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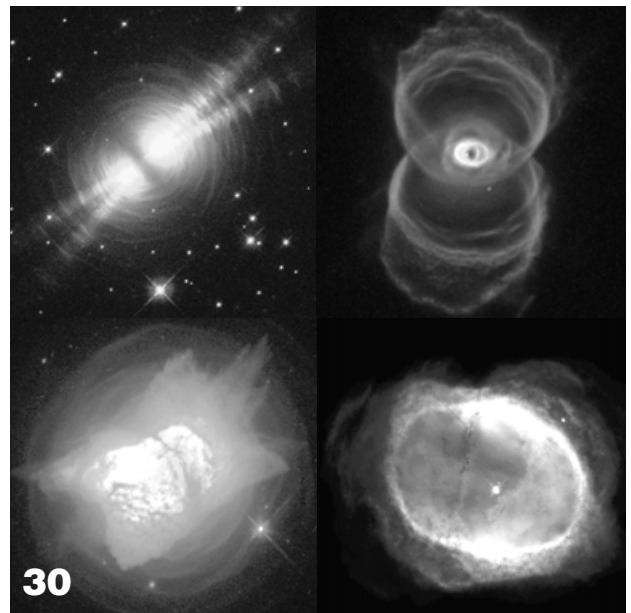
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COVER PHOTO: *Pigeon Point Light House and Wild Flowers*, taken in Northern California, 1996, by Mike Mullen.

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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

The Four Virtues

I HAVE a question about the article “Buddhist Concept for Today’s Living (1)—The Four Virtues of the Buddha: Breaking out of the lesser self,” in the January 1999 issue of *Living Buddhism* [pp. 8–9].

In summary, the “four virtues” of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are True Self, Eternity, Happiness, and Purity (November 1992 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 8-11), whereas the “three virtues” of the Buddha are Parent, Teacher, Sovereign (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 90). In 1264, Nichiren Daishonin explained that only Shakyamuni was endowed with the three virtues (MW-6, 22). He also explained that other Buddhas, such as Amida and Yakushi were not endowed with these three virtues (MW-6, 22).

I have found no reference [in the *Major Writings*] to a Buddha endowed with the “four” virtues of True Self, Eternity, Happiness and Purity, and no reference to a set of four virtues of a Buddha.

On page 8 of the article in the January issue there is the statement that Mahayana Buddhism views the four virtues of True Self, Eternity, Happiness, and Purity as the four virtues of the Buddha. Is there a text or reference to support

this statement? The Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana text, presents Bodhisattvas Jogyo, Jyogyo, Muhengyo, and Anryugyo to embody these four virtues, rather than a Buddha to embody these virtues.

The article suggests that Nichiren Daishonin attributes the four virtues of the Buddha to the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In which text or reference did Nichiren Daishonin refer to these four virtues of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as being virtues of a Buddha?

There is an incredible amount of praise for the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the Major Writings, in the Lotus Sutra and in the writings of President Ikeda. Nichiren Daishonin claims that no one but the Bodhisattvas of the Earth could appear to propagate Nam-myohorenge-kyo (MW-1, 90), whereas he could have claimed that Buddhas could accomplish this. There are several descriptions explaining that the heritage of the ultimate law of life was transferred to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whereas the Daishonin could have said that it was transferred to a Buddha. Instead, he praises the Bodhisattvas of the Earth thoroughly.

In conclusion, the four virtues of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth should not be attributed to any

CORRECTION: In the February 1999 issue the photo caption on page 26 should have identified the fifty-ninth high priest as Nichiko.

Buddha(s). To automatically assume that Buddhas are praiseworthy, and that Bodhisattvas can be a bit praiseworthy after-the-fact is to treat the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in a condescending manner.

JON CUMMINGS,
A City in the USA

As you suggest, Nichiren Daishonin attributes the four virtues of true self, eternity, happiness and purity to the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in “The Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings” (Gosho Zenshu, p. 751). The same passage describes “the actions of the essential bodhisattvas [i.e., the Bodhisattvas of the Earth]” as “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” and their function as “leading all people of Japan to the pure land of Eagle Peak” (Ibid.). In other words, here and elsewhere the Daishonin equates the function of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to that of Buddhas—those who manifest the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in their lives and thereby lead others to happiness.

In addition, in his writing “The Fourteen Slanders,” the Daishonin states: “All Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be present in complete joy, caressed by the breezes of eternity, happiness, true self and purity” (MW-3, 217). Here the Daishonin associates the four virtues with both Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Attributing the four virtues to a Buddha or to Buddhas in general is appropriate and accords with the Daishonin’s meaning.

I think it is safe to say that any Buddha who is real—who is a human being living in this world and who manifests his or her innate Buddha nature—manifests these four virtues. This is what we mean when we refer in general to “a Buddha” in our study articles. Amida and others do not fit this description. The Daishonin describes Amida as follows:

Amida Buddha dwells in a region ten billion Buddha lands away and has not the slightest connection with this saha world. However one may claim [that such a connection exists], there is no basis for it. It is like trying to mate a horse with an ox, or a monkey with a dog! (MW-6, 102)

We can interpret the above to mean that Buddhas such as Amida are no more than god-like images with no connection to the real world—not real persons. Since the four virtues are very real qualities—real potentials within human life—only a real person could possibly manifest them.

It is best to view the four virtues as a function of a person’s emerging Buddha nature—also, an expression of that person’s identity or function as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

—J.K.

Frequently Cited Sources

For 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>

Be Extraordinary Ordinary People

WHERE is the power of Buddhism found? I think we can safely say that it is found in the lives of the people who practice it. It does not come from any special person or entity. In fact, SGI President Ikeda recently commented that he feels his struggle as a Buddhist has been one of challenging those who consider themselves special. When ordinary people become convinced of their true power, those who consider themselves superior will feel threatened and insecure. It then takes a person of courage to stand up against their attempts to undermine the people's confidence.

Last month, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit members in the newly formed Caribbean Region. What impressed me most was the power, passion and richness of the hearts of the members throughout that region, which is now part of SGI-USA's new Southern Zone.

With unemployment rates as high as twenty percent, economic and social conditions are often harsh.

**The hope that burned
in the Daishonin's
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SGI members.**

In spite of these difficult conditions, the members often go far out of their way to participate in SGI meetings and activities. For instance, to attend the Caribbean Area General Meeting on the island of St. Maarten, members flew in from the islands of Antigua, Aruba, Bonaire, Nevis, St. Croix, St. Lucia and St. Thomas—some from as far as three hours away by air.

In Puerto Rico, members on the far side of the island chartered a bus at their own expense to travel three hours to attend a meeting. Regardless of their difficult circumstances, none of these members appeared poor.

All were wealthy in terms of the "treasure of the heart" that is their faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. They were rich in spirit and in their shared pride, joy and determination as SGI members. To me, this was a concrete expression of the energy and power of ordinary people, which has always been the SGI's pillar and strength.

After World War II, President Toda vowed that by propagating the Daishonin's Buddhism, he would rid Japan of poverty and misery. In the early days of the Soka Gakkai, the organization was ridiculed by the press and others as an organization of the poor and the sick. Yet these "poor" and "sick" people created a powerful foundation of fortune in their lives and in society, to the extent that Gakkai members today are criticized for being too influential—in a sense, too "healthy." This condition is none other than the collective good fortune of individual members who have dedicated their lives to kosen-rufu. Clearly, President Toda's vow has been fulfilled.

Today people are anxious and even afraid about what the upcoming turn of the millennium will bring. While this sort of "millennium fever" may have its roots in Judeo-Christian thinking, a similar atmosphere prevailed in Japan around the Daishonin's time. Society was gripped by disasters, and people feared that with the onset of what Buddhist scriptures termed the evil Latter Day of the Law, things would only get worse. While other Buddhist leaders used people's fear to gain support and profit for themselves, the Daishonin made a bold and optimistic declaration based on his enlightened state of life: The present calamities were not simply signs of an evil age, but sure signs that a Great Pure Law was about to spread and bring great fortune to all humanity as the Lotus Sutra taught.

The hope that burned in the Daishonin's heart has been made real in this age solely through the efforts of SGI members. They have cherished it as their dream and, without concern for profit or fame, worked over the decades to build a foundation of peace, happiness and good fortune for themselves and for society. And whatever fear or doubt prevails in the world today, whatever difficulties may await us, it is our mission to inspire hope in those around us that the coming century is in fact the Century of Life.

The Daishonin himself said that he was "born poor and lowly to a *chandala* family" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 37), meaning that he came from the lowest, most ordinary class of society. He also said, "The true Buddha is the common mortal" (MW-1, 91). The Buddha, he declared, is an ordinary person—an enlightened ordinary person.

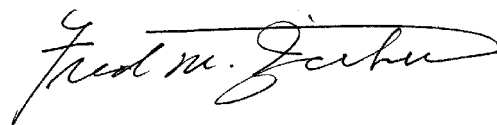
Today, we are flooded with media images of high style, wealth and status. The need to be "special"—prettier, richer and more popular than others—has become ingrained in our collective psyche. In fact, many have interpreted the "American Dream" to be the pursuit and acquisition of wealth, property and prestige. But recently even science has been demonstrating the shortcomings of such an approach to life.

In February *The New York Times* reported the conclusions of the latest research: "Not only does having more things prove to be unfulfilling, but people for whom affluence is a priority in life tend to experience an unusual degree of anxiety and depression as well as a lower overall level of well-being.... Researchers sketch an increasingly bleak portrait of people who value 'extrinsic goals' like money, fame and beauty. Such people are not only more depressed than others, but report more behavioral problems and physical discomfort...."

From such reports, I think, we can take pride that being an "ordinary" person is in tune with the times. And our goals and focus—to create friendship and trust based on shared "treasures of the heart"—are increasingly sought, even by those with wealth or power.

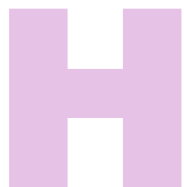
The Daishonin writes: "When it comes to understanding the Lotus Sutra, I have only a minute fraction of the vast ability that [the great teachers] T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo possessed. But as regards my ability to endure persecution and the wealth of my compassion for others, I believe they would hold me in awe" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 100).

Rather than think ourselves special, when we strive to make a special degree of effort and show special concern for others, we ordinary people will discover within us extraordinary treasures of the heart.



Fred M. Zaitzu
SGI-USA General Director

What Is Karma?



HUMAN BEINGS HAVE LONG ASCRIBED TO FATE, destiny or even God's will problems they felt powerless to resist, resigning themselves to these perceived forces.

The ancient Greeks envisioned three elderly goddesses—the Fates—who controlled people's lives. The goddess Clotho determined birth, spinning the thread of human life; Lachesis dispensed that thread, steering the path a person would follow in life; and Atropos cut the thread thus determining an individual's moment of death.

This attitude—that all in life is predetermined or inalterable—is not limited to people of old; it exerts an influence on the hearts and minds of many living today. Expressing frustration over this tendency, British author and essayist George Orwell wrote: "For the ordinary man is passive. Within a narrow circle . . . he feels himself master of his fate, but against major events he is as helpless as against the elements. So far from endeavoring to influence the future, he simply lies down and lets things happen to him."¹

The idea that something other than ourselves controls our destiny can in one sense be seen as a form of avoidance—a rationalization to escape facing and challenging real problems and suffering. It may also be an expression of a deep, subconscious sense of helplessness.

Buddhism teaches the solution to human suffering and provides a way to overcome or transform this sense of helplessness. Ultimately, it teaches that the cause of misery lies not with any external force or circumstance, but with ourselves. Buddhism looks nowhere beyond the sufferer for both the cause and the solution to suffering.

According to Shakyamuni Buddha: "If a person commits an act of good or evil, he himself becomes the

heir to that action. This is because that action actually never disappears (*Udana*)."

The Sanskrit word *karma* means action. And Buddhism

divides the actions that constitute karma into three categories: actions of the body (behavior), actions of the mouth (speech, language) and actions of the mind (thoughts).

The latent force of both our good and bad actions remains in our lives.

ONCE committed, any human action, whether good or bad, does not simply vanish into the past with time. Each act remains in one's life at the present as a potential force or energy, influencing the course of one's existence from the point of that action forward. In this sense, rather than simply viewing karma as "action," it may be more appropriate to think of it as action plus that action's potential influence on one's life. Or, in simpler terms, karma may be seen as life's ingrained habits, leanings or tendencies—actions that tend to repeat themselves, or that we tend to repeat.

Buddhism teaches of the eternal or unending nature of life as a cycle of birth and death. So when people speak of "past karma," they really mean the present influence on one's life of actions taken in the past (in past lives). Buddhism also teaches that actions (karma)

can be either good or bad; good actions (good karma) give rise to happy, positive effects, and bad actions (bad karma) give rise to unhappy, negative effects.

Further, some actions yield specific results that will appear at a set time—this is known as fixed or immutable karma. Other actions yield results that are not set or specific in their nature or timing—this is non-fixed or mutable karma. Immutable karma is often used to describe a person’s life span, because the time of one’s death is viewed in Buddhism as fixed or set by the influence of past karma.

What kind of actions form immutable karma? In the Buddhist scripture *A Treasury of Analysis of the Law* (Jpn. Kusha Ron), they are described as:

1. Actions arising from strong earthly desires (delusions, illusions); or conversely, actions arising from a very pure heart and mind.
2. Actions that are continually repeated over time.
3. Actions taken toward the correct teaching of Buddhism.
4. Actions taken toward one’s mother or father.

While human beings cannot avoid the results of their actions in past lives, Buddhism does not teach that we should simply resign ourselves to the effects of karma, be they good or bad. Submission to fate, to “one’s lot in life” or to some will outside our own is not a correct Buddhist view. Rather, Buddhism is correctly understood as a forward-looking, empowering teaching that stresses personal responsibility and hope. “If I am the one who made myself what I am today, then I am the one who will create the ‘me’ of the future,” is the ideal attitude of a Buddhist.

Karma, then, does not so much apply to our circumstances as to our thoughts, words and deeds. Things do not happen to us, we make them happen—or we act in a habitual way when they do happen that leads us to habitual situations. We made what we are and experience now, and we are at this moment making what we will be and experience in the future. That is karma. So to change karma means to change our lives

right now; that is, the way we think, speak and do things. The best way to positively transform the effects of our past bad karma, enjoy the effects of past good karma, and create good karma for the future is to inform our actions with fresh life force and wisdom.

Fortunately, the Daishonin’s Buddhism provides us with a way to bring forth this powerful life force and wisdom. The power of our Buddhist practice also enables us to transform negative karma or circumstances into a motivating force for creating great future benefit and reward.

**Faith and practice
enables a change of destiny and the
accumulation of good fortune.**

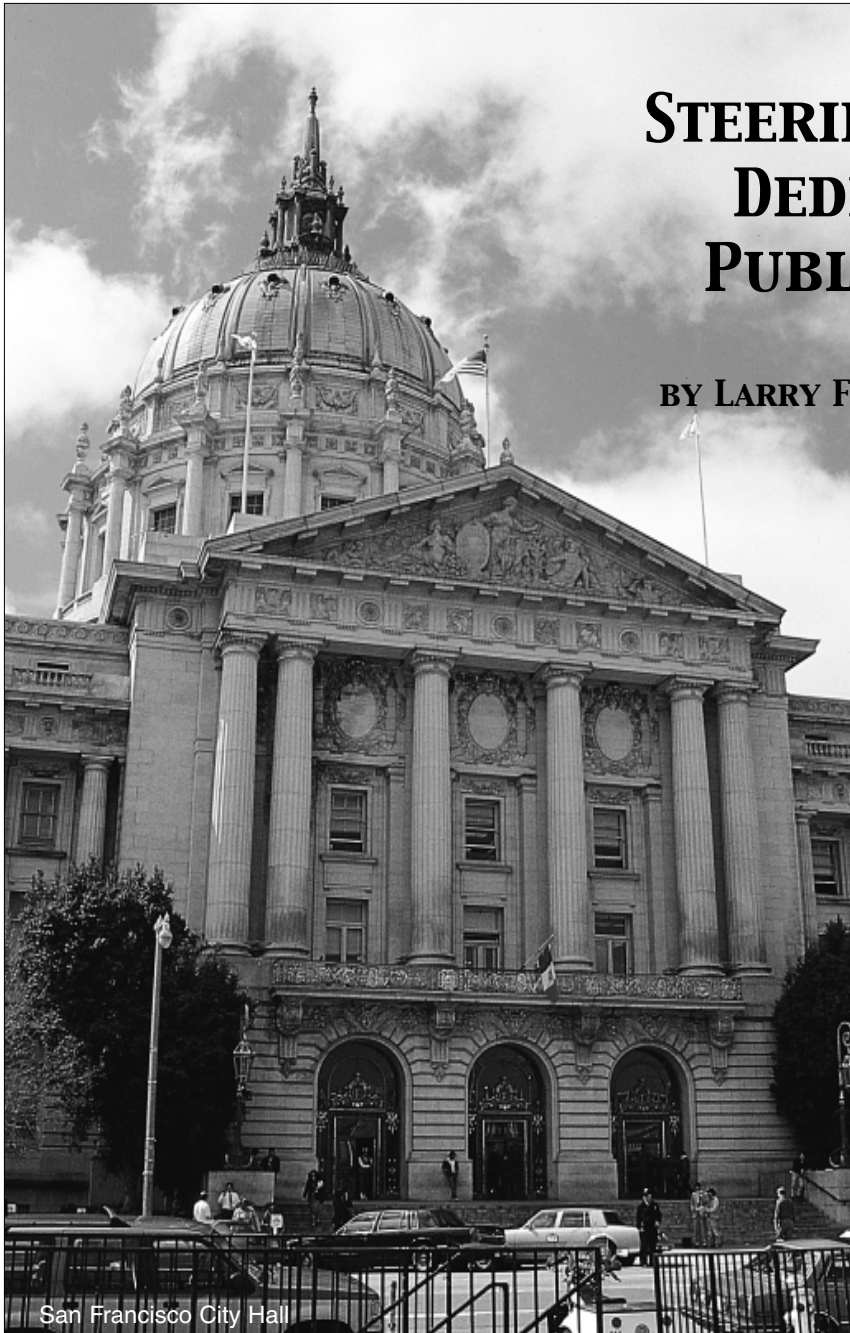
THE key to breaking through the wall of our bad karma and creating future happiness lies only in ourselves—in our own actions.

Nichiren Daishonin writes in “On Prolonging Life” that “sincere repentance will eradicate even immutable karma, to say nothing of karma which is mutable” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 229).

“Sincere repentance” here means to repeatedly refresh our determination to dedicate ourselves to the Law of Buddhism by continually carrying out the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo for our sake and for that of others. This is the purpose of our SGI organization—to provide many people with support in doing just this. When we freely engage ourselves in chanting daimoku and in SGI activities, powerful vitality will emerge from within us. Not only will we break the restraints of our past karma, we will also build a rock-solid foundation of good fortune and happiness for the future.

*By Jeff Kriger, SGI-USA Vice Study Department Leader
Based on the book Yasashii Kyogaku [Easy Study].
Tokyo: Seikyo Press.*

1 George Orwell (1903–50), British author. Inside the Whale and Other Essays, “Inside the Whale” (1940).



STEERING A COURSE DEDICATED TO PUBLIC SERVICE

BY LARRY FLORIN, SAN FRANCISCO

through my actions, pathways of understanding and trust toward the humane ideals of Buddhism.

Something I have learned in my career is that while many enter public life with strong ideals, the proximity to power and prestige can be intoxicating and lead us to veer from our initial purpose. It takes commitment and strength to carry through with our chosen mission. I guess that is why it's important to have a solid, profound philosophy and a mentor in life, someone who shares our ideals and who can continually steer us back on course.

During my fifteen years in the public sector, I have had some extraordinary opportunities to work closely with those in positions of high visibility. I have worked directly on the staff of three mayors, been chief of staff to the president of our county Board of Supervisors, headed up city departments, and managed numerous projects with high public exposure and citywide implications. Each of these brought with them unique challenges and an

WHEN I left graduate school, I knew that I was destined for public life. Many of the ideals that motivated me to take responsibility in the SGI-USA caused me to seek out a career in public service. I believed that the only way for me

to have a significant impact on society was to forsake the profit motive and work in a career dedicated to the public interest. I also felt that by doing so I could fulfill my mission to support SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's vision for global peace. I wanted to create,

Larry Florin (left) with former mayor of San Francisco, Art Agnos.



CARMEN MAGANA/F.P.L.C.

opportunity to learn more about the power structure in our country. I learned firsthand how it can be exhilarating to wake up in the morning and read your quotes in the newspaper or hear your voice on the radio as you're driving home. I've also learned how, if you live for these accolades, you can forget why you have undertaken such a mission.

WHEN I was hired into my first job after graduate school, I was filled with great enthusiasm and ideals. I assumed that every employment opportunity would be like my SGI youth division activities, filled with individuals working tirelessly and in unity to achieve a shared goal. Well, I was in for a huge surprise. My first job was to work as a staff planner for the Municipal Railway, the transit agency for the City of San Francisco. I was hired to work alongside individuals who had been at their jobs for twenty, thirty and in one case, forty years. I soon found out what happens when one is filled with cynicism and defeat. It was a debilitating environment in which many had long ago given up. Inevitably, when I would suggest a new way of doing something, I would be met with great apathy.

Undeterred, I would persist in writing memos to those in charge

about how we could do things better. It was because of this persistence that I caught the attention of a senior in the organization. This individual took me under his wing and became the first of many supportive individuals who would take the time to train me.

This person, fifteen years my senior, had already had a great career in public service, serving previously in presidential, gubernatorial and mayoral administrations. He hired me, even though many more capable individuals were seeking a position with him. It was from here I learned the importance of persistence in reaching my ideals and working to improve the system.

In 1988 I received my formal introduction into politics. I was hired by Art Agnos, then the recently elected mayor of San Francisco. Mayor Agnos was a former assemblyman and social

worker who was elected mayor of San Francisco on a platform that he would “shake things up” at city hall. As a young idealist with tons of ideas and virtually no experience in politics, this was an exciting and intimidating world for me to be thrown into. I remember sitting through my first staff meeting with the mayor and wondering if the people in the room were even speaking the same language I was. For the first few meetings I was afraid even to open my mouth.

FORTUNATELY, once again I felt that forces in my environment were watching out for me. I became the personal project of the mayor's chief of staff, a career politician who had a reputation as someone whom you did not cross. I would routinely run ideas by the chief of staff before bringing them to the mayor. More often than not, he would point out some flaw in



GLENN ALISON

San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge

my position and challenge me to talk with more people and think it through more thoroughly. It became a tutorial in politics.

I resolved to use this opportunity to gain as much experience as I could. First, mostly out of sheer terror and with the realization that I was in way over my head, I embarked upon a campaign of chanting as much as I could to the Gohonzon. The goal of my prayer was to manifest the wisdom to avoid saying anything stupid.

In addition, I always tried to pray with a conviction I had learned early on in my Buddhist practice. On one occasion, an SGI-USA leader to whom I was close reminded me of the passage where Nichiren Daishonin writes: “The belief of some is like fire while that of others is like water. When the former listen to the teachings, their passion flares up like fire, but as time goes on, they tend to discard their faith. To have faith like water

means to believe continuously without ever regressing. Since you pay frequent visits to me regardless of the difficulties, your belief is comparable to flowing water. It is worthy of great respect!” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 250)

THE point here is that persistence is more important than raw enthusiasm or excitement. However, this leader said, once you understand that faith like flowing water is important, it’s better to make it “boiling water.” I took this to mean that with both persistence and passion, I could accomplish anything. From that time on, I always prayed to have a spirit like “boiling water”—and have tried to approach both my work and Buddhist activities with passion and tenacious persistence.

I volunteered for every assignment. When the government liaison officer left, I volunteered to be

the mayor’s liaison to the Board of Supervisors; when the ballpark project manager left to take a job in the private sector, I volunteered to take on his duties. I let it be known that I was available whenever and wherever anyone needed assistance. It was an incredible experience that provided me with training that would help me for many more years to come.

In 1989 the mayor decided to put on the ballot his proposal to build a new ballpark for the San Francisco Giants, an initiative intended to keep the team from leaving San Francisco. It was during this campaign that I got my first lesson in the true “hardball” tactics that can come into play in an election. It was my job to travel with the mayor to his campaign appearances, prepare him for each event, take notes during the discussions that would inevitably ensue, and follow up with answers and commitments that he made. To me



Larry (eighth from right) with staff of San Francisco Event Summit and Mayor Willie Brown (tenth from right).

there was no question on this issue of the ballpark. It seemed obvious that this was a brilliant proposal, and that few things were more important than keeping baseball in San Francisco. Unfortunately, not everybody agreed.

The campaign became a referendum on the job that the mayor was doing for the city. For some individuals, especially those who felt they had been excluded from the decision-making process, it was an opportunity to teach the mayor a lesson. While generally believing that our policies were in the best interests of the public, we did not have a reputation for listening. There developed a perception within our office that those who disagreed with the policies coming from City Hall were being influenced by self-interested people looking to even a score. The opposition seized upon this sense of paranoia and elitism with the result that the initiative narrowly lost. I was devastated. It was the first campaign that I had worked

on, and our initiative had lost by fewer than a thousand votes.

Rather than reflecting on the lessons of the campaign, however, some on the staff became dedicated to excluding those who had worked against the initiative. It was here that I got my next big lesson in politics: that is, how easy it is to lose perspective and become convinced that there are those who are simply out to destroy you. My closest friend in the administration, a man with a lot more experience than I, saw the signs and resigned. I simply couldn't understand how someone could abandon ship. I was so consumed with being in the limelight, at the center of attention, that I, like many on the staff, forgot the reason that we had entered public life. Rather than listening, we excluded people and increasingly saw the situation as one of us versus them. The negative results would manifest themselves in the next campaign.

In the midst of the ballpark campaign we got an unexpected

breather, and I got an opportunity to gain a whole new perspective on public service. Three weeks before the election, the city of San Francisco was hit by a major earthquake. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake destroyed homes and left thousands of people homeless. Moments before the earthquake I had left the mayor and was heading for the ballpark to see the World Series game between the Giants and the A's. When the earthquake hit I was in my car driving, and as a result I didn't feel a thing. When I went to my seat I was told for the first time what had happened. At that point I was in disbelief, hearing reports that the Bay Bridge had collapsed and that many people had died.

ALTHOUGH emergency preparedness was part of the mission of the Mayor's Office, it was at that moment the furthest thing from our mind. Consequently none of us had any idea what to do. Instinctively, and because of my experience as an SGI-USA leader, I knew that I had to take decisive action and initiate communication. I had to find the mayor and be there to provide any necessary assistance. After making sure that my family was safe, I headed down to the Command Center, a building I barely knew existed that is supposed to act as a center for all city departments and

the mayor in case of emergency. There I volunteered to do whatever was needed.

Over the next few weeks I found myself briefing national and state elected officials, convening special meetings of the Board of Supervisors, delivering blankets to families who were without heat, procuring thousands of flashlights for Chinatown residents left without electricity, and hundreds of other assignments. My SGI experience as a youth division member and leader planning and executing many events had taught me not to wait to be told what to do, but to take the initiative and do what had to be done. Watching people who had lost everything and helping them to resurrect whatever was left of their lives was a very sobering experience.

MY final lesson in my four-year tutorial was perhaps my most important. Despite the narrow loss of the ballpark ballot initiative, I thought things were going well. I was no longer intimidated by my colleagues, and I was functioning as a contributing member of the staff. I had been told by the mayor that I would have additional responsibilities in the second term and I looked forward to my new assignments. Unfortunately the second term was not to come. The individuals I mentioned earlier, who felt they had been excluded from the decision-making process, decided to fight back.

They found a very unlikely candidate—the former police chief of the city. After convincing him to run, they ran a brilliant campaign that exploited perceptions that the

administration had isolated itself from the concerns of the average citizen. The result was that the administration I had been part of was thrown out of office after just one term. It was simply unfathomable to me that this could occur. I had become so oblivious that I could not believe people could think that we were acting in anything other than the public interest. In retrospect it was a good lesson in what can happen to elected officials. I have heard President Ikeda continually talk about how important it is for those who are elected to public office to understand that it is their mission to serve the people. After this experience it became clear to me how easy it is to fall short of that mission without even realizing it, and how critical it is to continuously remind oneself of that.

Despite being fired very publicly by the new administration, a move that was announced on the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, I found myself with other opportunities over the next few years. I became chief of staff to the president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, a role in which I worked with the supervisor in initiating legislation on everything from controlling litter to landmark gun control. I also served as director of the Office of Military Base Closure for the City and County of San Francisco, a position from which I managed the transition of three facilities in the city from military to civilian use. Ironically, I was hired for this position by Mayor Jordan, the man who had beaten Mayor Agnos in 1991.

In 1995 Mayor Jordan was defeated by Willie Brown, the long-time speaker of the California State Assembly. On Mayor Brown's first day in office I received a phone call from his secretary asking me to meet with him at 8:00 a.m. the next day. I had never met the new mayor and so I had no idea why he would want to see me.

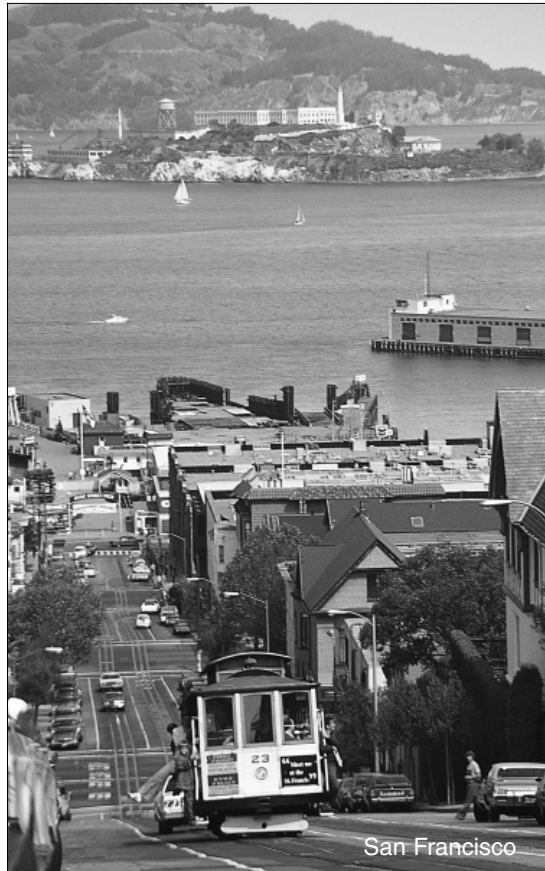
The new mayor informed me that I had been recommended by some people, and he wanted to get to know me. We had a very nice conversation after which I left and returned to my office. Later that afternoon I started to receive a flood of phone calls from the press. It seems that the mayor had held a press conference later that day and announced that he had appointed me to be the executive director of the San Francisco Economic Summit. I not only had no idea that I was to be appointed to this position, but, more important, I had no idea what the Economic Summit was. I soon found out. Mayor Brown had proposed, during the election, to convene a gathering of the city's key decision makers and constituencies to develop a plan for the economic revitalization of the city.

The summit was to be modeled after a similar gathering held by President Clinton after he had been elected president, and I was to run it. I spent the next four months putting together the event. It certainly called upon all of my training and experience in both the youth division of the SGI-USA and in politics to pull this off. I was responsible for everything from the logistics and staging of the event to getting

traditionally opposing groups to sit down at the same table and plan an agenda. It was an exhilarating experience. I had to continuously remind everybody throughout this process that we had to think about why we were gathering, and that was for the greater good of the city. Learning from previous mistakes, I insisted that we go throughout the city and listen to the concerns of individuals expressed in public forums.

The mayor agreed to chair each of these meetings. We got a great deal of good feedback and, more important, real-life experiences that helped us to focus our agenda on issues that mattered to the people. The resulting summit was a complete success and a historical event for our city. Addressing this gathering of 500 were three members of President Clinton's cabinet, mayors from major metropolitan cities, noted business and labor leaders and academics. Each challenged the participants to think about new ways of doing things.

THE most impressive speaker by all accounts was an individual from Pittsburgh named Bill Strickland, who worked with the homeless and the economically disadvantaged. Mr. Strickland had created a community where he trained those who were less fortunate to survive on their own. His message was filled with hope. Many of the principles he talked about reminded me of themes consistent with the mission



GLENN ALISON

of the SGI, ideas like how one individual can make a difference, how no person is beyond hope. What made this speech so moving was that Mr. Strickland was living this life and instilling hope in so many people who had been abandoned by society. Everybody gave him a standing ovation.

I have certainly learned a great deal from the tremendous opportunities that I have had over my years of public service. Each one has been a learning experience, and each one has deepened my understanding of how important it is to have the faith in humanity that Buddhism instills in us, as well as an excellent mentor in life. One experience crystallized for me the importance of the role that President Ikeda is playing daily

through his meetings with public officials and his constant encouragement to us. I had the opportunity to witness in 1993, during President Ikeda's visit to San Francisco, his dialogues with some of our locally elected leaders. I watched these politicians, who had perhaps to some degree been jaded by their positions and sense of self-importance, immediately let down their guard upon meeting President Ikeda. Something in his life—his open-hearted demeanor or genuine respect for them as human beings—caused them to immediately open their hearts, listening attentively as students and asking him questions about problems they faced and what he perceived their missions to be. I witnessed a political official,

trained to be stoic and unemotional, break down in tears as he then sincerely expressed his personal convictions after the encounter.

It made me realize that the real compassion of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is completely blind to position, power or status; it is directly conveyed to people's hearts through the sincerity of those who practice it.

My years of public service have given me great opportunities, but perhaps most important, it has made me realize that there is a mission more valuable than being a public official, and that is being a Bodhisattva—someone genuinely dedicated to the well-being and enrichment of ordinary people. □

“My Ambition Is to Express Humanity Naturally and Directly”

Elisabeth Augustin, Austria



The Royal Theater, Vienna

“I was searching for my real self,” says Elisabeth Augustin, an actress with Austria’s distinguished Royal Theater (Burgtheater).

In sharp contrast to the storms of applause that greeted her stage performances, Ms. Augustin felt a profound sense of solitude when she left the stage. It was as if there was a gap between Elisabeth Augustin the actress and Elisabeth Augustin the person.

Ms. Augustin’s father was a government official, and her mother, a graphic designer. On weekends during her childhood, she, her two younger sisters and her brother used to hold family concerts for friends, as they were all very musically inclined.

On entering elementary school, Ms. Augustin joined a children’s ballet company run by the Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera), and at 10 she entered a dance school. There she learned a wide range of dancing styles, from clas-

sical to Russian and East European ethnic dancing.

However, at over five-foot, eight inches, she was so tall that she stood out from the other students, so she switched from dance to theater. After finishing high school in 1971, she passed the entrance examination for Austria’s top national drama school, the Max Reinhardt-Seminar. Almost immediately she had the opportunity to appear in a TV program which turned into a big hit. She won an award in the process. Her talent was soon recognized by a famous director who came to the school to see her. After graduating from drama school with honors, she was given a contract with the Royal Theater, a long-cherished dream, thanks to the strong recommendation of this director. It seemed that there was no end to her good fortune.

As she challenged every role given to her with youthful passion, Ms. Augustin’s reputation con-

tinued to grow. In 1980, she married Rudolf Melichar, another experienced actor. The next year, at 28, she was selected to play the title role of Empress Maria Theresa in a TV drama. It was a wonderful part, that of the dynamic empress who set in motion the transformation of the feudal system of the Habsburg dynasty into a powerful modern nation. The program was a sensation and it was repeated many times.

However, at the gala reception celebrating the success of Maria Theresa, the show’s star was nowhere to be seen. Utterly exhausted, Ms. Augustin couldn’t find the energy to face a large group of people on such a grand occasion. It was as if her heart was enveloped by dark clouds.

Left alone after each brilliant performance, she was struck by a deep sense of solitude. Ms. Augustin’s very success was causing her distress in her private life, especially because of the envy she aroused among her peers. Offstage, the actors and actresses were fiercely competitive,



Elisabeth shares her Buddhist experience with other SGI members.

fighting each other for roles or to keep each other from succeeding.

She thought of the self who performed on stage as a different person from her private self, so prone to exhaustion and weakness. Which one was real?

Ms. Augustin's first daughter was born in 1982. Having to manage both family and professional life further increased the pressure on her. She tried meditation and therapy, but to no avail.

Around that time she started receiving letters from a friend in America, full of talk about Buddhism. At first she wasn't interested, but the letters kept coming—followed shortly by the friend herself, returning to Vienna on vacation. Despite her friend's enthusiasm, Ms. Augustin didn't decide to begin practicing Buddhism. But later, while on a trip to Greece, she again felt a deep sense of solitude as she sat staring at the ocean. Without realizing it, she started chanting like her friend had taught

her to do. She felt a warm sense of fulfillment and openness, and so she decided to try practicing Buddhism regularly.

HER husband also started to chant with her, and they received the Gohonzon in 1986. The next year, she was asked unexpectedly to perform at a major theater in Munich, Germany, on a long-term, two-year contract. This was a big challenge in terms of both time and physical strength, since it was not long after the birth of her second child. Ms. Augustin decided to use her practice to challenge herself. Since her husband could not leave Vienna because of his work, she took the two children with her to Munich. Every day was a struggle. She contacted local SGI members in spare moments from her work and participated in Buddhist discussion meetings whenever she could. She also managed to find time to take part in an SGI seminar at Trets in the south of France.

When she returned to Vienna, bigger jobs and a busy schedule were waiting for her, including a domestic tour, and performances at the famous festivals, Salzburger Festspiele and Festspiele Reichenau. She threw herself into her work, and every job was greeted with acclaim. She received a letter from an unknown fan saying that he had been encouraged by seeing her perform and hearing her voice. For her fellow actors, it was her energy as much as her performances that attracted them. Many of her colleagues started to participate in discussion meetings, so she began talking about Buddhism whenever she had the opportunity.

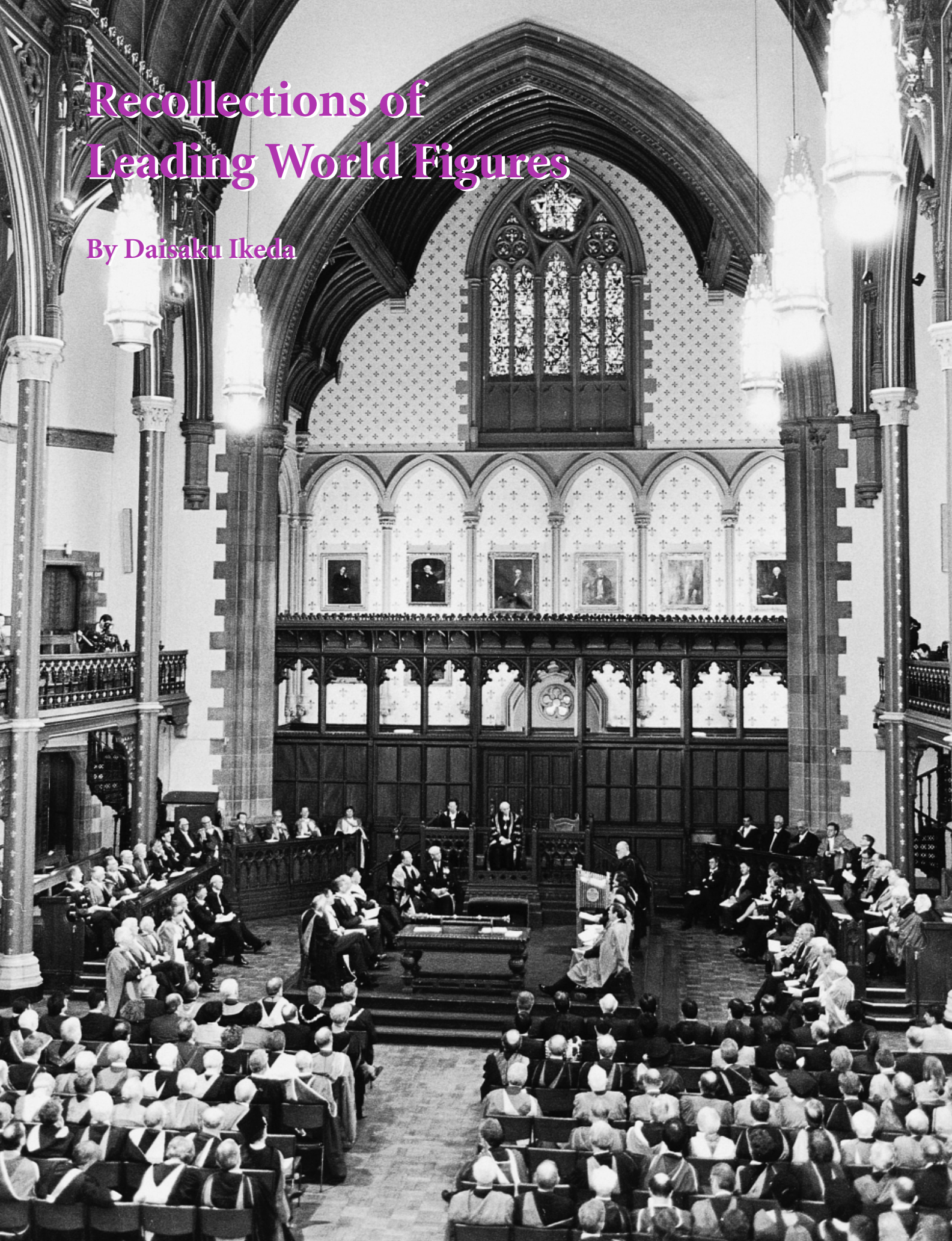
According to Ms. Augustin, her Buddhist practice has become a source of power that sustains her on stage: "In most cases, actors and actresses play their roles in a certain style, but I am trying to move away from artificial styles like that. My ambition is to express humanity naturally and directly. Every performance is a fight to discover the truth. When I'm playing a villain, disguising myself to look like an evil woman is not what it's about: only when I can find and express that woman within me does the character find her soul.

"While chanting, I realize that I am facing my weak self. This used to be scary, but weakness, and the courage to overcome it, are part of the reality of being human. Learning to express this is my struggle." □

Courtesy SGI Graphic

Recollections of Leading World Figures

By Daisaku Ikeda



Unfazed by Authority:

J. Forbes Munro, Clerk of Senate of the University of Glasgow, Scotland

THE voice tells much of the person within. The voice of Dr. J. Forbes Munro, professor in economic history and Clerk of Senate of the University of Glasgow, resounded with vibrant clarity through the time-honored Scottish institution's Bute Hall. He was delivering his nominating speech on the occasion of my receipt of an honorary doctorate at the University of Glasgow on June 15, 1994 (photo at left). It was a grand and dignified ceremony. Seated in the traditional black stone chair reserved for the recipients of honorary doctorates, I sensed the firmness of Dr. Munro's convictions in the timbre of his voice.

In 1990, four years earlier, Dr. Munro had visited Soka University and the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, and also given a lecture in Kansai [for the Culture Lecture Series sponsored by the Soka Gakkai newspaper, *Seikyo Shimbun*]. He remarked to those who had come to see him off at the airport just before his departure from Japan that the Soka Gakkai members he had met in Kansai were wonderful people devoted to the cause of peace. Why, he wanted to know, didn't the Soka Gakkai protest the false and inaccurate reports and attacks that it was



SGI President Ikeda confers with J. Forbes Munro, April 1995.

constantly subjected to? He declared that he would take action to make the truth known based on what he had seen.

I share this incident with you because I want to demonstrate Dr. Munro's integrity and sense of righteousness and justice. He is acutely intelligent, decisive and abhors dishonesty. He is a man of courage and principle who refuses to be fazed by position or authority.

Scotland, Dr. Munro's native land, is renowned for its frequent rain. Yet when the rain lifts, it gives way to truly lovely rainbows—so much so that the Scots even call their country "the land of rainbows."

The beautiful Highlands where Dr. Munro was born bring to mind a poem by Robert Burns (1759–1796),

the beloved national poet of Scotland of whom the professor is also a great admirer:

My heart's in the Highlands,
my heart is not here;
My heart's in the Highlands
a-chasing the deer;
.....

The birthplace of valour, the
country of worth;
Wherever I wander, wherever I
rove,
The hills of the Highlands for
ever I love.
("Highlands")

Dr. Munro grew up surrounded by mountains and lochs [lakes]. He also spent large parts of his

The University of Glasgow became a leading center of scientific research in the eighteenth century

childhood with his maternal grandparents, who lived in Northern Scotland. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—during the years when Japan began its drive to modernization following the Meiji Restoration in 1868—many Japanese sailors made port calls at the Shetland Islands which lie north of the Scottish mainland. His grandmother was also acquainted with some of the visiting Japanese.

As an undergraduate at Edinburgh University, Dr. Munro planned to enter into a career in commerce and industry. However, his encounter with the brilliant scholar and teacher of African modern history, Dr. George Shepperson, changed the whole direction of his life. His teacher introduced him to exciting new horizons and vistas. Stimulated by the practical relevance of Dr. Shepperson's lectures on Africa, at the age of twenty-four he found himself doing academic research in the newly independent Kenya. He also studied with Dr. Philip Curtin (who later became head of the American Academy of History) and Dr. Jan Vansina at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the United States. Dr. Munro attributes his academic achievements to the fine teachers with whom he had the privilege of studying. In every realm of human endeavor, he agrees, the relationship between teacher and student, mentor and disciple is key to achieving greatness.



After the conferment ceremony, an officer of the university, ceremonial staff in hand, led the way out of the hall to the solemn strains of a pipe organ. I and the other recipients followed him in a slow and stately procession.

FOUNDED in 1451, the University of Glasgow became a leading center of scientific research in the eighteenth century and contributed greatly to the Industrial Revolution, which transformed our world. It was also a benefactor to Japan's modernization. Many professors and teachers from the University of Glasgow came to Japan, including Dr. Henry Dyer who helped set up an institute for the study of engineering and industrial sciences.

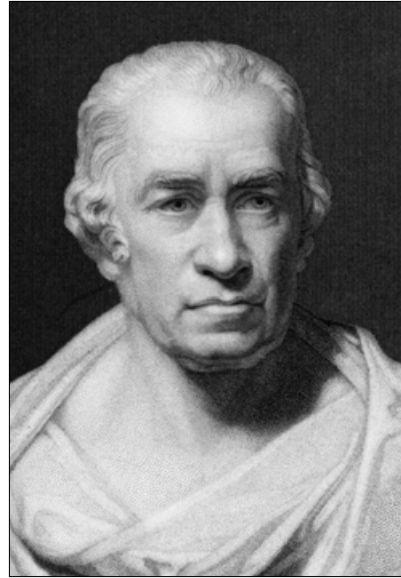
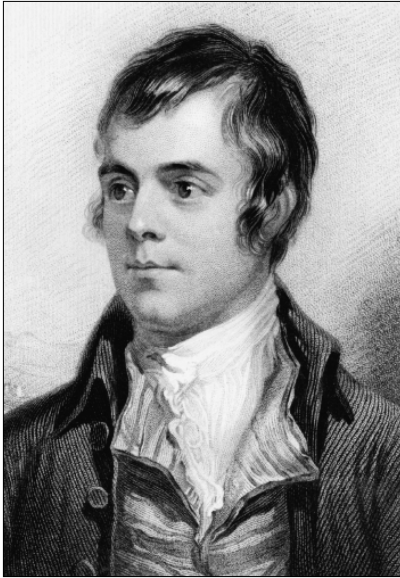
This school was known as Kōbu Daigakko (College of Engineering) and was later incorporated into the Tokyo Imperial University, forerunner of today's prestigious University of Tokyo. From these teachers of the University of Glasgow, Japanese students learned the satisfaction of

studying practical subjects and experienced the joy of scientific experimentation. This served to strengthen Japan's respect and appreciation for professions that entailed such practical creativity and craftsmanship.

A society that values people who produce things through their own labor, those who actually build and create things with their own hands, is a healthy society. A nation that makes much of showy but essentially shallow and meaningless endeavors is, on the other hand, in peril.

The Scots embraced the spirit that a person's position, authority or popularity is not important. Rather, what matters is that you use your own eyes, brain, hands and the sweat of your brow. This practical and earthy Scottish spirit opened the door for the establishment of the mighty British Empire.

JAMES Watt (1736–1819), the Scot who invented the steam engine that served as the central impetus behind the Industrial Revolution, was also a person who



(Left to right) Robert Burns (1759–1796), “Caledonia’s Bard.” James Watt (1736–1819), the inventor of the steam engine. Adam Smith (1723–1790), the “father of modern economics.”

put his own hands and ingenuity to work. Adam Smith (1723–1790), the “father of modern economics,” who studied and later lectured at the University of Glasgow, helped the young James Watt secure employment at the Scottish university, contributing in no small way to the blossoming of his talent and the fruition of his hard work and effort.

THE University of Glasgow’s greatest treasure was and still is its open-mindedness to acknowledge and support that which is good, transcending prejudices of class and social background. It is also the spirit that emanates from Dr. Munro. How this spirit enriches a society! How it energizes and improves and enlivens! The present feeling of stagnation and suffocation in Japan is surely caused by a lack of just this spirit.

The poet Robert Burns was once taken to task by a young nobleman for greeting a farmer as they walked along the road. But Burns exclaimed:

Why, you fantastic gomerl, it was not the great coat, the scone bonnet, and the saunders-boot hose that I spoke to, but the man that was in them; and the man, sir, for true worth, would weigh down you and me, and ten more such, any day.

As in his poem “Scotland,” he was praising the “virtuous populace” and criticizing “luxury’s contagion”; he called out to the people to rise up, drive away their oppressors and “stand, a wall of fire, around their much-lov’d isle.”

In the lyrics to the well-loved Scottish song “Scots, Wha Hae,” Burns writes:

Tyrants fall in every foe!
Liberty’s in every blow!—

This passionate blood would seem to pulse in Dr. Munro’s veins as well.

The northern winds were strong on the day of the ceremony, chill on the skin of the visitor. But Dr. Munro’s kindness and hospitality warmed me more than anything else possibly could.

WHEN I arrived in Glasgow, I was told that such clear skies are rare at that time of year. The legendary Loch Lomond glittered like diamonds, reflecting the cloudless blue sky.

The inexpressible beauty of the land drenched in light; the warm, open hearts of the people; the goodwill and friendship of Dr. Munro—Scotland will remain for me forever a land of shimmering light. □

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (14)

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

Last month's installment explained the tension that developed between the Soka Gakkai and the priesthood during the 1970s, resulting in Daisaku Ikeda's resignation as president of the Soka Gakkai in 1979.

Chapter 14: Toward the liberation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

(1) Operation C

NOVEMBER 28, 1991, will probably be marked as one of the most memorable days in the history of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. In an ultimate display of clerical authority, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood excommunicated the SGI with its worldwide membership of more than 10 million. The priesthood's sense of power rests on its ability to exclude believers from communion with the high priest, who, according to its new doctrine, is identical with the Dai-Gohonzon and Nichiren Daishonin in his spiritual properties. The priesthood

maintains that communion with or connection to the high priest is essential for believers' salvation; the excommunicated have no hope of attaining enlightenment. From the priesthood's standpoint, therefore, excommunication is a spiritual death sentence; it is a device to evoke believers' fear and thereby demand their obedience.

For this device to be effective, however, believers must be convinced that their happiness depends upon their relationship with the high priest. Since excommunication is the priesthood's last resort in its attempt to restore its superior status over believers, all it could do when this failed was to threaten excommunication again (in 1997) to those it had already excommunicated.



Taiseki-ji's branch office in Nishikata, Tokyo,
where Nikken and his associates planned 'Operation C'

The 1991 excommunication was unprecedented in scale in the entire history of Buddhism and certainly rare in any world religion. On November 7, prior to the excommunication, the priesthood sent to the Gakkai a notice calling for its dissolution. On July 4, 1992, the priesthood revoked Daisaku Ikeda's status as a lay believer of Nichiren Shoshu, that is, excommunicating once again the leader of the already excommunicated lay organization. On September 29, 1997, Nichiren Shoshu held an emergency council session and revised its rules so that believers who belong to other religious groups would lose their status as believers unless they terminated their religious affiliations before the end of November (the priesthood maintained that it had excommunicated the Soka Gakkai organization but not its members). Thus, Gakkai members were once again expelled from Nichiren Shoshu on November 30, 1997. Those repeated efforts to excommunicate the SGI members demonstrate the failure of the priesthood's measures as well as its frustration.

Behind the priesthood's self-destructive decision to excommunicate the SGI was the high priest's insecurity over the control of the ever-growing international lay Buddhist movement as well as his animosity toward its leader. Although it cannot be denied that there was an underlying feeling of discontent and mistrust among priests toward the lay organization, something that had continued since the 1970s, what directly motivated the priesthood's irrational behavior in punishing the SGI was sixty-seventh high priest Nikken Abe's emotionalism.

IN February 1989, the priesthood proposed a large increase in the fees paid by lay believers to visit Taiseki-ji. When Gakkai representatives asked that the priesthood reconsider the price hikes, the priesthood retracted its proposal altogether in frustration. This incident seemed to solidify Nikken's resolve to disband the Gakkai and gain control of its membership.

On July 16, 1990, Nikken and his close associates met in secrecy at Taiseki-ji's branch office in



GREGORY NAKASUJI

SGI youth culture festival in October 1990 celebrates the 700th anniversary of Taiseki-ji's founding. As the Soka Gakkai carried out this event, the priesthood was planning to implement "Operation C," intended to disband the organization.

Nishikata, Tokyo. At this conference, they agreed on a plan to enfeeble the Gakkai and gain control over its membership. The plan was code-named "Operation C" whose meaning Nikken himself disclosed to one priest as "Operation Cut"—to "cut off Ikeda from Nichiren Shoshu and thereby from the Gakkai membership." The plan was scheduled to be implemented in August 1990. The existence of Operation C, denied by the priesthood, was proven when conference notes taken by Jitoku Kawabe, a senior priest and participant in the Nishikata meeting, were made public. The plan describes in detail steps necessary to achieve its goal—control of the Gakkai membership. The basic steps mentioned in the plan include: 1) dismiss Ikeda from the position of chief lay representative; 2) demand that priests be selected to comprise half of

the Gakkai's Board of Directors; 3) prohibit Ikeda from public appearances and bar reports on his activities in Gakkai publications; 4) if the Gakkai does not accept these demands, excommunicate Ikeda and the lay organization; 5) run an advertisement in major newspapers for one week announcing that the Gakkai is no longer associated with Nichiren Shoshu; and 6) urge members to secede from the Gakkai and directly join their temple parish.

The following day, July 17, the priesthood held its regular communication conference with Soka Gakkai representatives. There, Gakkai leaders requested that senior officials in the priesthood admonish priests who were displaying extravagant lifestyles. This request from the Gakkai inadvertently put the priesthood in an

awkward position. If it decided to launch Operation C the following month as scheduled, the action would reflect badly in public as an emotional reaction to the Gakkai's legitimate claim.

On July 18, Nikken called another conference at Taiseki-ji and decided to postpone the implementation of Operation C until the event celebrating the 700th anniversary of the head temple's founding was completed in October. Meanwhile, in response to the Gakkai's request, the priesthood issued a notice containing more than twenty points cautioning priests on their conduct.

On December 16, 1990, the priesthood sent a letter of inquiry to the Soka Gakkai accusing Ikeda of not respecting the high priest and committing doctrinal errors in his speech at a Soka Gakkai Headquarters leaders meeting held on November 16. The priesthood was using Ikeda's speech as a pretext to implement the once-delayed Operation C. The accusations in the priesthood's letter of inquiry, however, were based on inaccurate transcriptions of the speech and statements taken out of context, which the priesthood later admitted.

The Gakkai requested a face-to-face meeting with priesthood representatives to resolve misunderstandings through discussion rather than exchanging documents. On December 26, the priesthood, however, sent the Gakkai a letter describing the Gakkai's response as "insincere." Based on the priesthood's view of itself as an absolute and unquestionable religious authority, anything short of immediate supplication to its demands would now be cast as insincere or slanderous.

On December 27, 1990, the priesthood held an emergency council session and amended the school's rules to place a term limit on the offices of lay representatives. The rule meant Ikeda's term as chief lay representative would expire immediately. The priesthood initially maintained that the loss of Ikeda's position was merely a result of the revisions of its corporate rules and not intended as punitive. The sequence of the events, however, clearly indicates that it was intended to dismiss Ikeda from the highest lay office of Nichiren Shoshu. This was the first step in the temple's implementation of Operation C.

On December 25, just prior to the priesthood's action to dismiss Ikeda, Nikken met with active anti-

Gakkai priest Kojun Takahashi and his brother Isao Dan, an anti-Gakkai tabloid media reporter, at the head temple. At the meeting, the high priest thanked Dan for his long-standing critical coverage of the Gakkai and asked him to further intensify his written attacks. Nikken also expressed his desire to "gain 200,000 Gakkai members" as a result of expelling Ikeda from Nichiren Shoshu. This figure, which was enough to ensure a foundation of financial contributions for all the branch temples, indicates the calculating attitude with which Nikken executed Operation C.

On January 1, 1991, the Soka Gakkai sent a letter to the priesthood, responding to each of the priesthood's allegations in its original letter of inquiry. As a result, the priesthood acknowledged three transcription errors and one unsubstantiated statement based on hearsay in their allegations.

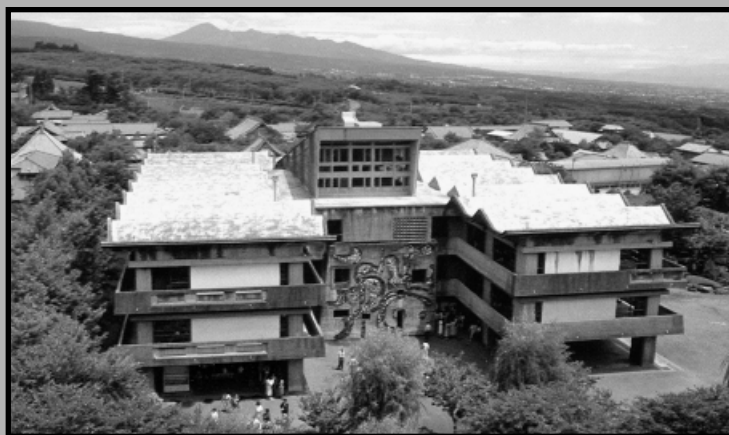
On January 16, Soka Gakkai President Einosuke Akiya sent a letter of protest to Nichiren Shoshu General Administrator Nichijun Fujimoto, pointing out the priesthood's obvious intent to trump up charges against the Gakkai and demanding its accountability for the incident as well as the retraction of punitive measures taken against the Gakkai.

MEANWHILE, as the priesthood saw its initial allegations based on Ikeda's speech proven unjustifiable, Nikken sought another pretext to proceed with Operation C in Ikeda's past statements about the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo). At nationwide chief priests' meetings held at the head temple on January 6 and 10, 1991, Nikken criticized Ikeda for his statement made on October 12, 1968, at the ceremony to mark the start of the Grand Main Temple construction.

At that time, Ikeda described the Grand Main Temple as "the high sanctuary of the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra." Nikken alleged that Ikeda had attempted to define the significance of the Grand Main Temple even before the sixty-sixth high priest Nittatsu. Nikken asserted that Ikeda's statement demonstrated his arrogance in overstepping the bounds of a lay believer and that the current "problem" of the Gakkai stemmed from this arrogance.

After Nikken's speech, however, the priesthood found out that Nittatsu had indeed made statements

Buildings donated by
the SGI to Taiseki-ji
that were destroyed
by Nikken.



Daikejo Hall

about the significance of the Grand Main Temple as the high sanctuary prior to October 1968. Nikken's claim that Ikeda had done so first was shown to be false. In spite of the revelation, the priesthood published Nikken's speech in the February issue of *Dai-Nichiren* with a brief statement acknowledging Nittatsu's prior statements. In protest of the priesthood's decision to publish the speech despite the fact that the basis of Nikken's allegations was proven false, the Gakkai sent a letter requesting a retraction of those allegations and the priesthood's apology. In an attempt to maintain its allegations against the Gakkai, the priesthood responded in a letter dated March 9 that some of Nittatsu's statements had been inappropriate and were made under the pressure from the Gakkai. On March 30, the Gakkai then sent a response to the priesthood, refuting in detail the priesthood's allegations.

Despite its unsuccessful attempts to justify its claims against the Gakkai based on Ikeda's November 1990 speech and on his October 1968 statement, the priesthood proceeded with its plan. It decided that from July 1991, it would abolish the Gakkai-sponsored pilgrimage to the head temple and institute a new system in which all believers

must obtain a permit from the chief priest of their local branch temple to visit Taiseki-ji to worship the Dai-Gohonzon. Needless to say, the measure was devised to make Gakkai members directly dependent on their temples, where they could be encouraged to secede from their organization and belong directly to the temple parish. The scheme, however, produced only small, frustrating results, which forced the priesthood to its final phase of Operation C—the excommunication of the SGI.

In November the priesthood excommunicated the SGI in hopes of boosting its failing campaign to gain direct supporters. Contrary to the priesthood's expectation, however, SGI members interpreted this intended spiritual "death sentence" as a "declaration of spiritual independence" from abusive priestly authority. In an ironic reversal of the priesthood's intended purpose, the excommunication encouraged the SGI to rally under the theme "Soka Renaissance."

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism could now take its place as a global religion, rather than the possession of a provincial and restrictive clergy. Its humanitarian and egalitarian principles could now be directly communicated, without dogmatic constraints, to the world.



Mutsubo Hall



Grand Reception Hall

SEIKYO PRESS

(2) The third of the three powerful enemies espoused in Buddhism

BESIDES Nikken's emotionalism, there are some additional underlying elements behind the recent conflict. These reflect behavior patterns displayed by the priesthood over the last seven centuries. First, the priesthood became so preoccupied with its own prosperity that the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism was reduced to a means for economic gain. The priesthood's aggressive promotion of funeral-related rituals such as memorial tablets and posthumous Buddhist names attests to its view of members' bereavement merely as a source of income. Second, the priesthood continues to view lay believers as inferiors and to demand an absolute obedience similar to the feudal relationship between a lord and his vassals. This archaic attitude, which is contrary to the Daishonin's egalitarian teaching, has become a source of anxiety for the priesthood. This anxiety grew as the importance of priests to both the practice of individual believers and to propagation diminished considerably with the successful development of the lay

Buddhist movement. The more the priesthood wished to assert its superiority and importance, the more oppressive it became toward lay believers. Trapped in this vicious cycle, the priesthood under Nikken's leadership has become extremely authoritarian to a level never before seen in the school's history.

From the standpoint of Buddhism, the priesthood's attempt to destroy the SGI is an unavoidable obstacle to the spread of Buddhism as foretold by the Lotus Sutra and predicted and experienced by the Daishonin himself. In the "Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says to Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower: "After I have passed into extinction, in the last five hundred year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devil's people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas or kumbhanda demons to seize the advantage!" (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 288).

This sutra passage describes the Buddha's mandate to spread the teachings and ideals of the Lotus Sutra throughout the world and overcome various obstacles in the process. In Buddhist history, the SGI's current



Somon Gate



Somon Gate and cherry trees

state of development may be one of few phenomena, if not the only one, that precisely correspond to the global spread of Buddhism as foretold by the sutra. As predicted by the sutra, only when the SGI started to spread the humanistic ideals of the Lotus Sutra on a global scale, did this unprecedented obstacle appear.

In the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the descriptions of those inevitable obstacles that the sutra’s practitioners must face come alive in vivid detail. The sutra explains its practitioners will face three kinds of obstacles. First, the practitioners will face “many ignorant people who will curse and speak ill” of them and attack them “with swords and staves” (LS13, 193). Second, the sutra predicts: “In that evil age there will be monks with perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked who will suppose they have attained what they have not attained, being proud and boastful in heart” (Ibid.). Third, the sutra goes on to state: “Or there will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement, who will claim they are practicing the true way, despising and looking down on all humanity” (Ibid.). Those three kinds of obstacles facing the sutra’s practitioners are called the three powerful enemies of Buddhism, according to the Chinese

Buddhist scholar Miao-lo (711–782). Of these three powerful enemies, the most powerful is the third kind: priests who are revered as saints and respected by the general public and who, in fear of losing fame and profit, induce the secular authorities to persecute the sutra’s practitioners.

DURING the Daishonin’s time, Ryokan, chief priest of Gokuraku-ji, a prestigious temple of the Ritsu school in Kamakura, fit the sutra’s descriptions of the third powerful enemy. Ryokan was the main instigator behind the government’s execution attempt on the Daishonin and his exile to Sado Island among other persecutions. Although he was considered a saintly priest by many for his promotion of public construction projects, he was amassing personal wealth behind the scenes and inciting the government to persecute the Daishonin and his followers.

In recent events, Nikken, with his abuse of the office of high priest, has proven himself to be functioning in the same way—as the third of the three powerful enemies. Using his religious authority, Nikken devised a plan to destroy the SGI and excommunicated it to gratify his personal desires. Furthermore, in league with Japan’s ruling Liberal

In early 1993, Nikken ordered the destruction of 278 cherry trees planted by the Soka Gakkai in commemoration of the Grand Main Temple's completion.



Democratic Party as well as anti-Gakkai journalists and activists, including Masatomo Yamazaki, Nikken has supported various anti-Gakkai campaigns in politics and media. For example, in October 1994, the LDP started to attack the Soka Gakkai in nationally televised Diet sessions, calling for Ikeda's testimony. The political harassment toward the Gakkai proceeded in accord with a plan detailed in the letter Yamazaki wrote to Nikken in late 1994.

LDP politicians worked to incite anti-Gakkai sentiments in Japan, using the public's fear of religious organizations after the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway by the Aum Supreme Truth sect. The ruling party also attempted to revise the Religious Corporation Act to restrict the Gakkai's activities. Yamazaki's letter to Nikken indicates the priesthood's connection with those political attacks on the Gakkai.

Nichiren Shoshu also supported a petition drive in April 1992 demanding that the Tokyo metropolitan government, where the Gakkai is registered as a religious corporation, dissolve the Gakkai. The petition was rejected by the Tokyo governor's office, but Taiseki-ji later paid ¥10 million to petition-organizer Nenko Ryu, a former Gakkai leader and longtime detractor. The priesthood also supported some weekly

tabloids during those anti-Gakkai political campaigns. For example, Nichiren Shoshu collaborated with the weekly magazine *Shukan Bunshun* in publishing articles critical of the Gakkai.

Nikken's dismissal of Ikeda from the position of chief lay representative and expulsion from Nichiren Shoshu interestingly coincide with the passage from the Lotus Sutra, which states that the sutra's practitioners "again and again...will be banished to a place far removed from towers and temples" (LS13, 195).

As the Daishonin himself experienced through the persecutions induced by Ryokan, the third of the three powerful enemies manifests itself in the form of religious authority. Referring to Ryokan, the Daishonin states that the third powerful enemy of Buddhism typically exhibits the characteristics of greed, jealousy, delusion, lewdness and self-indulgence despite the reputation of abiding by Buddhist precepts (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 350). The third powerful enemy invariably takes the form of religious authority in order to abuse believers and obstruct the spread of Buddhism. As the Daishonin explains: "It is the way of the great devil to assume the form of a venerable monk" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 31).



Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo)

(3) The absolute authority of the high priest

NICHIREN Shoshu's most recent wrongdoing is twofold. First, it excommunicated the SGI and attempted to destroy its international Buddhist movement. To destroy a harmoniously united group of believers is considered to be the most serious of offenses in Buddhism since Buddhism cannot benefit people without a Buddhist order dedicated to its spread. Second, Nichiren Shoshu has distorted the Daishonin's Buddhism by presenting its priest-centered authoritarian doctrine as orthodox, thus causing profound confusion among believers.

To bolster the high priest's authority and thus silence criticism both internal and external, Nichiren Shoshu has been propounding the absolute authority of the high priest and raising his person and administrative office to the level of an object of religious veneration. Nichiren Shoshu asserts that believers' faith in the high priest is as important as their faith in the Gohonzon. In a document dated July 30, 1991, Nichiren Shoshu senior priests stress that the high priest and the Dai-Gohonzon are "the inseparable object of veneration" and insist that believers' faith in those two must be "absolute." In a document dated September 6, 1991, the senior priests also write: "The Daishonin, who is the original Buddha, the

Dai-Gohonzon of the high sanctuary, and the successive high priests are one in their internal identity and constitute an inseparable object of veneration." In the June 1991 issue of *Dai-Nichiren*, a temple believer writes: "The high priest is the modern-day Daishonin and, in his internal identity, is the object of veneration that possesses the entity of the oneness of the Person and the Law." Kosei Mizushima, Nichiren Shoshu vice Study Department chief, claims in the eleventh issue of *Fuji Gakuho*, the official publication of Taiseki-ji's seminary: "The essence or soul of the Law has been transmitted into the body of the current High Priest Nikken in the same manner as in the Daishonin's day without the slightest difference, although his appearance as an ordinary person and as a vessel of the Law may be different." Along with those doctrinal changes, Nichiren Shoshu also revised its rules and regulations so that those who criticize the high priest may be subject to punitive measures.

With those doctrinal and administrative revisions, Nichiren Shoshu has sought to establish the absolute rule of the high priest. In his sermon at a chief priests' meeting on August 28, 1997, Nikken cited a letter from Nichikan, a chief priest of the temple Hoshō-ji in the seventeenth century (a different person from the twenty-sixth high priest Nichikan), to Taiseki-ji's chief parishioner written to solidify the fragile position of the newly appointed nineteenth high priest Nisshun. The letter states: "The matter of Taiseki-ji [regarding the transfer of

the office of high priest] is the transmission of the golden utterances [of the Buddha]. Those who receive this transmission, learned or unlearned, shall possess the living body of Shakyamuni and of Nichiren. Earnest faith in this enables the people of the Latter Day to sow the seeds of Buddhahood” (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 5, p. 271).

Nikken commented on this letter as follows: “Since a long time ago, I have always thought of this document as noteworthy because it explains precisely the faith of Taiseki-ji.” Nikken, like Nisshun, wished to gain advantage by supporting dogma that painted the high priest as an absolute vessel of the Law and equal of the Buddha.

4) Toward the renaissance of the Daishonin’s Buddhism

WHEN faced with the three powerful enemies, the Daishonin vigorously refuted their erroneous views while expressing his powerful optimism for the spread of Buddhism. In his well-known treatise “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” the Daishonin sharply criticizes the teaching of the Pure Land school: “Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil [doctrine] that is the source of all the trouble!” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 20). When he submitted the document to the powerful retired regent Hojo Tokiyori, the Pure Land school was spread throughout Japan. The Daishonin points out in the treatise that its erroneous teaching must be refuted to alleviate the confusion and suffering of the people. As shown in this passage, the Daishonin maintained an uncompromising stance toward what he saw as misleading teachings and corrupt religious authority.

Although he underwent numerous severe persecutions perpetrated by political and religious authority, the Daishonin’s view of the three powerful enemies was positive and optimistic. He saw their appearance as proof of his identity as the votary of the Lotus Sutra as foretold by the sutra. He states: “Even if it were possible to point straight at the earth and miss it, if the flowers were to cease blooming in spring, still I am certain that these three powerful enemies are bound to appear in the land of Japan” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 158).

The Daishonin’s confidence in the appearance of the three powerful enemies is an expression of his confidence in his identity as the true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra as he states: “When I examine these passages, I know that if I do not call forth these three enemies of the Lotus Sutra, then I will not be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. Only by making them appear can I be a true votary” (MW-4, 20-21).

The Daishonin also viewed the appearance of the three powerful enemies as a sign of the spread of Buddhism. The Daishonin expresses his confidence: “Great events do not have small omens. When great evil occurs, great good will follow. Since the worst slander already prevails throughout the country, the supreme True Law will spread without fail. What have any of you to regret? Although you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should leap for joy! Although you are not Shariputra, you should rise and dance!” (MW-5, 161). No doubt such hope and optimism in the appearance of the three powerful enemies were a source of the Daishonin’s resilience in facing his extreme difficulties.

The essential nature of the priesthood’s recent actions is the same as that of the corrupt religious authority that persecuted the Daishonin in the thirteenth century. As Ryokan was threatened by the Daishonin’s popular Buddhist movement growing in Kamakura, the priesthood views the growing influence of the laity as a sign of arrogance. The priesthood’s anxiety in losing its power over lay believers has essentially brought about its recent oppression of the SGI’s movement to globally spread the Daishonin’s teachings. In this sense, SGI members may view the excommunication and other oppressions perpetrated by the priesthood as proof of their identity as true practitioners of the Lotus Sutra and a sign of the greater spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism in the near future. As the Daishonin’s understanding of the three powerful enemies’ appearance became a source of his hope and optimism, SGI members’ understanding of the recent temple issue will no doubt serve as a driving force behind future development of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The priesthood’s excommunication of the SGI, in this sense, will be recorded as a pivotal moment in the history of Buddhism. It has served to announce a new era in which the Daishonin’s humanistic ideals will flow unrestricted, thus marking the beginning of a real renaissance of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. □

DIALOGUE

on the *Lotus Sutra*

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

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

How does our life change as we come to grips with the “Life Span” chapter’s teaching about the eternity of life? This time the participants discuss the “Distinctions in Benefits” (seventeenth) chapter, exploring what it means to lead a life of value creation—a life where one is able to transform life’s hardships into a source of value and benefit.

37 Those Who Spread the Mystic Law Accumulate the Great Life Force

The Buddha preaches a rarely encountered Law,
one never heard from times past.
The World-Honored One possesses great powers
and his life span cannot be measured.
The countless sons of the Buddha,
hearing the World-Honored One make distinctions
and describe the benefits of the Law they will gain,
find their whole bodies filled with joy.
(*The Lotus Sutra*, chapter 17, p. 235)

KATSUJI SAITO: It is now three years since we began our “journey” through the Lotus Sutra. The time has really flown by.

PRESIDENT IKEDA: You may feel it’s flown by, but doing this every month is wearing me out! But, since this undertaking is vital in paving the way for the century of life, let’s forge ahead and complete our quest.

IKEDA: We now come to three chapters that all contain the word benefit in their titles: “Distinctions in Benefits,” the seventeenth; “Benefits of Responding with Joy,” the eighteenth; and “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law,” the nineteenth. Each provides an explanation of the benefit of the Mystic Law. In particular, they describe the great benefit of spreading that Law, and the change and growth that one devoted to working for kosen-rufu experiences. In that sense, it is the members of the SGI who are truly living the teachings of these chapters. Let us proceed with that conviction.

To start with, what is the meaning of benefit?

HARUO SUDA: Basically, the term means gain. It also implies the Buddhist concept of the beneficial power to produce good fortune and merit. Beneficial power is action that creates happiness and good, while good fortune and merit are the effects produced by this power. Positive action, or making good causes, has intrinsic virtue that brings one good fortune and merit. In some cases, the term benefit is used to refer to this innate virtue of positive action.

We Accumulate Benefit Through Action

IKEDA: That’s a pretty complicated explanation! The bottom line is, positive action has inherent benefit. Benefit is definitely not something that comes to us from the outside; rather, it wells forth from within our lives, manifested through our own actions. It gushes out like water rising from a spring. That’s what benefit is.

TAKANORI ENDO: In other words, true benefit has nothing to do with pinning one’s hopes on being favored by an external source, like some kind of windfall.

IKEDA: Nichiren Daishonin says that benefit arises through “purifying the six sense organs.” The purification of the six senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind is itself the purification of one’s life. In other words, it is doing our human revolution and transforming our destiny.

[The section of the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” (Ongi Kuden) dealing with the “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” chapter says, “Benefit’ means the result and recompense of purifying the six

sense organs.... Benefit is attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form and the purification of the six sense organs” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762).]

Attaining Buddhahood, that is to say, doing one’s human revolution, is the supreme benefit. All the so-called worldly benefits manifest as concrete proof of happiness to the extent that we have purified our lives; this is in accord with the principle of the oneness of life and environment.

SAITO: So, elevating our state of life is the foundation of all benefit.

IKEDA: Yes. When we change, we can, as the Daishonin says, “gather fortune from ten thousand miles afar” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 272).

President Toda often said, “Supposing the benefit I have received is comparable in size to this auditorium, then what you call benefit is only about the size of the tip of your little finger.” Mr. Toda received enormous benefit as the result of his actions for the sake of the Law, enduring great persecution alongside his mentor Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, and willingly accompanying him to prison in the struggle to promote kosen-rufu.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “The element *ku* [in the word *kudoku*, or benefit] means eliminating evil, while the element *doku* means producing good” (GZ, 762). Benefit in the Daishonin’s Buddhism means getting rid of the fundamental darkness in one’s life and bringing forth goodness. To manifest benefit we need to carry out the practice of propagating the Daishonin’s teaching. Doing so means refuting the mistaken beliefs that cause people to suffer and enabling them instead to live based on the Mystic Law.

SAITO: Propagation is the action we take to “eliminate evil and produce good.” Through carrying out this practice for others, we also manifest the same effect in our own life.

IKEDA: On the other hand, the Daishonin says, “Both master and disciple will surely fall into the hell of incessant suffering if they see enemies of the Lotus Sutra and fail to reproach them” (MW-1, 165). Sharing Buddhism with others is all-important.

The next three chapters that we will study mark the start of the transmission section¹ of the Lotus Sutra.

Transmission, as the word implies, means propagation. In other words, the chapters after “Life Span”² explain the benefit of propagating the teaching. We can only become happy as much as we strive to help others become happy through faith in the Mystic Law. This is the concept of benefit in Buddhism.

ENDO: In terms of the mentor-disciple relationship, transmission is the work of the disciples. Therefore, from this chapter forward the focus will be on the efforts of the Buddha’s disciples.

A Living Philosophy Must Address the Reality of Life

SUDA: Some mistakenly interpret the teaching of benefit as indicating a preoccupation with material gain, and on that account look upon Buddhism as an inferior religion. But the Buddhist doctrine of benefit has to do primarily with purifying and revolutionizing one’s life.

IKEDA: Perhaps it would be more accurate to look at benefit in terms of value, or value creation. There are three kinds of value: beauty, gain and good.³ The opposites of these could be termed anti-values. Don’t all people aim to bring value to their lives?

SUDA: Working, eating, reading books, trying to cure disease—all are attempts to acquire or create some kind of value.

IKEDA: Everyone seeks happiness, just as plants and trees instinctively grow toward the sun. We always strive for a better life. This is only natural. To ignore or lose such drive is to be as good as dead.

SAITO: Consciously or not, all people seek happiness, value and benefit. It seems to me that this is indisputable. It is from the standpoint of this truth that all theory and explanation must begin. Any philosophy not based on this premise is no more than dead theory that has no bearing on reality.

ENDO: Throughout the history of Buddhism, since the time of Shakyamuni, never has the idea of gain been rejected. All along, Buddhism has urged that people accumulate benefit.

The Buddhist term benefit is written in Japanese with two Chinese characters. The first can be interpreted as meaning happiness and the second as meaning gain.⁴

SUDA: Of course, benefit in Buddhism does not refer only to the kind of gain that is visible to the eye. But if Buddhism were to reject such gain altogether, however, it would be no more than an abstract doctrine divorced from actual life, an enervated religion lacking the power to help people realize concrete improvement in their lives.

Even Illusion Becomes Benefit

From the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”

Those [bodhisattvas] who had heard in the prior [“Life Span”] chapter about the Buddha’s true identity as the Thus Come One inherently endowed with the three enlightened properties whose life is eternal, themselves come to believe in and understand the “inherent three enlightened properties.” The [“Distinctions in Benefit”] chapter clarifies the benefit that these bodhisattvas accrue through their belief and understanding.

In other words, when they believe and understand the inherent three enlightened properties, they then recognize that the earthly desires of the three poisons innate to living beings in each of the ten worlds are the benefit of the Mystic Law. The benefit is that they awaken to the fact that their own life is inherently an entity of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (GZ, 799)

IKEDA: Many people certainly hold the bias that religion merely pertains to the subjective realm of life. But Buddhism is the law of life; it is a teaching for daily life.

Viewed subjectively, life is a matter of self—of how we experience our own existence. Viewed objectively, from the outside, it is a matter of how we live—our daily activities. It’s neither entirely one nor the other. Partiality to the subjective view leads to an emphasis on the spiritual, while partiality to the objective view leads to an emphasis on the material.

**As long as we have the spirit of faith to dedicate our lives to
advancing kosen-rufu, everything that happens to us
will become our benefit without fail.**

Buddhism rejects bias toward either one of these extremes, enabling us to purify and strengthen our being while improving our daily lives. Put another way, through realizing improvement in daily life, we elevate our being.

For example, Buddhism speaks of attaining a state in which all our wishes are fulfilled. Wishes relate to the objective world. Being fulfilled means a sense of satisfaction experienced in the subjective realm. When these two are fused harmoniously, we attain the state of “fulfillment of all wishes”; this is a condition of happiness. That is how President Toda framed the issue.

SUDA: This seems to suggest that even a person with few wishes can readily find fulfillment.

IKEDA: I think it was Socrates who said that having few desires is the path to happiness.

SAITO: It seems to me that practitioners of Hinayana Buddhism seek to attain happiness through the elimination of desire. By contrast, Mahayana Buddhism, and the Lotus Sutra in particular, teaches the principle that “earthly desires are enlightenment.” It imparts the wisdom that enables us to channel the life-energy of earthly desires in the direction of good rather than something destructive.

IKEDA: The Lotus Sutra teaches that we can make our entire being blaze with the strong desire to attain a great objective. It teaches not that we should suppress anger, for instance, but that anger has a role to play in fueling our efforts to battle iniquity.

The “Orally Transmitted Teachings” read, “In the ‘Distinctions in Benefits’ chapter...they [the bodhisattvas] then recognize that the earthly desires of the three poisons innate to living beings in each of the Ten Worlds are the benefit of the Mystic Law” (GZ, 799).

To urge people to discard the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness from their lives would only breed hypocrisy. Besides, people who suppress their true feelings, who are content with being docile, powerless and

merely swept along by outside influences, are perfect candidates to be taken advantage of and used by the negative forces rampant in the Latter Day of the Law.

The Daishonin, however, urges that we challenge evil with great indignation and passion. When we base ourselves on the Mystic Law, everything becomes a source of value creation. This is the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra.

Benefit, or gain, and loss are not exclusive to the realm of religion. All people’s lives are, in a way, a succession of instances of gain and loss, value and anti-value. In business, selling is gain or value. But if the goods are sold at too low a price, the business takes a loss. When a painter realizes his or her subjective desire to paint a wonderful masterpiece (i.e., create the value of “beauty”), a fusion of subject and object occurs, filling the person with a sense of happiness. And when the painting is purchased, gain is realized.

When we are able to create value, we feel happy. The purpose of the Lotus Sutra is to enable us to develop in our inner, or subjective, world the great life force to create value no matter what circumstances we may encounter in our outer, or objective, world. That’s what is the process called human revolution.

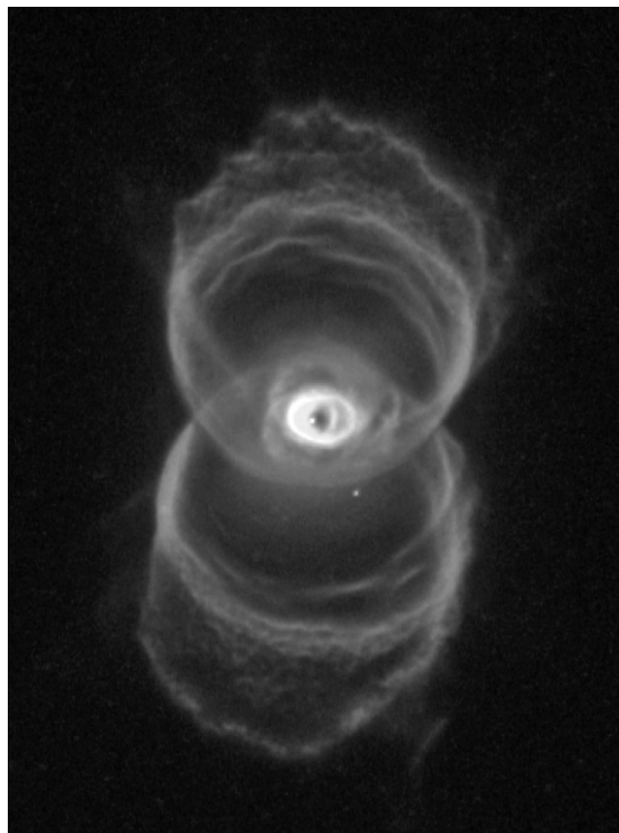
SUDA: That is true benefit.

IKEDA: Taking faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism does not mean that all difficulties will disappear. Being alive means that we will have problems of one kind or another. But no matter what happens, it’s important that we remain firm in our hearts. The Mystic Law is the teaching of “earthly desires are enlightenment” and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana.”

As long as we have the spirit of faith to dedicate our lives to advancing kosen-rufu, everything that happens to us will become our benefit without fail. Though we may not realize it while it’s happening, gradually our lives enter a path where “all wishes are fulfilled” and we can honestly say, “Everything that I’ve gone through



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has really been for the best.” This said, let’s begin our study of these three chapters, starting with “Distinctions in Benefits.”

The “Benefit of the *Jigage*”

ENDO: This chapter describes how those who had heard the preaching of the preceding “Life Span” chapter received benefit of different kinds according to their state of life. This benefit is distinguished according to twelve different levels. That is why the chapter is called “Distinctions in Benefits.”

SAITO: The Daishonin calls this benefit collectively the “benefit of the *Jigage*.”⁵ In “Letter to Horen” he says:

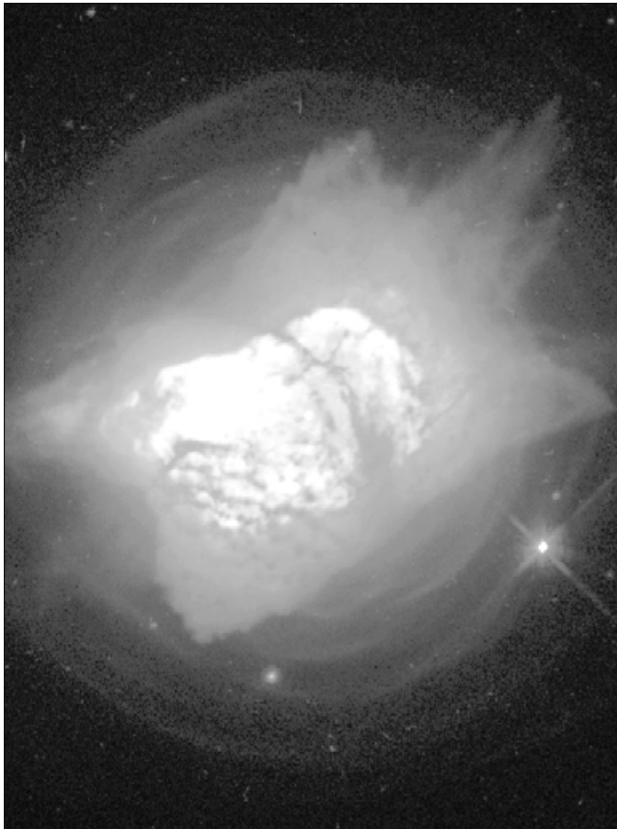
But it is not for me to describe the blessings deriving from the *Jigage*. Rather I refer to the subsequent *Fum-betsu kudoku* [Distinctions in Benefits] chapter, which elaborates on them. It says that those persons who became Buddhas after hearing the *Jigage* are equal in

number to the particles of dust in a minor world system or a major world system. (MW-7, 111)

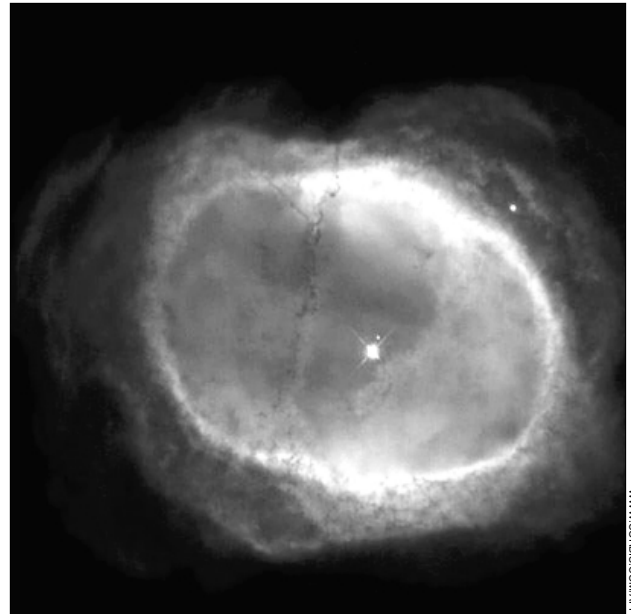
IKEDA: We could discuss this from many different angles. But from the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, listening to the preaching of the *Jigage* and becoming a Buddha is the benefit of worshipping the “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One.” This is the great benefit of revering the Gohonzon. It is the great benefit of believing and understanding that since the remote past our lives have been one and inseparable with the life of the “Buddha of time without beginning.”

SUDA: The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter begins as follows: “At that time, when the great assembly heard the Buddha describe how his life span lasted such a very long number of kalpas, immeasurable, boundless asamkhyas of living beings gained a great many rich benefits” (LS17, 233).

ENDO: It explains the content of these “great many rich benefits” as follows:



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SGI President Ikeda comments: “Everything in the universe is alive. Everything is an entity of life and death, an entity of the Mystic Law.” Like human beings, stars go through the cycle of life and death. Above are pictures of dying stars. (From left to right: the Egg Nebula, the planetary nebulae MyCn 18 and NGC 7027, and Southern Ring Nebula.)

Some abide in the stage of
no regression,
some have acquired dharanis,
some can speak pleasingly and
without hindrance
or retain ten thousand, a million
repetitions of the teachings.
Some bodhisattvas numerous as the
dust particles
of a thousand major worlds
are all able to turn
the unregressing wheel of the Law.
Some bodhisattvas numerous as the
dust particles
of a thousand intermediate worlds
are all able to turn
the pure wheel of the Law....
Thus when living beings
hear of the great length of the
Buddha’s life,

**they gain pure fruits and rewards
that are immeasurable and free
of outflows. (LS17, 235–36)**

IKEDA: In this passage, Bodhisattva Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku) is summarizing and restating the benefit that Shakyamuni has described.

ENDO: Yes. Regarding the first of these benefits, that of abiding in the stage of no regression, “no regression” means not backsliding. In other words, it is to attain the state in which one can advance eternally, always realizing growth and improvement.

IKEDA: That’s right. It has often been said that not to advance or to struggle is to retreat. A person who attains the “stage of no regression” is already a winner.

SAITO: To “acquire dharanis,” here, means gaining the ability “to retain all that they hear” (LS17, 233–34).

IKEDA: The Daishonin says, “Few continue their faith in the face of great obstacles” (MW-1, 127). And “Foolish men are likely to forget the promises they have

**Clearly perceiving reality by “purifying the six senses”
is a first important step toward true happiness.**

made when the crucial moment comes” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 180). Essentially, taking faith in this sutra means attaining a state of life where one does not forget one’s promises. It means correctly remembering and putting into practice the teachings of the mentor.

**The More We Speak,
The More Powerful
Our “Voice” Becomes**

SUDA: To “speak pleasingly and without hindrance” is also expressed elsewhere as gaining “the eloquence that allows them to speak pleasingly and without hindrance” (LS17, 234). This is referring to the ability to freely explain the Law without impediment and in a manner that brings joy to listeners.

IKEDA: The Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (GZ, 708). We have to use our voices. This means we must speak eloquently and intelligently. There may also be times when having the gift of gab is useful!

Of course, eloquence does not mean simply being long-winded. Sometimes just a few well-chosen words will suffice to deftly refute a misconception. Also, using our voice to do the Buddha’s work means being able to correctly respond to whatever it is that someone wants to know in the depths of their heart. If you yourself don’t know the answer, you can invite the person to join you in going to talk to someone who does. Sometimes that’s the best course to take.

What is important is to possess the ability to move people’s hearts and to empathize with them. In short, this is what it means to freely employ one’s voice for *kosen-rufu*.

SAITO: I think this certainly describes your efforts to write and to speak with people all over the world. Your published dialogues with people from all areas of society alone number approximately thirty.

IKEDA: What I have been able to accomplish is a testament to the immense power of Buddhism. The great power of the Mystic Law is still not fully understood.

The Spirit Never Rests

SUDA: Next, the sutra says the bodhisattvas can “retain ten thousand, a million repetitions of the teachings.” In the prose section it says they gain “*dharanis* that allow them to retain hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions, immeasurable repetitions of the teachings” (LS 17, 234). The expression used here literally means causing a collection of things of different weight to spin around, and separating them through centrifugal force. This seems to indicate the spiritual power to separate out and sublimate earthly desires by “rotating” them at a tremendous speed, and thereby revealing the greatness of the Buddha. The Sanskrit term *dharani* denotes the spiritual power to promote good and thwart evil.

IKEDA: As this passage implies by its description of things rotating at high velocity, to live a truly peaceful existence requires diligently and vigorously challenging the negative forces that aim to cause suffering. The benefits enumerated next also contain the idea of rotation.

SUDA: Yes, the fifth kind of benefit is the ability to “turn the unregressing wheel of the Law.” And the sixth is the ability to “turn the pure wheel of the Law.” The phrase “wheel of the Law” comes from the fact that the Buddha, in expounding the Law, is metaphorically said to “turn the wheel” of teaching. I think these passages express an unceasing and dynamic faith—a faith dedicated to conveying the Buddha’s pure teaching to others and spreading it far and wide.

ENDO: The passage continues by saying that many bodhisattvas “are assured that after eight more rebirths they will be able to complete the Buddha way.” (LS17, 235) It further states that after four, three, two or one

more rebirth, many bodhisattvas will attain the perfect and unsurpassed enlightenment. And it concludes the introduction of the benefit of listening to the “Life Span” chapter by declaring, “All [living beings] are endowed with good roots to help them set their minds on the unsurpassed way” (LS17, 237).

SAITO: The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China categorizes these benefits according to the fifty-two stages of

bodhisattva practice.⁶ The sutra describes various benefits that bodhisattvas receive. At first, it may seem to suggest that people can only receive benefit according to their specific level of attainment. But, contrary to that viewpoint, I think it actually reveals the great power of the “Life Span” chapter to benefit any and all people.

IKEDA: All benefit that can be attained through bodhisattva practice comes from faith in the “Life

Purifying Our Six Senses

FROM one perspective, what we call benefit in Buddhism comes from the positive relationships we create with our environment and with the people and events we encounter in life. To create such relationships, we must perceive things correctly so that we may act wisely. If our perception and grasp of our surroundings is clear, we can exercise wisdom and create positive value, happiness and joy.

But if our perception is clouded, we are more likely to bring suffering upon ourselves. This is why Nichiren Daishonin states: “Benefit’ means the result and recompense of purifying the six sense organs.... Benefit is attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form and the purification of the six sense organs” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762).

When we clearly perceive the positive meaning in our experiences, even in unpleasant ones such as unemployment, divorce or sickness, we can find hope and use any experience as an impetus for growth. In other words, how we perceive things determines

largely whether we create happiness or suffering in our lives. This is why Buddhism emphasizes “the purification of the six senses.”

“Purifying the six senses,” however, does not mean that we eliminate what Buddhism regards as life’s impurities: greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance and doubt. These so-called earthly desires are always a part of us, as is our Buddhahood. When we practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism, we activate our inner state of Buddhahood, which imbues our lives with the strength and wisdom not to allow these “impurities” to influence our decisions and actions. We no longer see things through an impure or tainted “lens.”

And from this enlightened perspective, we begin to recognize our own “impurities” and how they cause us to suffer. The wisdom of Buddhahood can even cause these impure qualities to function in a positive way. It can transform greed, for example, into a strong desire for happiness for self and others; anger can become a strong sense of justice; foolishness, spontaneity; arrogance, tenacity; and

doubt, a healthy skepticism or sense of inquiry.

Some may equate purity with innocence and innocence with ignorance. But the Buddhist view of being “pure” is to have total self-knowledge; it is an ability to see ourselves clearly for what we are and remain uninfluenced by our innate negativity. This is why the Daishonin states: “Among those who wish to become Buddhas through attempting to eradicate earthly desires and shunning the lower nine worlds, there is not one ordinary person who actually attained enlightenment” (GZ, 403).

In this sense, the illusion of imagining oneself to be a person devoid of the potential for greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance and doubt is itself a great “impurity.” So the aim of Buddhism is to enable us take off those tainted glasses and see ourselves and what is around us in the light of truth. We may not like everything we see, but clearly perceiving reality by “purifying the six senses” is a first important step toward true happiness.

Span” chapter. That’s because those bodhisattvas who reach the stage of enlightenment almost equivalent to the Buddha’s when they hear the “Life Span” chapter simultaneously awaken to the Mystic Law of time without beginning. It is at that moment that they make the transition from the stage of common mortals who have just embraced the Lotus Sutra to that of the Buddha.

It is as though they are steadily climbing a mountain with their sights set on reaching the state of enlightenment, the life-state of the Buddha. But when they arrive at the top, at the summit of the “Life Span” chapter, what do they see, what kind of scene unfolds before them? They perceive that the true Buddha enlightened from time without beginning is constantly and tirelessly carrying out activities in the world to lead all beings to enlightenment. They understand that they themselves once received his instruction. And they realize that they themselves were originally united in a relation of mentor and disciple with the Buddha who is one with the universe.

In other words, they recollect the truth of their own lives, remembering where they had come from and where they are going, and envision their true identity. They recall their mission to ceaselessly work together with the eternal and fundamental Buddha to lead others to enlightenment.

Essentially, those bodhisattvas awaken to the truth that Buddhahood, or enlightenment, is certainly not a static goal. Embracing the Lotus Sutra itself is the way to enlightenment for ordinary people. To live with the original cause of Buddhahood as the center of one’s life and never stop progressing is to embody the life of the Buddha.

This is the conclusion of this sutra.

SAITO: This is not clearly stated on the surface of the “Life Span” chapter. But the teaching that the Buddha attained enlightenment in the extremely remote past, provides us with a clue that enables us to understand this.

SUDA: Shakyamuni explains that he attained enlightenment long ago in the remote past. Those in the assembly who hear this and consequently reach the stage of enlightenment almost equal to the Buddha understand that the Mystic Law from time without beginning, the teaching by which Shakyamuni

became enlightened, is itself the true cause for attaining Buddhahood.

ENDO: I think therefore that the fundamental teaching of the sutra is that the common mortals who embrace it instantly arrive at a state of enlightenment equal to that of Shakyamuni.

Celestial Bodies Exhibit a Wide Range of Aspects Upon Death

IKEDA: Those people return to the very core of their own lives. They understand that they are one with the single great living entity that is the entire universe.

This might seem like a digression, but I recently saw a number of pictures of dying stars released by the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).⁷

SUDA: Yes. The photographs were taken by the Hubble Space Telescope. Interestingly, the stars exhibited a variety of different shapes: “sphere-shaped,” “balloon-shaped,” “sprinkler-shaped,” “butterfly-shaped,” “rocket engine exhaust-shaped” and “pinwheel-shaped.”

ENDO: Stars also go through the cycle of birth and death.

IKEDA: It seems that stars exhibit different kinds of death depending on their mass. Many stars of approximately the same mass as our sun burn out completely in the final stage and, while slowly emitting gas, eventually become dim stars known as white dwarfs.

SAITO: Among people, too, there are those who completely “burn out” and quietly fade away!

IKEDA: On the other hand, a star of several times the mass of the sun will produce a brilliant explosion on death.

SAITO: Such an explosion is termed a supernova.

IKEDA: That’s right. In his *Meigetsuki* (Bright Moon Diary), Japanese literary figure Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241) discusses the great supernova that created what today we call the Crab Nebula. On the Western calendar, that was in the year 1054, during the latter half of Japan’s Heian Period (794–1185).

ENDO: That’s just two years after 1052, the date traditionally taken to mark the start of the Latter Day of the Law.

SUDA: After eruption, the luminosity of a supernova suddenly increases millions of times its normal level.

Demonstrating values of beauty, gain and good in their lives, SGI members around the world are living proof of the benefit from the practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Some are so brilliant that they can be seen with the naked eye even in daylight. They also grow dim in time.

IKEDA: The supernova that appeared in 1054 was recorded by astronomers in China and Arabia. And line drawings were found in caves in North America that seem to record the same event.

ENDO: How far do you think the Crab Nebula is from Earth?

SUDA: I understand that it's about 7,200 light years away.

ENDO: For the death of a star so remote to have caused such a stir on Earth means it must have been an exhibition of enormous energy—a truly remarkable event!

SUDA: There are no doubt people who aspire to go out in such a blaze of glory!

SAITO: From the photos recently released, I was intrigued by the finding that stars in the same class as our sun seem to undergo many kinds of death.

IKEDA: Everything in the universe is alive. Everything is an entity of life and death, an entity of the Mystic Law.

Even if we only look at the material aspect, matter that is scattered throughout the universe as a result of the death of a star will be used in the birth of new stars and in the bodies of biological organisms. It may be that the atoms making up our bodies, too, were once shining as part of a star somewhere.

Human beings are children of the stars, of the universe. Our lives are one with the great life of the universe. The benefit of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is literally the benefit of the entire universe. It is inexhaustible. Limitless.

The "Distinctions in Benefits" chapter says, "He will gain immeasurable merits, boundless as the open air" (LS17, 243).

And:



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**The Buddha is none other than our own life.
When we have this great confidence,
we will definitely never become deadlocked.**

Their virtue will be uppermost, immeasurable and boundless, as the open sky, east, west, north and south, in the four intermediate directions and up and down, is immeasurable and boundless. The blessings of such persons will be as immeasurable and boundless as this.” (LS17, 241)

Attaining a State of Life in Which All Wishes Are Fulfilled

IKEDA: The benefit of the Gohonzon is infinite and boundless, and is therefore impossible to thoroughly explain.

In his commentary on Nichiren Daishonin’s “The True Object of Worship,” Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, says: “[If you have faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a short while] no prayer will go unanswered, no offense unexpiated, no good fortune unbestowed, and all righteousness proven.”⁸ Such absolute conviction contains all the benefits of the four stages of faith and five stages of practice⁹ described in the “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter.

As long as we have faith, there is no difficulty we cannot overcome. The great life force of the lion king wells up in our lives, the Daishonin’s boundless spirit comes pouring out. The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter describes the practitioners of the sutra as “roaring like a lion” (LS17, 239) in the same manner as the Buddha.

SAITO: Those who hear of and believe in the unfathomable life span of the Buddha state the following pledge upon accepting the Lotus Sutra:

**Our wish is that in future ages
we may use our long lives to save
living beings.**

**Just as today the World-Honored One,
king of the Shakyas,
roars like a lion in the place
of practice,
preaching the Law without fear,
so may we too in ages to come,
honored and revered by all,
when we sit in the place of practice
describe our life span in the same
manner. (LS17, 239)**

IKEDA: “Long lives” here means living with the unsurpassed life of the Mystic Law. The Chinese term for lion comprises two elements: the first means teacher or mentor, and the second disciple. “Roars like a lion” refers to the oneness of mentor and disciple where mentor and disciple call out in unison. This is the true meaning of propagation.

Early on in my practice, I made the determination: “President Toda is the mentor of propagation in the Latter Day, and I am his disciple. Therefore, it is impossible that I should be unable to propagate Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching.” With that resolve, I accomplished propagation of the Daishonin’s teaching second to none.

The chapter says that the disciples are “without fear.” We should never be afraid. We need not be fearful, or complain or lament our situation. Rather, we must have bright, vital faith. Then the limitless beneficial power of the Mystic Law will flow through our lives.

All along, I have continued to spread the Daishonin’s teaching and protect the Soka Gakkai while enduring all manner of persecution and overcoming all kinds of obstacles. As a result, I have received truly immense benefit from my practice to the Gohonzon.

Although we are all chanting to the same Gohonzon, if our faith is weak, we will not savor the truly great joy of faith pouring out of our lives. The benefit that we receive differs depending on our faith. Each person’s

benefit is unique and different. This is the meaning of “distinctions in benefits.”

Again, while the manner in which benefit manifests differs for each person depending on their faith, life-condition and karma, as long as we persevere in faith, in the end we are sure to attain the state “in which all wishes are fulfilled.” This is the profound meaning of “distinctions in benefits.”

For example, while we should of course exercise care to avoid accidents, the Daishonin teaches that even if we should die in an unfortunate accident, as long as we have embraced strong faith, then “in the space of a moment” (GZ, 574) we will return to the ranks of those working for kosen-rufu.

A passage from the Nirvana Sutra cited in his writings says, “Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil paths. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them” (MW-5, 168). In modern terms, to be “killed by a mad elephant” would be comparable to dying in a traffic accident.

Those who die in the course of carrying out activities for kosen-rufu cannot fail to receive great effects from their faith. The Daishonin makes this clear in such writings as “Lessening One’s Karmic Retribution.” This sort of death literally exemplifies the principle of giving one’s life for the sake of the Law. This is the most noble way to die.

A Sense of Calm and Security at the Moment of Death

SAITO: A little earlier it was mentioned that dying stars exhibit a variety of different aspects. The same is true of people’s deaths.

Akiko Kojima, the secretary of the Soka Gakkai nurses group, expressed to me her belief that the view of life and death that we hold while alive is a very important factor in determining our final moments. But if it is only a matter of theory and knowledge, she says, it will count for absolutely nothing when that moment comes. Ms. Kojima further remarked that under the assault of the three poisons of greed, anger and stupidity that come spewing forth at the time of death, unless one feels true calm and security in the depths of one’s heart, one cannot weather the ordeal.

Naturally, status and wealth are irrelevant; nor do leadership positions in the organization count for anything at the time of death. Ms. Kojima says that, even if a leader goes to extreme lengths to conceal his or her pain out of a sense of responsibility, one cannot hide one’s suffering at the moment of death.

ENDO: There was a men’s division member who until the moment he passed away never ceased encouraging those who came to visit him. As the end approached, his wife, who had looked after him throughout the course of his illness, began crying. Noticing this, he turned to her and said, “There’s no need to cry,” adding, “I think that this is the end. Please convey my thanks to all of the nurses for their hard work.” He died encouraging his wife to the very end.

SUDA: I also heard the story of a women’s division member whom the nurses would later compare to a “marshmallow.” The reason they said this was that each nurse who attended her felt as though she were being gently embraced in a soft marshmallow. The woman possessed abundant warmth and concern for others. And to the very last she continued to bring joy to those around her with her magnanimous spirit.

IKEDA: That is the life of a bodhisattva. No, of a Buddha. Not only do such people strive to revolutionize their own state of life, but they constantly make efforts to elevate the state of life of those around them to the very end.

SAITO: The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter describes the benefit that accrues to those who understand the importance of the long duration of the Buddha’s life span, that is to say, the benefit of awakening to the eternity of life. This probably manifests in their appearance at the time of death.

IKEDA: Yes. This is not mere theorizing divorced from reality. We must live earnestly, always moving forward energetically, proud to be able to experience complete fulfillment in both life and death. Buddhism was expounded to enable us to manifest such great life force.

The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter in one place speaks of people who are “diligent and courageous, mastering all the good doctrines, keen in faculties and wisdom, good at answering difficult questions” (LS17, 242). Diligent and courageous—doesn’t this describe SGI members?



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SGI President Ikeda and Dr. Norman Cousins, professor at University of California at Los Angeles, discuss the power of the human spirit (February 1987).

A Life of Struggle to the Finish

SUDA: Ms. Kojima, whom I mentioned a little earlier, told me that she had one patient who impressed her more than any other. That patient, a men's division member, died of cancer. But no matter how dire his situation became in the course of his illness, he maintained a fighting spirit to the very last.

Even when he was receiving treatment, and even when he was experiencing the most pain, his will to fight never abated. He would tell his doctors and nurses exactly how he felt and discuss methods of treatment with them, all the while challenging his situation with every ounce of his energy.

Ms. Kojima says that his eyes left the strongest impression on her. She describes them as the eyes of a master swordsman. At one point in his treatment he made a recovery and was discharged from the hospital, only to be hospitalized again when the cancer recurred. But even at that time, she reports, his "swordsman's

eyes" glowed with the same unshakable determination. She also relates feeling that even though his body was being devoured by cancer, his life itself continued to burn as strongly as ever.

IKEDA: To live vigorously through every ordeal is proof that someone understands the eternity of life. Eternal life is not something that we can verify with our eyes, but it is something that we can believe in.

SAITO: The Lotus Sutra repeatedly emphasizes the importance of belief.

IKEDA: Belief means basing one's entire life on the Law. It is the state where our actions themselves manifest faith. This is true of propagation and of encouraging friends. By struggling to communicate an understanding of the Mystic Law to someone, we polish our own life. And a life that has been thoroughly polished can soar freely throughout the three existences of past, present and future.

Without our even realizing it, we attain a state of eternal freedom. Like a rocket that can traverse the

universe, our lives store up an inexhaustible supply of energy. We develop the great life force of the lion king. That is the benefit of the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter.

SAITO: I am reminded of the benefit described in “Distinctions in Benefits” of gaining the “truth of birthlessness” (LS17, 233). Similar to the benefit of “abiding in the stage of no regression” that we talked about earlier, this indicates a state of confidence that there is neither birth nor death, that, in other words, life is eternal. It basically affirms that all phenomena are free from birth and death.

IKEDA: Our lives are one with the eternal Buddha. The Buddha is none other than our own lives. When we have this great confidence, we will definitely never become deadlocked. We can advance limitlessly, overcoming all suffering, all sadness, all inertia. We attain a calm state of no regression.

ENDO: That is a life imbued with the optimism of Buddhism.

IKEDA: Buddhist optimism is not the escapist optimism of those who throw up their hands and say, “Somehow or other things will work out.” Rather it means clearly recognizing evil as evil and suffering as suffering, and resolutely fighting to overcome it. It means believing in one’s own ability and strength to struggle against any evil or any obstacle. It is “fighting optimism.”

Speaking of optimism, I remember the smiling face of Dr. Norman Cousins, who was known as the “conscience of America.” Although he did not practice Buddhism, in his belief in the power of the human being he was no different from a Buddhist. Dr. Cousins once wrote:

No one need fear death. We need fear only that we may die without having known our greatest power—the power of his free will to give his life for others. If something comes to life in others because of us, then we have made an approach to immortality.¹⁰

When we devote ourselves to the happiness of others, when we undertake the struggle of a bodhisattva of our own free will, the immense force of life without beginning or end wells up in our being. The eternal life of the Buddha permeates our being like a rising tide.

Then, there is no way that we cannot dramatically change our lives for the better.

In that sense, being able to chant daimoku, to spread the Daishonin’s teaching, and to work for kosen-rufu—that in itself is the greatest benefit. The Daishonin states, “There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 161). This plainly indicates that a life dedicated to kosen-rufu is most noble and lofty. The “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter imparts the wisdom to recognize this.

To be continued

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1. Transmission section: One of the three divisions of a sutra, together with preparation and revelation. The preparation section explains the reason a sutra is being expounded. The revelation section constitutes the main body of the teaching. And the transmission section is the concluding part where the benefit of the sutra is set forth and its transmission to future generations is urged.
 2. Strictly speaking, the first half of the “Distinctions in Benefits” chapter belongs to the “revelation” section of the essential teaching, along with the latter half of “Emerging from the Earth,” the fifteenth chapter, and the “Life Span” chapter in its entirety. This portion of the sutra is referred to collectively as the “one chapter and two halves.”
 3. Beauty, gain and good: In his theory of value, the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, argued that these constitute the core values, in contrast to the traditional values of truth, good and beauty.
 4. “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” says, “‘ku’ means ‘happiness’” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). The *Shoman Hokutsu** says, “‘toku (doku)’ means ‘gain.’” (**Shoman Hokutsu: A commentary on the Shrimala Sutra by Chi-tsang [Jpn. Kichizo, 549–623], a priest of the San-lun [Jp. Sanron] school of China.*)
 5. *Jigage*: The verse section that concludes the “Life Span” chapter.
 6. Fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice: Progressive stages through which a bodhisattva is said to advance, from the time of his first resolve until he finally attains Buddhahood. They consist of ten stages of faith, ten stages of security, ten stages of practice, ten stages of devotion, ten stages of development, a stage almost equal to enlightenment (*togaku*) and enlightenment (*myogaku*).
 7. NASA press release, December 17, 1997.
 8. *Fujishugaku Yoshu* (Essential Writings of the Fuji School), ed. Hori Nichiko (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1978), vol. 4, p. 213.
 9. The four stages of faith are: (1) to produce even a single moment of faith in the sutra; (2) to understand the Buddhas’ teaching in the sutra; (3) to propagate this teaching widely to others; and (4) to realize the truth expounded by the Buddha with deep faith. The five stages of practice are: (1) to rejoice on hearing the Lotus Sutra; (2) to read and recite the sutra; (3) to propagate the sutra to others; (4) to practice the six paramitas while embracing the Lotus Sutra; and (5) to perfect the six paramitas.
 10. Norman Cousins, *Human Options* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1981), p. 45.

Giving Back to Nature What She Gives to Us

Article and photos
by Mike Mullen,
Niles Canyon, California



I HAD two distinct impressions when I first moved to Niles Canyon, located about forty miles southeast of San Francisco: I was immediately impressed with the natural beauty of the area and yet appalled by the trash and debris dumped there. I

have developed a keen appreciation of the natural environment through my training and work as a research geologist. And as a geologist, I have traveled to some of the world's most pristine and remote wilderness areas in places like Alaska and the Arctic.

But my concern over the condition of Niles Canyon was doubly so because I live in the canyon, next to Alameda Creek. When I talked to some of the neighbors about my concerns, a long story of neglect and bureaucratic inertia began to unfold. The area is a jurisdictional



On the Wings of Willet, Bolinas Lagoon, Marin County, California

nightmare in that fully six agencies claim parts of the creek and canyon, along with parcels of private property. There was no unity or agreement on what to do with the area or how to police it.

I felt it was time to take action. SGI President Ikeda has encour-

aged us to sink roots of trust into the community. In the San Francisco area, SGI-USA members have applied this guidance through a series of community projects. In 1997 I participated in the Parks for PEACE project in Hayward, Calif. Seventy-five SGI-USA members

along with other interested citizens renovated Eden Park in July. The following September, city officials and the mayor dedicated the park, stating that the day was made special through our efforts. In the ensuing years, we engaged in several other projects in the community.



Fireweed Trio, Monahan Flats, Central Alaska Range, Alaska



With the experience I had gained from those efforts, I began to contact people in the appropriate agencies regarding Niles Canyon and to chant for a solution. I soon found allies in the Alameda County Water District and East Bay Regional Parks District. I volunteered to work on a hiking trail

project and met a supervisor for the park district. It turned out he knew my contact at the water district and together we discussed a pilot clean-up project for Alameda Creek. Things were coming together. Now I needed to rally the community, and photography would play a key role.

In my career as a geologist, I photographed geologic features as part of my mapping projects. My abilities in this field expanded to photojournalism when I began volunteering as a photographer for SGI-USA publications. I was also inspired by President Ikeda's beautiful photos. In 1998, I began



Aspen Glow, Aspens on Rush Creek,
Eastern Sierras, California

a freelance part-time job with a local magazine and won two awards in the Fremont Cultural Arts Commission photo contest.

Photography has become a great source of creativity and personal satisfaction. Photographing a beautiful natural scene often becomes a spiritual experience for



Dawn on Alameda Creek, Alameda Creek, Fremont, California



Spring Sycamore, Niles Canyon, Fremont, California

me. Each time I go out to shoot, I wonder what nature will give me today. As a scene develops, I experience an uplifting feeling as the sun approaches the horizon and the colors deepen over a series of receding ridges approaching the ocean or as the sunlight trickles through leaves falling upon the

water. When I feel this kind of inspiration I know my photos will be great.

I began photo excursions into Niles Canyon and met several of my neighbors. When I explained my plans to clean up the area, they said they would help if I organized the project. During some of my



Backwash: Bean Hollow State Beach, San Mateo County, California

magazine assignments, I met other volunteer groups willing to participate. When I explained the project to the local chapter of the Audubon Society they were interested. As a result, I have been invited to give a slide presentation on “Restoring and Preserving Alameda Creek—A Local Riparian Habitat” in April 1999.

I worked with the water district and parks district and, with the support of the Audubon Society,

we came up with a plan: One hundred volunteers will descend into the canyon at the end of this summer and restore it to its natural beauty. The government agencies will provide equipment and trash bags and funding for lunches and bottled water. They are also going to give a small memento to each volunteer for their efforts. I am hoping that about half of those volunteers will be SGI-USA members from the area.

THIS effort has taught me that with persistence and the confidence I’ve gained through my Buddhist practice, one person can make a difference. I’ve learned I can use my personal talents to influence people in a positive manner. If a picture is worth a thousand words, I would like to publish volumes of positive visions.

I believe in the Buddhist concept of dependent origination—that everything is interconnected, that our lives and our environment are one. Through the Niles Canyon project, I can give something back to nature and, in turn, to others who will enjoy its beauty.

President Ikeda has encouraged us to become persons of great good—to overcome our lesser selves and express our greater selves through working for the happiness of others. I intend to continue challenging my lesser self and develop strong ties in my community to create positive images for the future. ◻



Mike Mullen

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Red Clover, Niles Canyon



California Poppies, Niles Canyon



Wild Flower, Niles Canyon



Purple Lupine, Niles Canyon



Wild Mustard blossoms and Sycamores, Niles Canyon



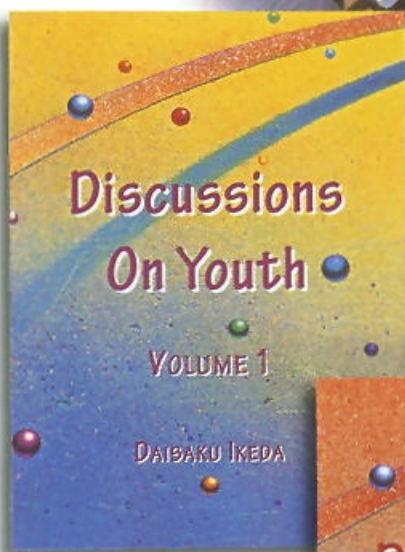
Snowy Egret in flight, Niles Canyon



Plum blossoms, Niles Canyon

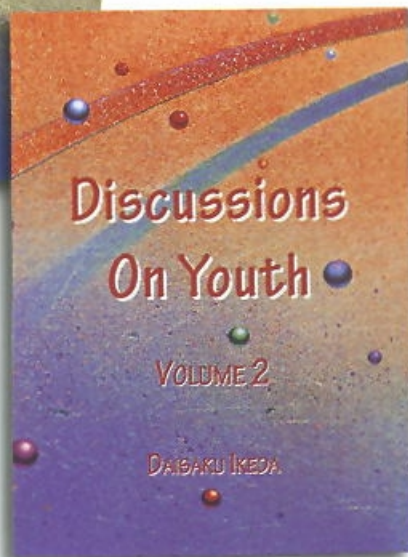
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APRIL 1999



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: SGI MEMBERS SHARE THEIR STORIES
BUDDHIST CONCEPTS: WHAT IS KARMA?

HAWAII CULTURE CENTER



Among the three thousand participants for the long-awaited opening of the Hawaii Culture Center on March 19, 1994, were SGI-USA members from as far away as the island of Guam (3,800 miles). The previous center had been demolished three years earlier to make way for the new building on the very same lot. What the members saw on the day of the opening was beyond their imagination. Located in Honolulu's Nu'uuanu Valley on Pali Highway, the three-story center of Finnish balmoral granite is environmentally sensitive. It has the latest in energy-efficient features such as insulated glass windows, and people are welcomed into the huge lobby by natural light from overhead skylights (photo, bottom right).

SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda visited the culture center in January 1995 and attended the nineteenth SGI General Meeting held in the expansive auditorium (photo, below right). During their stay, Mr. Ikeda dedicated a monument to the courageous youth around the world who are striving for the Buddhist ideal of world peace based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. He also planted a cherry tree to commemorate his first visit to the beautiful center, which he called a castle of happiness.

