

*My mentor has left this world  
making the offering  
of Bodhisattva Medicine King.  
Left behind,  
what offering can I make  
for the Buddha?*

He is saying that since his mentor had the spirit of “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it cost him his life,” he, too, would live with this spirit. This is the spirit of the “Life Span” chapter. Without this continuity of mentor and disciple, discussion of “eternal life” would be little more than abstract theory.

Another important point in the “Life Span” chapter is that the mentor appears differently depending on the state of life of the disciple. It explains that disciples understand the greatness of the mentor only to the extent that they themselves grow.

### **The Meaning of the Jigage: The “Self” Is the “Eternal Buddha”**

**ENDO:** The passage “as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana” probably reflects the situation at the time when Shakyamuni died. His disciples, bewildered at the loss of their great mentor, were probably thrown into utter confusion, not knowing where they would turn for support as they lived out their lives.

**SUDA:** According to a sutra, they were so afraid that “their hair stood on end.” It describes the scene, saying that disciples “tear their hair and weep, and stretch forth their arms and weep, fall prostrate on the ground, and roll to and fro.”<sup>8</sup>

**SAITO:** I think the adherents of Buddhism in later generations must have also felt a profound sense of loss at the fact that Shakyamuni was no longer in the world. In that context, the passage “as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana” taught that one must not become attached to Shakyamuni’s outward “life and death.” It urged them to open their eyes to the eternal life of the Buddha that transcends this dimension.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. Moreover, when we awaken to the eternal and boundless life of the Buddha, we simultaneously realize that the Buddha’s life constitutes the foundation of our own life. This is the “dawn” of our life.

Therefore, the *jigage* [verse] section of the “Life Span” chapter begins with the character *ji*, meaning “one,” and ends with the character *shin*, meaning “self.” In other words, the *jigage* section in its entirety is concerned with elucidating the enlightened self that is totally free of all impediments.

**SUDA:** The *jigage* is the essence of the “Life Span” chapter, and the “Life Span” chapter is the soul of all Buddhism. The call to open one’s eyes to the greater self is therefore the quintessential message of Buddhism.

**ENDO:** The “Life Span” chapter says, “The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb and flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction” (LS16, 226). In summary, this means that there is neither “life” nor “death.”

**IKEDA:** But in reality there is both “life” and “death.” So why does it say this?

**ENDO:** I imagine that it's because the Lotus Sutra seeks to direct people's attention toward something that transcends the appearance of life and death.

**SAITO:** That seems correct. The Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan says "The two distinct phenomena of life and death are mystic functions of the one mind."<sup>9</sup> I think that the purpose of Buddhism is to awaken us to this "one mind."

**IKEDA:** That sounds true enough. But when we awaken to this "one mind," or the universal life of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we understand that "life" is the life of the Mystic Law, and "death" is the death of the Mystic Law. Therefore, saying there is no life and death is meaningless, and actually asserting so is an escapist approach, representing a kind of illusory attachment.

## The Eternally Unchanging Entity of Life

**SUDA:** Yes. The Daishonin says:

Regarding life and death with abhorrence and trying to separate oneself from them is delusion, or partial enlightenment. To clearly perceive life and death as the essence of eternal life is realization, or total enlightenment. Now Nichiren and his disciples who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo awaken to the ebb and flow of birth and death as the innate workings of life that is eternal. (GZ, 754)

**IKEDA:** This is the correct Buddhist view of life and death. In the case of the Buddhism of Shakyamuni, it could be said that the teaching so encourages people to seek the "eternal great life" of the Buddha that it creates the tendency to try to avoid actual life and death.

When we practice the Daishonin's Buddhism, however, we can experience the "eternally unchanging entity of life" and actualize the principle that "the sufferings of life and death are nirvana" based on this eternal great life.

**SAITO:** It seems that in the West, many people have the image of Buddhism as a teaching aimed at attaining a "nirvana of tranquillity," a state in which there is neither life nor death.

**SUDA:** That is the way of thinking of the Hinayana teachings, which promote an image of nirvana as a "state free of the transmigration of life and death."

**IKEDA:** But the "Life Span" chapter rejects this view, explaining that such a "nirvana" is nothing more than an expedient means for pointing people in the right direction. Its strong point, nonetheless, is that it still emphasizes a realm that transcends life and death.

By contrast, the Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that we can quickly awaken to the "eternally unchanging entity of life."

## Both Life and Death Are the Buddha

**IKEDA:** What, then, does it mean to experience life and death based on the cosmic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo? The Daishonin says, "We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the ground of our intrinsically enlightened nature." (GZ, 724). He is talking about a state of life of absolute freedom that exists eternally over past, present and future.

"Birth and death secure upon the ground of our intrinsically enlightened nature" means undergoing life and death based on the supreme life of the Mystic Law. When we embrace the Gohonzon, we can advance with our lives rooted in the "great earth of Buddhahood," which is at one with the life of the universe.

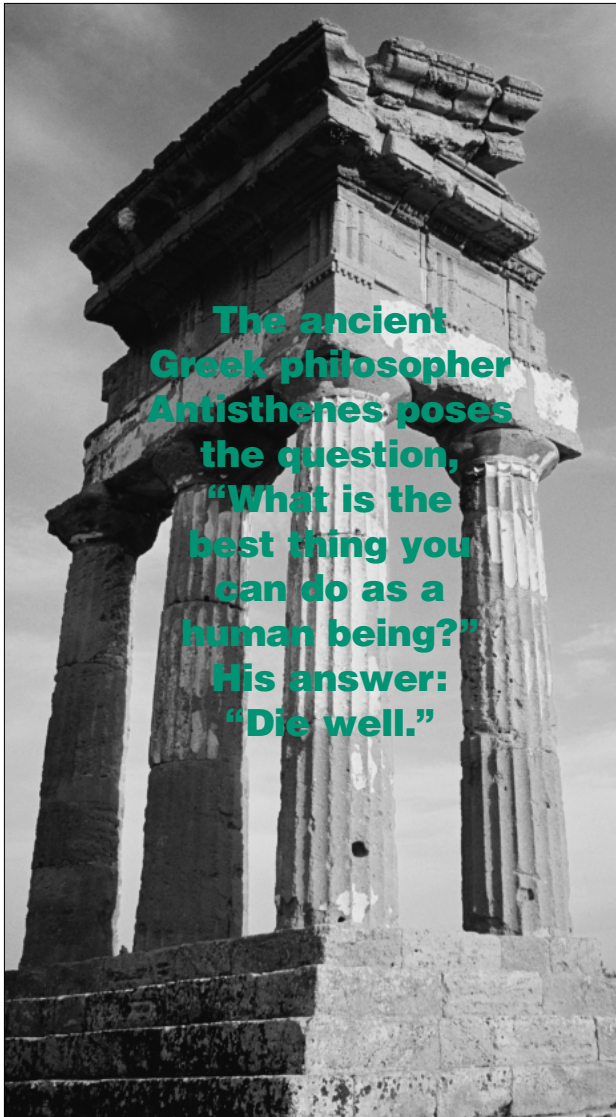
Undergoing the cycle of life and death in the nine worlds means awkwardly navigating one's way through difficulties and hardships. It is like veering along a path strewn with potholes; sometimes we fall in and are unable to get back on track; sometimes we have accidents and get injured.

On the other hand, experiencing life and death in the world of Buddhahood is like driving along on a smooth highway in a high-performance car; while enjoying the brilliant scenery around us, we take action with infinite life force to help others become happy.

**ENDO:** We are traveling through life and death with the world of Buddhahood as our foundation.

In Japan, many people believe that you become a Buddha only after death. But that's off the mark.

**SUDA:** The Daishonin says to one of his followers, "While he was in this world, he was a living



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Buddha, and now, he is a Buddha in death. His Buddhahood transcends both life and death. This is the meaning of the doctrine that is of utmost importance: attaining Buddhahood in one's present form" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 207).

**SAITO:** This truly signifies the oneness of life and death.

**IKEDA:** We therefore have to be victorious in our present lifetime. Victory in this life translates into victory after death, in future lives, and over eternity. President Toda said, "If we can become happy in this life, then we will definitely be happy in our future lives, too."

**ENDO:** There are religions that teach that happiness only comes with death, without even attempting

to offer people solutions to misfortunes and trials in this life. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, however, teaches that actual proof of happiness in this life is itself actual proof of happiness after death and in lives to come.

**IKEDA:** Eternal life is not something we can verify with our eyes; nor can it be proven empirically. In that sense, it belongs to the realm of belief rather than to the ordinary world of knowledge. This means that anyone can fabricate stories about the afterlife.

**SUDA:** It seems to me there are many religions that do just that.

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin's Buddhism is different in that it teaches the inseparability of life and death, indicating that we can see the state of one's afterlife in the state of his or her present life.

If we could not become happy in the present through practicing this Buddhism, we would have a hard time believing in promises of happiness after death. On the other hand, experiencing actual proof of happiness in this life gives us complete confidence that we will also enjoy happiness in the next. If the Daishonin's teaching about happiness over eternity was in fact mistaken, then it stands to reason we couldn't receive immeasurable benefit in the present life through its practice.

**SAITO:** That seems indisputable.

**IKEDA:** What about life and death based on the world of Buddhahood? What happens to a person who dies having maintained faith in the Mystic Law? Why don't we begin by seeing what the Daishonin says about this?

**ENDO:** In one place he says, "Were he to go right now to Eagle Peak, he would feel as delighted as if the sun had come out and illuminated all the ten directions; and he would find himself rejoicing, wondering how an early death could be so happy a thing" (MW-5, 281).

**SUDA:** That's a remarkable passage. There's not even the tiniest speck of doubt. He is saying that death, rather than being something to fear, is something we might even look forward to.

**SAITO:** The Daishonin also says:

When you climb the mountain of wondrous enlightenment and gaze around you in all directions, then

to your amazement you will see that the entire universe is the land of Tranquil Light. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, and the eight paths will be set apart by golden ropes. Four kinds of flowers will fall from the heavens, and music will resound in the air. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be present in complete joy, caressed by the breezes of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. The time is fast approaching when we too will count ourselves among their number. (MW-3, 216–17)

**IKEDA:** It's a state of being where "life is joyful, and death is joyful, too."

The Daishonin also says, "Because he has the wings of the single vehicle to rely upon, he can soar into the sky of Tranquil Light" (MW-7, 173). With eternity and the entire universe as the venue of our activity, we soar gracefully into the "great sky of happiness." Therefore, it is not death that we need to fear, but the strict law of cause and effect.

A person who lives well also dies well, and will be reborn well. A person who lives badly, dies badly, and will be reborn badly. The ancient Greek philosopher Antisthenes poses the question, "What is the best thing you can do as a human being?" His answer: "Die well."

## **The Spirit of the "Life Span" Chapter Is to Live Out Our Lives Based on the Mystic Law**

**SUDA:** *Juryo*, in the title of the chapter, "Nyorai Juryo-hon" (Life Span of the Thus Come One), means to measure or fathom the life and wonderful virtues of the Buddha.

As we learned in our first discussion on the "Life Span" chapter, to practice the "Life Span" chapter is to live our lives filled with the great life force of the Buddha.

**ENDO:** I guess this means that longevity is important.

**IKEDA:** Someone once said, "Longevity is the art of life." To live long is itself a kind of victory. A passage in the chapter says, "Let us live out our lives!" (LS16, 228) Every day, morning and evening, I pray that all SGI members will enjoy excellent health and long lives.

At the same time, our success or failure in living based on the world of Buddhahood is not determined simply by our life-span in years. Nichiren Daishonin was only 60 at the time of his death.

In Japan, someone who is sixty years old is said to have "completed one round of the calendar," because on the lunar calendar it marks the completion of five twelve-year cycles. This suggests that a person who reaches this age has lived completely.

Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's successor, died at 88.

**SAITO:** At that time, especially, he would have been extremely long-lived.

**IKEDA:** At nearly 90, he was hale and hearty, reportedly attesting that his ears and eyes were as sharp and clear as ever. He took to bed early in February of 1333, and died in the middle of the night on the seventh. Accounts describe how to the very last moment he never suffered from senility or illness.

Nichimoku, the third high priest, died at 74 while on a journey to urge the imperial court to accept the Daishonin's teaching.

**ENDO:** He passed away at a place called Tarui in Mino province, which is part of what is now Gifu Prefecture.

**IKEDA:** The circumstances of his death reflect his total dedication to the Law. Rather than peacefully living out his natural span of years, he died engaging in a fierce struggle to uphold and spread his mentor's teaching.

**SUDA:** Nichimoku's death in the middle of a journey must have come as quite a surprise to all.

**IKEDA:** I think the fact that each of the three teachers<sup>10</sup> died in such a different manner is quite significant; although each of them embodied the eternal life of the Buddha achieved by one who thoroughly dedicates oneself in the struggle for *kosen-rufu*, the circumstances surrounding their deaths vary greatly. I believe there is profound meaning in this.

**SAITO:** The Daishonin says, "She [Toki Jonin's mother] departed on her journey to the Yellow Spring to reveal the principle of birth and death" (GZ, 977). The Daishonin teaches that life and death take many forms.

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin's Buddhism is flawless. It comprehends all aspects of life and is entirely free of contradiction. If, for instance, it expounded an ideal

**When we grasp the eternity of life, compassionate action naturally wells forth. Otherwise our understanding is not genuine. Those who perceive that all people's lives are the same as the Buddha's life will freely expend their own lives to convey that understanding to others.**

age for people to live to, then not reaching the desired age would cause unhappiness and suffering.

**SAITO:** President Toda died at 58. He cannot be said to have lived long. And President Makiguchi was 73 when he died in prison. Had he not been subjected to the harsh conditions of prison life, he would have surely lived longer.

**IKEDA:** However long you may live and whatever the place and circumstances of your death, if you have steadfastly dedicated yourself to kosen-rufu, then you are certain to experience life and death based on the world of Buddhahood.

From a young age, I was told that with my frail health I would not live past 30. But I have lived long and vigorously in President Toda's stead. Mr. Toda once told me, "You'll become the Takayama Chogyu of the Mystic Law.<sup>11</sup> The real Chogyu died at 31. You have to live on. You have to live on as my successor." Another time he went so far as to say he would "give his life" to me so that I could carry on. Now I have reached 70, and I am healthy. I believe I still have many good years ahead of me.

**ENDO:** It seems to me that this is truly the essence of the "Life Span" chapter.

**IKEDA:** Longevity itself is a treasure. But how you live is more important still. The Daishonin says, "It is better to live a single day with honor than to live to one hundred and twenty and die in disgrace" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 238).

**SUDA:** We find similar statements even in early Buddhist texts. One passage reads, "Better than a hundred years not seeing one's own immortality is one single day of life if one sees one's own immortality."<sup>12</sup>

**SAITO:** *Immortality*, here, means the state of life in which one has awakened to the eternal life of the Buddha.

**SUDA:** Yes. The same text contains the following description: "Watchfulness is the path of immortality; unwatchfulness is the path of death. Those who are watchful never die: those who do not watch are already as dead."<sup>13</sup>

### **Immortality Through Efforts for Kosen-rufu**

**IKEDA:** For us, to be ever "watchful," to dedicate our life and work to actualize the great wish of kosen-rufu, is to attain a state of "immortality." This is what it means to read the "Life Span" chapter with one's life. We become one with the "eternal Buddha," the "Thus Come One," only through making continuous efforts for kosen-rufu. Then the infinite life of the Thus Come One manifests through our own finite life. This was certainly true of President Toda. Even when he was sick in bed, if someone raised a question relating to Buddhism, he would prop himself up and provide an answer. "No matter how bad a mood I may be in," he would often say, "being asked a question about the Daishonin's teachings always cheers me up." And this was his attitude until the very last moment of his life.

There was a certain chapter leader who, by struggling very hard, had gone from being a poor laborer to a successful businessman. On the day before we were to set out for the historic March 16 pilgrimage [in 1958], President Toda called up the man on the telephone. After explaining that he would be gone for a few days, President Toda, despite his very weak condition, proceeded to energetically and politely instruct the man for thirty minutes on how to conduct his business.

Several days later, the man called President Toda at the head temple to tell him how things were going. At the time, Mr. Toda was severely ill. Even so, as soon as

he heard that the chapter chief was on the line wishing to speak with him, he asked for the phone. Then, leaning on the person next to him for support and having someone else hold the receiver for him, he talked to the chapter leader. He was truly a remarkable teacher.

**SAITO:** I understand that President Toda had a premonition of his own death. According to the notes of his attendant, the year before he died, Mr. Toda remarked, “I should have died long ago. I’m trying to see just how long I can go in this life... Here’s the truth: I will die in April of next year. Yes, I will die.”

I cannot begin to comprehend President Toda’s state of life. But I am moved to hear accounts of how to the very end of his days, having awakened to life’s eternity, Mr. Toda always treated people with the most profound compassion.

**IKEDA:** When we grasp the eternity of life, compassionate action naturally wells forth. Otherwise our understanding is not genuine.

Those who perceive that all people’s lives are the same as the Buddha’s life will freely expend their own lives to convey that understanding to others. Whether we call it the Buddha’s state of life or enlightenment, only in such concrete action can we envision what it means to be enlightened. The same was certainly true of President Makiguchi.

The following is the experience of a woman who had only just taken faith. She was trying sincerely to introduce other people to the Daishonin’s teaching. One day she brought a friend who was worried about the illness of a parent with her to see Mr. Makiguchi. President Makiguchi advised her, “To enable your parent to take faith is an act of the highest filial devotion.” The friend immediately decided to practice.

The woman joined her friend in earnestly chanting daimoku, and half a year later the friend’s parent passed away with a truly beautiful and peaceful look. The friend was glad to have done everything she could for her parent’s eternal happiness.

Next the woman introduced her friend’s younger brother to the practice. But the very night that the brother decided to take faith he was killed in an accident. The woman, shaken by this turn of events, lost no time coming to see President Makiguchi at his home. She asked him, “Why did he die so suddenly after deciding to take faith?”

Although it was late at night, out of concern for the woman’s friend, Mr. Makiguchi said, “Let’s go see her together,” and they set out. As soon as they arrived, he suggested that they all chant daimoku together earnestly. With him leading, they continued chanting for a long time. Some people who were not members joined in the chanting, and later they reportedly also joined the Soka Gakkai.

Questions of life and death cannot be addressed by pat answers or simple logic. It is by really expending our life and mustering the utmost sincerity that we can open and revive the hardened hearts of people overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. It is through such conduct that we can show actual proof of the teaching that “*Myo* means to revive, that is, to return to life” (MW-3, 23).

**SAITO:** I see.

For the benefit of our readers, I would like to talk a little about the death of the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan. I receive many questions about Nichikan. It seems that many members want to learn more about him, as they are praying daily before the Gohonzon that he transcribed.

**IKEDA:** Leaders should always give immediate responses to the questions that are on people’s minds. Let’s take that up right now.

## Nichikan’s Last Moments

**ENDO:** There’s a famous episode concerning Nichikan’s final moments that involves Japanese *soba*, or buckwheat noodles. He died in the early morning hours of August 19, 1726. He was 62.

It seems that Nichikan knew that death was upon him. A day or two before, he dressed in his robes and emerged from his sickbed. Boarding a litter, he went around the temple grounds to make his farewells. First he recited the sutra and chanted daimoku at the main temple. Then he went to pay homage at the graves of the three teachers in the cemetery. He then went around to see the former high priest and the new high priest. Passing through the commercial area at the foot of the temple, he returned to the Dai-bo lodging complex. It is said that the path was lined with well-wishers.

**SUDA:** As soon as he was back in his quarters, he had workers begin preparations for the funeral, and

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he personally wrote a few lines of verse on the lid of what would be his coffin.

**SAITO:** He was completely self-composed.

**SUDA:** Late in the night on the eighteenth day of that month, he had those around him enshrine a Gohonzon nearby and instructed them about chanting daimoku when he died and about other matters. He then asked them to prepare some buckwheat noodles, which was a favorite dish of his.

Consuming the noodles in seven mouthfuls, he smiled brightly and remarked, “It’s magnificent—the Palace of Tranquil Light.” He then rinsed his mouth and held his hands together in prayer facing the Gohonzon. Around 8:00 A.M. on the morning of the nineteenth, he passed away peacefully, with his eyes and mouth slightly opened.

**SAITO:** The fact that there are such detailed records probably shows just how moved people were.

**IKEDA:** He ate the noodles in order to fulfill a promise he had made. About half a year before his death, he remarked, “Upon his death, the great translator and scholar Kumarajiva said, ‘After my death, if my tongue does not burn, you will know that all that I have said is true.’ And, indeed, his tongue was not consumed in flames. Likewise, since I have always been fond of buckwheat noodles, at the time of my death I think I will eat buckwheat noodles, give a big smile and chant daimoku. If this is indeed how it turns out, then you must not doubt a single word that I have spoken.”

**ENDO:** And his final moments were indeed just as he had said.

**IKEDA:** Also two months before his death, in June of that same year, Nichikan remarked: “Taiseiki-ji is now flourishing. The number of people chanting daimoku is increasing. The three powerful enemies

are therefore sure to arise. Since this past spring I have been praying to dispel calamity. Therefore the Buddhas and heavenly deities in response have assumed the form of...the devil of illness that has afflicted me personally. Since this is certainly the principle of ‘lessening karmic retribution,’ there is no need to be saddened by it in the least.”

**ENDO:** It was around that year that the Kanazawa persecution<sup>14</sup> came to a head.

## **Reborn in the Time and Place We Desire**

**IKEDA:** He had the dauntless attitude of a leader of kosen-rufu. I think that Nichikan could retain such calm and dignity in the face of death because of his profound sense of responsibility.

At any rate, to experience birth and death from the standpoint of the world of Buddhahood means that death is something we absolutely need not fear. It’s the same as going to sleep one day and waking up the next. Just when you think you are dead, before you know it, you’ve entered your next existence!

**SUDA:** I feel much better now!

**IKEDA:** Moreover, we are born in the place, and at the time and in the form that we desire. And this is not limited to this world. If you’ve grown tired of Earth, you can go and work on some other planet!

The Daishonin speaks of attaining the “mysterious power of perfect freedom of action” through faith in the Mystic Law (MW-7, 69). And in the “Sanze Shobutsu Sokanmon Kyoso Hairyu” (On the Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas throughout the Three Existences), he says that those who embrace the Mystic Law will be reborn “in the space of a moment.”

**ENDO:** Yes. The passage reads:

Reaching the supreme land of Tranquil Light unimpeded, in the space of a moment one will return to the midst of the dream of birth and death in the nine worlds. One's body pervades the Dharma World in the ten directions and one's mind enters the lives of all sentient beings. Impelled from within and drawn from without, in the harmony of [internal] cause and [external] relation, one freely exercises the transcendental power of compassion and widely brings benefit to living beings without any impediment. (GZ, 574)

**SAITO:** This is what is meant by life and death based on the world of Buddhahood.

**ENDO:** Some people probably would much rather take a break than be reborn right away!

**IKEDA:** They should definitely rest then! To rest after a life of hard exertion is only natural. Death is rest. It is a time when, embraced in the healing sea of the universal life, we recharge our worn-out lives, and prepare for the explosion of vitality that is birth.

At the same time, when we base ourselves on the world of Buddhahood, compassion becomes the very foundation of our lives. Therefore, we want to be born again quickly so we can help more people become happy.

The expression "in the space of a moment" is better thought of in terms of "life-time" as opposed to "physical time." Just as the sufferings of Hell for even a brief time can seem like an eternity, time passes quickly when one is experiencing the great joy of the world of Buddhahood. "In the space of a moment" refers then to experiential time.

## A Warning to Modern Society

**SAITO:** This will conclude our discussion of the "Life Span" chapter. There are still many points that we could discuss, but now let's turn to the remaining chapters, beginning with the "Distinctions in Benefits" (seventeenth) chapter.

**IKEDA:** Here I would like to comment on the passage from "The Opening of the Eyes" that reads, "If one fails to become acquainted with the Buddha of the *Juryo* chapter, one is no more than a talented animal who does not even know what lands his father presides over" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 131).

While this passage can be interpreted in various ways, I think it is a warning to people of the modern age who are confused about the foundation of their own lives.

In summation, the "Life Span" chapter seeks to change "talented animals" into "genuine human beings" who are awakened to the Law of life. The sun of the true "century of the human being" will rise when people learn and put into practice the spirit of the "Life Span" chapter, the great philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Kosen-rufu is a magnificent movement to create a society in which all fields of endeavor—economics and politics, education and science, industry and agriculture, the home and life itself—are illuminated by the brilliant light of the Mystic Law.

*To be continued*

*Illustrations by Blair Thornley*

1. Motohiro Umemori, *Eikoku Bohimeiji no Sekai* (Tokyo: Shufunotomosha, 1997), p. 21. This Japanese book includes original English epitaphs.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
5. Editor's note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purpose of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
6. From the April 1960 edition of *The Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.
7. "At all times I think to myself: / How can I cause living beings / to gain entry into the unsurpassed way / and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?" (LS16, 232).
8. *Dialogues of the Buddha*, part 2, trans. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 178–79.
9. "Tendai Hokkeshu Gozuhomon Yoson," cf. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1543.
10. Three teachers: Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin, the second high priest and Nichimoku, the third high priest.
11. Takayama Chogyu (1871–1902): Japanese aesthetician, moralist, literary critic and essayist who led the literary and philosophical world of the Meiji Era (1868–1912).
12. *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 51.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
14. Kanazawa persecution: The persecution of those who had converted to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism by the 6th feudal lord of the Kanazawa area in what is known today as Ishikawa Prefecture. The persecution began with the oppression of samurai believers but soon spread to those believers among the general public. While many gave up, many others persisted in their faith despite the harsh treatment, which lasted for some seventy years beginning in the early eighteenth century. (See November 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 14)



# People With Faith and Creativity Vital for America

By Eric Hauber, Aliso Viejo, California  
SGI-USA Culture Department Chief

**I**N 1990, SGI President Ikeda set in motion his determination to provide all members the opportunity to discover self-motivated faith, to empower and strengthen our voices. He educated us to “world peace now,” of winning in our daily lives and building a foundation for the future, and began teaching us by his example how to care for an individual human being. An exhilarating breeze of wonderful fresh air swept through all of us in America!

Not coincidentally, in the morning before his first simulcast dialogue with the members, he inaugurated the SGI-USA Culture Department, encouraging us to become capable, trustworthy professionals for the sake of people everywhere. In the following months, he charged us to become “a lighthouse in society, respected and praised by others...to become a source of hope that will shed light on the darkness of humanity...a source of inspiration to others.” He asked us to become “the face of the new SGI-USA to society.”

In the succeeding nine years, Culture Department members under the direction of Gerry Hall accomplished truly remarkable victories in their personal and professional lives and also within

the SGI-USA through many symposia, seminars and major exhibits, such as the exhibit on humanistic education seen by people across the country.

On January 30, twenty-six Culture Department leaders from across the United States gathered in the new Los Angeles Friendship Center for a one-day conference. We came together determined to lay the foundation for the new century with a Culture Department re-invigorated with a fresh understanding of its humanistic mission and a firm commitment to accomplishing our SGI-USA goals. Each of us profoundly felt our responsibility as we read President Ikeda’s message and marveled at how he had given us our blueprint for the day.

To the members of the SGI-USA Culture Department, who are travelling through the era of wisdom, congratulations on your departure under the new leadership of SGI-USA Culture Department Leader Eric Hauber.

In 1990, during the opening of a new era for American kosen-rufu, I formed the SGI-USA Culture Department. This was because I firmly believed that producing promising capable people equipped with faith

and intellect would be vital for the development of America.

As we approach the twenty-first century, I would like each of you to deeply confirm this fundamental reason for the department’s formation by fostering a steady stream of capable people in your land of freedom who are brimming with hope.

I ask each of you, who are taking leadership for the next generation, to study Buddhism more deeply and seriously than ever before. Also, side by side with the members, please broaden the circle of dialogue filled with sincere encouragement, and assiduously polish your compassion and wisdom.

I am looking forward to meeting all of you, capable people of shining intellect, in the United States soon.

Having studied the guidance received in the early years and using President Ikeda’s message as a compass, we set out to re-examine and refresh our mission statement, its objectives and the strategies that we have traditionally used to accomplish them. Initially as a group, we identified and listed those things that historically have caused us trouble. In balance, we likewise enumerated those items that brought us



GREGORY NAKASUJI

SGI-USA Culture Department leaders from around the country with new department chief Eric Hauber (third from right). The group discussed their future goals for the turn of the century and beyond, replying to SGI President Ikeda's call to foster "a steady stream of capable people who are brimming with hope."

satisfaction and joy. We then broke into smaller groups. One examined anew the mission statement itself; others took a previous objective, revisiting its applicability and scope for the coming century, and discussing its implementation, using President Ikeda's message as a signpost. Re-grouping with points gleaned from our discussions

posted on the walls, our committee of twenty-six set about the Herculean task of reaching both understanding and consensus about the final document we would share with Culture Department members nationwide. As living testimony to each person's good-heartedness and trust, together we accomplished an agenda few thought

we could do in one day. The new Culture Department plan has been distributed throughout the country.

Our ultimate accomplishment in this conference was that twenty-six people, seeds of what's to come in the future, returned home with a renewed sense of being directly connected through the Culture Department. □



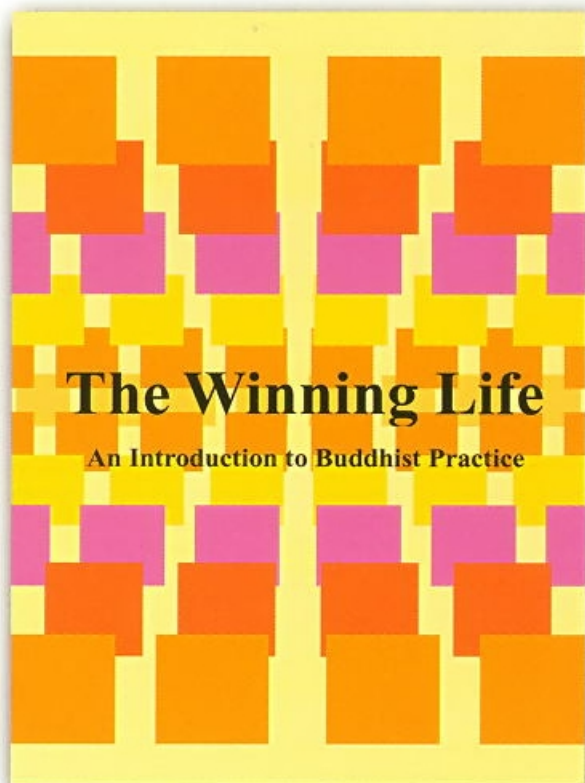
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An abstract painting of a pagoda, rendered in vibrant, layered colors of red, orange, yellow, and blue. The pagoda is the central focus, with a dark brown leaf-like shape and a green shape below it. The background is a mix of light and dark colors, with some brushstrokes and a small circular object on the right side.

# living

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# SGI Activity Centers

## LOS ANGELES FRIENDSHIP CENTER



**T**HE Los Angeles Friendship Center was built from the ground up through close cooperation between local members and designers. These grassroots efforts came to fruition when the facility opened on September 21, 1998.

The main hall can hold 400 people and is designed to host a myriad of activities such as large meetings, symposiums, stage productions, movies and cultural events. Next to the main hall is a triangle-shaped building that houses the offices, bookstore, library and study, music room and seven rooms of varying sizes that have Gohonzon enshrined in them. The center provides many places for people to gather, including an atrium and basketball court.

At the opening and subsequent open house, local and state officials and neighbors praised the center and its purpose. Los Angeles County

Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite-Burke, in proclaiming an SGI International Day of Youth at the September 21 opening, said: "Welcome to our community! This beautiful, beautiful building is a place of prayer and dedication where friends can gather and friends can be made."

In his message upon the center's opening, SGI President Ikeda stated: "This center is a palace of victory, a precious manifestation of the faith of each of you. It is also a symbol of hope, the certainty that the kosen-rufu movement of Los Angeles will continue to advance and develop by further spreading circles of friendship."

"I hope that you will love and care for this center, making it an ever more beautiful home of good fortune, a castle of friendship open to your community."

