

living BUDDHISM

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

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COVER PHOTO: Lotus Flower at Echo Park, Los Angeles, California, by Gregory Nakasuji

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FROM OUR READERS

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Can We Shine Some Light on You?

For a couple of years, *Living Buddhism* has featured SGI culture centers from around the country and the world on our color page inside the front cover. But not every district or chapter has a culture or community center in its town—yet. If you live miles and miles from an SGI center, we want to show you off. Send us color photos of your activities, town, members at work and play, whatever you want! We want to shine some light on you! But to put you in the best possible light, we need good photos! We can't guarantee everything we receive will be published, but we'll try. Include a page or two about yourselves along with a contact person and phone number. Send it all to Living Buddhism, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90406. If you have any questions, write us or email us at livingb1@aol.com.

Thoughts on Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra

I WANT to express my appreciation to *Living Buddhism* for publishing President Ikeda's series, "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra." Studying it has had a very positive impact on my understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, my prayer to the Gohonzon and my life.

Studying and discussing the series, which was first featured in the April 1995 issue, has become a consistent source of encouragement, and, more importantly, a profound resource for deepening my faith.

I have studied "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" with four different groups. In May of 1995, as a member of our joint territory study committee, I noticed that we were starting our meetings late because everyone spontaneously started talking about the latest installment.

In June, I was appointed study coordinator and my first suggestion was to set aside the first half-hour of our monthly meeting for studying these installments. This didn't work out as we planned. Instead of studying the installments prior to the meeting and discussing them for a half-hour, we usually discussed them for fifty or fifty-five minutes of our one-hour meeting! I noticed a very interesting result. We made a transformation into people with greater confidence and enthusiasm. As new people joined our committee and began to study the series, they also had this same type of experience.

In January and February of 1996, we were in the final stages of preparing for the Advanced-level exam to be held in April. After meeting monthly for a little over two years, the group I was studying in was starting to meet

every week to study and review our curriculum material. At around the same time, the series was covering the “Expedient Means” chapter and in particular, the section concerning the true entity of life. I found that studying it helped me understand the Daishonin’s writing, “The True Entity of Life” that was going to be on the exam. I began to use quotes and excerpts at our meetings. Everyone started reading the series. Despite the fact that we were all trying to study and prepare for weekly meetings! After the exam, we all realized that we did not want to disband our study group. We had met together each month for two years and seven months. In that time, we had deepened our faith, our understanding of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and developed friendship and trust among ourselves. We had created an activity where we could discuss anything together as close friends. We had found a way to relate our experience in life with our study and apply our new understanding in our daily lives. We did not want to lose such a source of encouragement and support. We decided to continue our monthly meetings and use the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” in the current issue as our study material.

Later in 1996, my wife noticed how much fun we were having studying the series. We always seemed to forget the time and no one seemed to mind whenever we kept talking to 8:45 or so. She had

started a women’s study group, but hadn’t gotten quite as much enthusiasm. Switching to studying “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” changed that. After that, her group kept growing (they often go overtime, too). New people would find it challenging and difficult in their first month or two, but they would then make that transformation and become confident and enthusiastic. The women’s group does one thing differently—a few women meet prior to the study meeting, go through the installment and list the points they feel are important. Then they make up a handout of these points so they can use it to facilitate their discussion. My wife then types the points into the computer and often asks me to proofread it before she prints it out. So, I am able to study each installment even more! What a benefit. The main points of each installment have really stayed in my mind!

The fourth group I started studying with last year, decided to start at the beginning of the series. It’s great, you discover all kinds of things you missed the first time around!

I often feel like I’m in the room listening to President Ikeda, Mr. Saito, Mr. Suda & Mr. Endo. Studying an installment changes my life-condition. Continued study deepens my faith and understanding and intensifies my passion and enthusiasm for learning and life.

I deeply appreciate that Presi-

dent Ikeda and the other participants have put a tremendous effort into creating this dialogue series for us. I feel it is my responsibility to share my enthusiasm with others and, most importantly, enable others to have the kinds of positive study experiences that I have been fortunate to experience.

I have copied and compiled all of the installments in a binder, and encourage others to do the same. I have made a list of all the installments, their sub-sections and what issue and page they are on—so I can go back and find important points (already 468 pages thru #37). I use points from DLS in other study presentations whenever I can.

Consistent, serious study with others has enabled me to experience the power of study on a new level. I find that, just as I can transform my life-condition with gongyo and daimoku, just as I can transform my life-condition with participating in activities, I can transform my life-condition by studying. Places you don’t like—post office lines, the DMV, doctor’s offices, etc.—are now places where I can read President Ikeda’s guidance or the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and they become enjoyable! Talk about a transformation! Also, I have had a lot of conversations about Buddhism when someone starts reading over my shoulder.

MARK WILLWERTH,
San Francisco

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>

The New Millennium Is Now

MANY people have already made plans for New Year's Eve, December 31, 1999. "Millennium parties" and celebrations will be happening worldwide. Some point out, however, that these celebrations are premature—the momentous transition will not arrive until the stroke of midnight, Jan. 1, 2001, one year later.

In our number system based on tens, the change of the highest digit of any number indicates a completion—the last of a set of ten or multiples of ten. Numbers followed by zeros signify a completion, a fulfillment, but not necessarily a beginning. So the year 2000, while marking the last year of the century and the millennium, is not, according to this argument, the beginning of the new millennium.

But there is considerable precedent for viewing the transition to the year 2000 with awe and celebration: The decade called the '90s began in 1990, not 1991—so years ending in zero, including the year 2000, do mark the beginning of a new decade. When people turn 20, 30, 40, 50 and so on, they feel their life has made a major transition. Even when the odometer on our car moves from 99,999 to 100,000, we watch the numbers change as if ushering in a new epoch in our driving life; 100,001 miles seems a bit anti-climactic.

For these reasons, I think we can understand why many people want to celebrate the year 2000 as the opening of a new era, rather than wait for 2001.

The month of June marks the end of the first half of 1999, the last year, at least, of the century known as the

Even though each moment of life is a rare and precious treasure, it is unusual for people to feel such appreciation.

1900s (no matter how you look at it, the year 2000 is no longer the 1900s). While much has happened in these six months, and we have accomplished many things, it seems like only yesterday we were celebrating New Year's.

It also seems the older I get, the busier I get; and the busier I get, the faster time seems to go by. When we are engaged in a worthwhile pursuit, we are never bored and are less likely to notice the passage of time. Before we know it, this year, too, will have passed.

And as we get older, it is human to lament the very process of time passing—of aging—a process that seems to accelerate the older we get. Of course, Buddhism describes this as one of the four sufferings of life—the suffering of old age, or aging.

Recently, Herbie Hancock, the world-renowned jazz pianist and SGI-USA member, met and talked with SGI President Ikeda while visiting Japan. In their discussion, which was published in the *World Tribune*, they turned to the topic of aging. President Ikeda shared with Herbie, who had recently turned 59, his feeling that life begins in one's 60s. Herbie, replied, "My 30s were better than my 20s, and my 40s better than my 30s. But whenever I think about turning 60, I couldn't help but feel that things would be downhill from there.... I am therefore very grateful for your encouragement." President Ikeda had pointed out that one's life is enhanced by the time one reaches sixty by the wonderful treasure of life experience we possess. "Each golden day of our 60s," he said, "is spent utilizing this

treasure, as we adorn our life in its third stage.” He then quoted the Daishonin who wrote, “You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 158).

As time marches forward, I am always impressed to see how those who practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism glow with ever-increasing vibrancy, wisdom and youthfulness. Without a fresh source of energy and youthful vitality in life, such as that we gain from our Buddhist practice, what hope or joy can growing older bring? While most people try to enjoy life in spite of the fact they are growing old, we are fortunate in that we practice a philosophy that enables us to take delight even in growing old.

I think this is natural, because Buddhism teaches us to profoundly appreciate each moment, to create the greatest value with each moment. The longer we sincerely practice and study its teachings, the more adept we become at this. President Ikeda turned 71 this year, and has amassed accomplishments in this lifetime that are truly mind-boggling—forging the foundation for our worldwide movement, establishing a university and educational system, holding countless dialogues and forming countless friendships for the sake of peace, and authoring many volumes about Buddhism, humanism, peace, culture and education. Yet he still pours all of his energy into his work, pledging to accomplish a hundred times what he has thus far.

If we can develop this attitude, I believe we can lead the most meaningful and fulfilling of lives. How we treasure and use each moment is our ultimate challenge.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “If you exert a hundred million eons of effort in a single moment of life, the eternal three enlightened properties of the Buddha will appear within you at each moment. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means vigorous practice” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 790).

As this passage suggests, when we pray and work as hard as we can for kosen-rufu—for the happiness of self and others—a profound sense of satisfaction and penetrating wisdom will enrich our lives at each moment. In fact, we reap the most satisfying benefits of faith and life only when we work hard, study hard and pray earnestly.

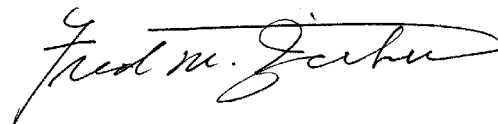
In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin also quotes the following sutra passage: “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to

understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” MW-2, 197). How intently we live this moment determines the quality of all our future moments. I recently had a conversation with a friend who is suffering from cancer. She told me: “When I wake up in the morning and see that I’m still alive, I feel tremendous joy. I’m still here!” Her great sense of appreciation for every second of life moved me deeply.

Even though each moment of life is a rare and precious treasure, it is unusual for people to feel such appreciation. When the alarm clock rings in the morning, rather than thinking, “Another day of life, what a joy!” and sharing our smile and optimism with the world, we might instead complain inwardly, “Another day of work. I need a break!” Even if no one else notices the difference in these attitudes, each creates results for our future that are drastically different.

While the beginning of the 21st century, the Century of Life, has been our long-cherished target, what that century becomes depends on our determination, attitude and effort at this very moment. Depending on how you calculate it, the new millennium is either about 180 or 540 days away. If we start each of these days with a vigorous gongyo, strong prayer and deep joy and appreciation, each will be a day of progress and a day of victory. And these victories will accumulate to form the foundation for each of our personal 21st centuries—our own “centuries of life.”

So, more important than looking ahead with anticipation or apprehension toward the instant the millennium turns, we can realize that this moment is the 21st century. I hope that together with SGI President Ikeda and all of our fellow members, we can welcome the new millennium celebrating our growth and benefit from the causes we are making today.



Fred M. Zaitso
SGI-USA General Director

The Oneness of Life and the Environment

M

OST WESTERN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS hold that life is the product of a supreme creator, placed into its environment as part of a grand plan. Science suggests that life sprang forth from inanimate surroundings—that it is merely a phenomenon of a higher complexity.

The Buddhist view of the relationship between life and its environment, between people and their surroundings, is very simple yet profound in its implications. It explains that life naturally emerges wherever causes and conditions are suitable for it to do so. The place where life emerges and exists is called an environment. “Environment” means surroundings, and life is what it surrounds. For human beings, environment includes our families, communities and workplaces, as well as the landscape upon which we live and all life that fills it. Life cannot exist apart from its environment, and life in turn profoundly effects its environment.

At the dawn of life on Earth, the oceans teemed with single-celled organisms. Some of these began to absorb the carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere and in turn give off oxygen (O₂). Gradually these simple organisms evolved into plant life, producing more and more oxygen. An atmosphere that once contained little oxygen slowly transformed into one that was oxygen rich, as new forms of oxygen-breathing life evolved. Some of that oxygen (O₂) was transformed into ozone (O₃), creating a layer in the atmosphere that blocked out much of the sun's harmful radiation, cooling the

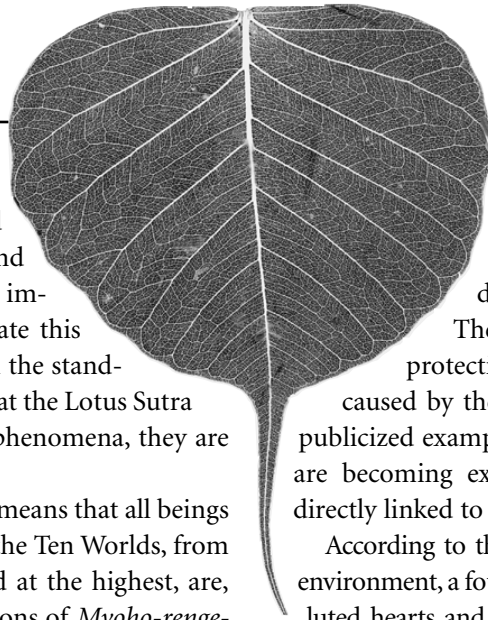
land and oceans and protecting life. Under this protection, life flourished and evolved. Life thus transformed the environment, making it more conducive to more forms of life.

Human beings are immersed in an environment rich with myriad forms of plant and animal life, divorced from which we cannot survive. Because we depend on the water, air and the plant and animal life that surrounds us, our environment truly deserves the name “mother nature”—giving birth to and nourishing human beings. Furthermore, our very bodies are composed of the same elements found in our environment—the liquid component of our bodies, for instance, is similar in composition to seawater.

That we depend on and closely resemble our environment make the Buddhist concept of the oneness of life and its environment a matter of common sense. But the Buddhist view goes beyond a merely mechanical connection; it recognizes a common thread that binds living entities and their environment. This thread is the true aspect of all phenomena, the Mystic Law, which can be understood as the very life of the universe itself.

While science recognizes that life arises from the environment and is an extension of that environment, Buddhism sheds light on why this is so. It is because the environment itself is “alive”—because the universe is brimming with the potential for life.

The “oneness” we have been referring to derives from a Chinese term that literally means “two but not



two.” On one level, people and their surroundings are distinct and separate entities. Naturally, it is important to recognize and appreciate this distinction. Yet when viewed from the standpoint of the essential reality, or what the Lotus Sutra refers to as the true aspect of all phenomena, they are one and the same.

Nichiren Daishonin states: “It means that all beings and their environments in any of the Ten Worlds, from Hell at the lowest to Buddhahood at the highest, are, without exception, the manifestations of *Myoho-renge-kyo*. Where there is an environment, there is life within it. Miao-lo states, ‘Both life (*shoho*) and its environment (*eho*) always manifest *Myoho-renge-kyo*.’” He equates *Myoho-renge-kyo* to the true entity or true aspect of all phenomena.

The Daishonin also writes, “The Environment is like the shadow, and life, the body. Without the body there can be no shadow. Similarly, without life, the environment cannot exist, even though life is supported by its environment (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 146). The phrase translated here as “is supported by” can also be understood as “is created by” or “is formed from.”

When people’s inner lives are misguided or unbalanced, the environment—human society, the ecosystem, oceans, atmosphere and geography—is negatively influenced.

It is important to realize that this is not a static relationship. The connection between us and our surroundings is dynamic, alive. We are constantly exerting an influence on our surroundings while our surroundings are constantly influencing us. What should concern us is whether we are exerting a positive, valuable influence on our environment, and whether we are responding to the influences of our environment in positive and valuable ways.

If we don’t like what we see in our environment, we can work to change it for the better. And to do this, the principle of oneness with our environment suggests that we must simultaneously work to better ourselves.

Today our world stands at the brink of an environmental crisis. The habits of humankind have been

causing cumulative global environmental effects that are beginning to degrade the well-being of humanity. The dangerous depletion of the Earth’s protective ozone layer and global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels are just two publicized examples. In addition, some 50,000 species are becoming extinct each year, many from causes directly linked to human influence.

According to the principle of oneness of life and the environment, a fouled environment is the product of polluted hearts and minds. It in turn functions to pollute the bodies, hearts and minds of those living within it. The ongoing destruction of nature, in this light, is clearly a sign of people’s ignorance of the true nature of life.

In our study of Buddhism we often use the term life-condition to describe our inner mental or emotional state. Life-condition, however, actually refers to the whole picture of our internal and external circumstances. Not only does it mean one’s outlook, frame of mind, heart and spirit; it also includes one’s surroundings—the harmony of one’s family setting, work environment, role in the community, prosperity, etc. All of these things characterize our life and its environment.

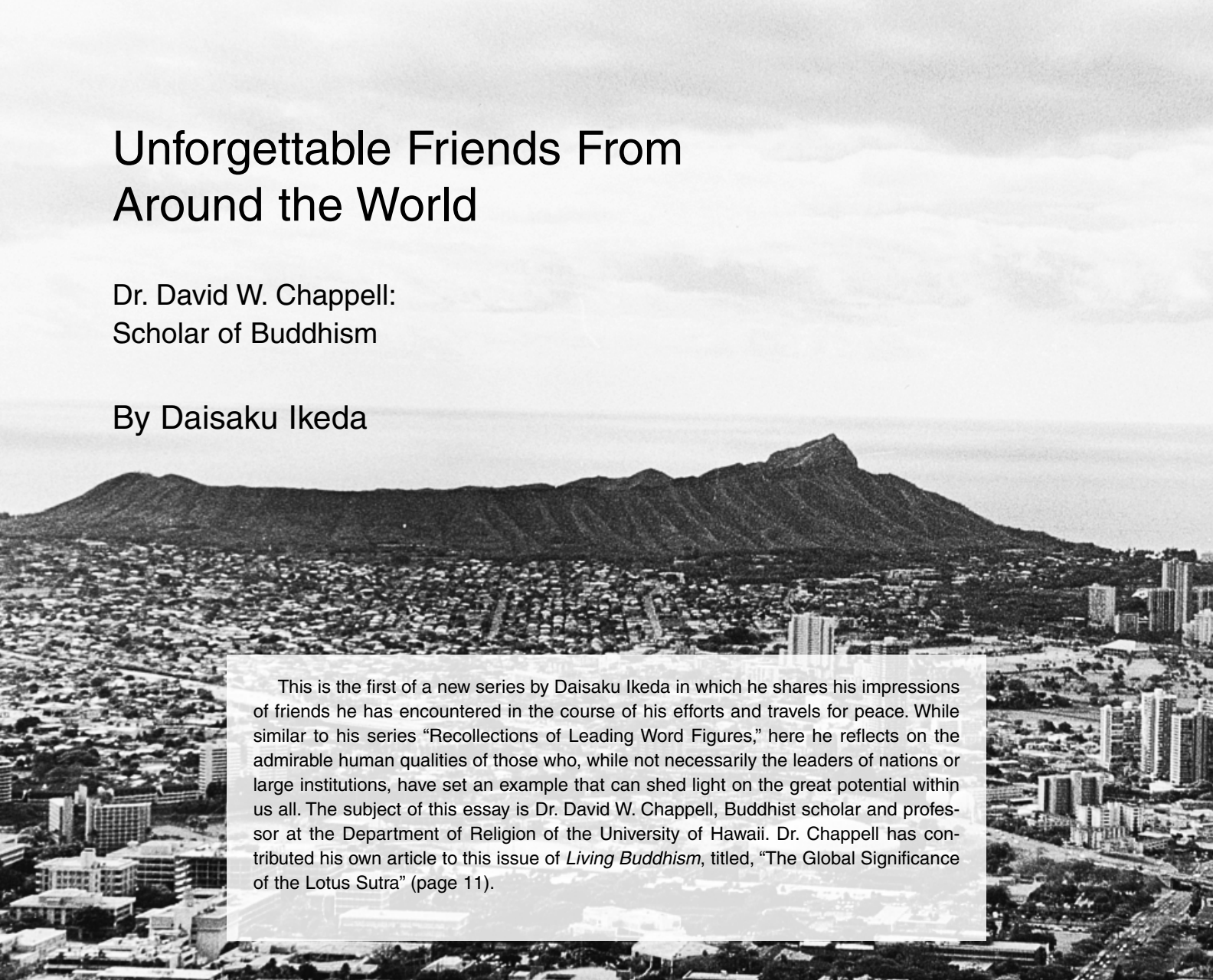
When we view ourselves and our environment as essentially one, we see the value of cultivating and enriching our inner humanity while working to improve our external circumstances. To attend exclusively to either the internal or the external will leave us going in circles. The purpose of the SGI movement is to enable a positive transformation in the lives of individuals, who in turn act with wisdom to exert a positive influence on their environment. As the preface to the novel *The Human Revolution* reads, “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.” Understanding of this principle is perhaps best expressed in our determination always to improve ourselves while working positively for the well-being of others and the improvement of our environment. □

By Jeff Kriger, Managing Editor

Unforgettable Friends From Around the World

Dr. David W. Chappell:
Scholar of Buddhism

By Daisaku Ikeda



This is the first of a new series by Daisaku Ikeda in which he shares his impressions of friends he has encountered in the course of his efforts and travels for peace. While similar to his series “Recollections of Leading Word Figures,” here he reflects on the admirable human qualities of those who, while not necessarily the leaders of nations or large institutions, have set an example that can shed light on the great potential within us all. The subject of this essay is Dr. David W. Chappell, Buddhist scholar and professor at the Department of Religion of the University of Hawaii. Dr. Chappell has contributed his own article to this issue of *Living Buddhism*, titled, “The Global Significance of the Lotus Sutra” (page 11).

LIFE is to be lived to the fullest, with zest and vigor. What made the deepest impression on me when I met Dr. David W. Chappell, scholar of Buddhism and professor at the Department of Religion of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, was his pleasant smile. His good cheer is contagious. In our three-and-a-half hour discussion, he never stopped smiling. When he speaks, one can see the joy welling forth from his heart.

Dr. Chappell visited Japan at the end of April 1996. Normally, the

cherry trees would have been covered with fresh green leaves, but it was a cold spring, and Dr. Chappell was greeted by cherry blossoms. “Perhaps they were kind enough to wait for me,” he said, and the talk turned to flowers. In the lobby of the *Seikyo Shimbun* building was an arrangement of purple irises and scarlet azaleas.

Dr. Chappell noted that of all the great religious texts in the world, the Lotus Sutra is remarkable for having a flower as part of its title and also many references to

the natural world. He sees the Lotus Sutra as having tremendous potential in the coming century, when it will be important for humanity to recapture an intimacy with nature.

I said: “A love of flowers is a love of peace. If the love of flowers and nature spreads, there will be more peace in the world, and more beauty.” Dr. Chappell smiled and nodded in agreement. “The love of beauty,” he said, “unites humankind. Life and society have many different aspects—commerce, government



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OSWALD NAKAGISHI

Diamond Head overlooking Honolulu. (inset) David W. Chappell is greeted by SGI President Ikeda in April 1996 in Tokyo.

and religion among them. Beauty is what unites humanity in all its variety. I think we can say that the lotus of the Lotus Sutra is a symbol of that beauty, a symbol of the unity of all humanity.” Dr. Chappell continued: “Nichiren’s name [meaning ‘Sun Lotus’] is a combination of the lotus and the sun, of a flower and the energy that makes the flower bloom.”

The scripture of the flower of the Law, the Lotus Sutra, is an ode to life, a song of the joy of living, a paean to the great fortune of having

life. Dr. Chappell’s motto is “Every day is a good day.” He believes in the importance of remembering to be grateful for all existence—the grass and trees, the earth and the sky, fire and water—all of the little things, the ordinary, everyday things, that we tend to overlook or take for granted. “Every day is wonderful. I feel happy every day, lucky every day.”

Dr. Chappell has survived many illnesses. Early in his youth, he had to undergo major back surgery. He also successfully battled a malig-

nant cancer with a survival rate of only one percent. In three months of radiation treatments, he recalls, he became “like an old person, with hardly any strength or energy to do anything.” He has also battled heart disease. “As a result,” he says, “I know what a wonderful treasure each day is. Every day is a good day.”

Buddhism teaches that a single day of life is worth more than all the treasures in the universe. People often say that they know joy is a wonderful thing, but that it is lacking in their own lives. That is a sad statement. The very gift of life itself should bring us joy. If we open our eyes, we can see the greenery of the flowers and trees, the blue of the sky. If we listen, we can hear the sound of a friend’s footsteps. We can hear the warbling of birds and the happy voices of children. If we open our lips, we can say, “Thank you.” We have legs, and we can walk the beautiful earth. We have hands, and we can shake hands with others. We can write letters and share our feelings.

Yet even if we couldn’t see, couldn’t hear, couldn’t move our arms and legs, still our hearts are beating. Our breasts can fill with hope day and night—ever bright as the sun and the moon. How could we waste this precious treasure of life? That is why we should live each day with vitality and joy. We should thoroughly fulfill our responsibilities and make the most of each single day.

The East-West Center on the grounds of the University of Hawaii where President Ikeda spoke in January, 1995.

Dr. Chappell learned the value and wonder of life through his close brushes with death. The message of the Lotus Sutra is that winter always turns into spring. Without enduring the winter of sufferings, one cannot savor the spring of joy. Trees bud. But the first signs of life on trees are the welts on their bark. That is their suffering. Only after tears of sap have flowed does the green of their new shoots appear.

The scholar's own personality is indivisible from his or her approach to scholarly investigation and the insights drawn therefrom. Dr. Chappell, who loves life so dearly, cherishes the ideal of diversity. He does so because life is a diverse phenomenon. In the "Parable of the Medicinal Herbs" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the rain falls equally on the trees, bushes and other plants, so that each can grow and flourish in its own way. In the same way, the rain of the Law falls down on all humanity, so that each of the many diverse individuals can grow and flourish, revealing their innate potential. This is the principle of "cherry, plum, peach and damson"—the Buddhist teaching of the unique diversity of all living entities.

Dr. Chappell opposes any movement that suppresses freedom and diversity. He is a fighter. He has repeatedly voiced his concerns about the increasing nationalism



GREGORY MAKASUJI

evident in Japan in recent times. Dr. Chappell is known for his research on Chinese Buddhism, and he had an interesting comment about the Guoqingsi Temple at the foot of Mount Tientai in China. He explained that the temple was given its name Guoqingsi—"Nation Purifying Temple"—to express the idea that the government of the nation should protect and safeguard the religious spirit. But later the country's government persecuted Buddhism; it tried to eliminate all religious values. Dr. Chappell noted, however, that a government that is no longer held to a standard of religious values becomes corrupt and degenerate. The oppression of the weak by the strong becomes widespread, he added, and there is a dangerous trend toward conflict and chaos.

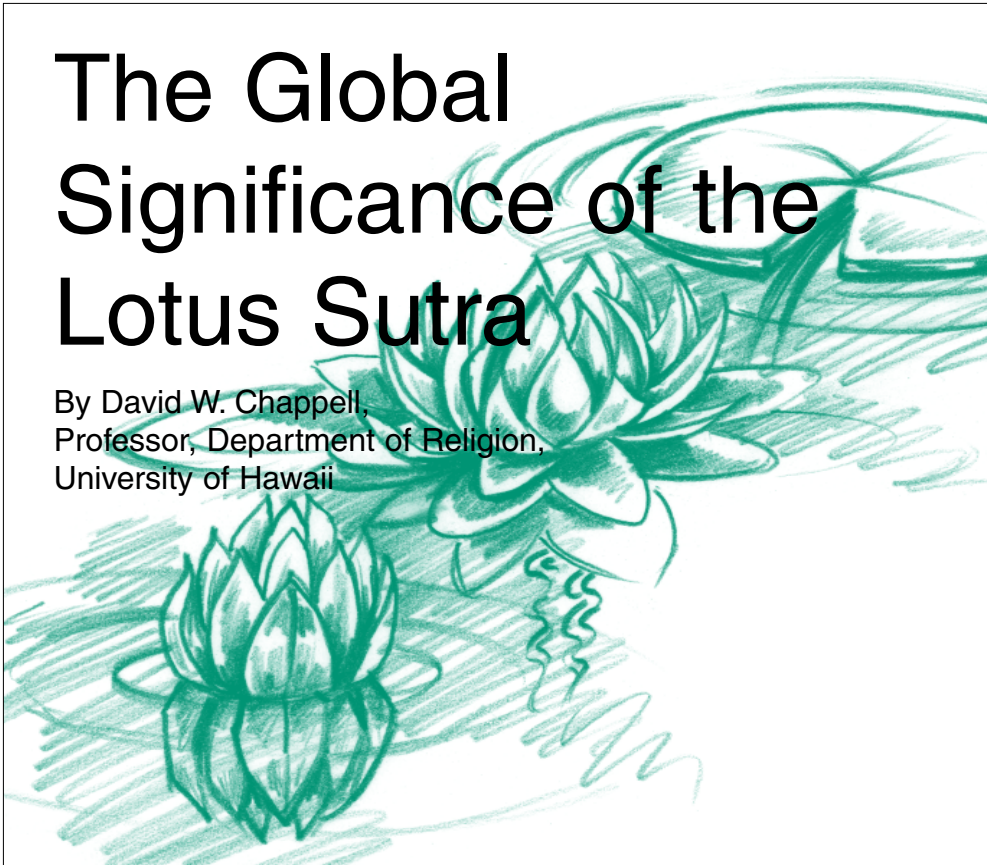
Dr. Chappell has said that the spirit of the bodhisattva will be needed in the twenty-first century, and he sees the Soka Gakkai as putting that spirit into practice: "The Soka Gakkai movement is

dedicated to reaching out to people wherever they are. That is the self-motivated spirit of the bodhisattva—to go where one is needed." Dr. Chappell points out that the Buddhist scriptures teach "the bodhisattva practice on the individual level." But the mass society we live in today, he says, requires "an organized bodhisattva practice" that unites and harmonizes the desire of individuals to contribute to society. This is a most insightful observation.

The Lotus Sutra is a scripture of the joy of living. We, who know the very essence of the Lotus Sutra, will ever champion the cause of freedom. We will work to cultivate good and eradicate evil, dedicating our lives to making the Earth a garden of richly diverse and individualistic human flowers. And when we reach the end of the journey of our mission in this life, let us set off to the next existence with these words: "I lived a full life. I triumphed. Thank you, life! Thank you for everything!" □

The Global Significance of the Lotus Sutra

By David W. Chappell,
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David W. Chappell teaches Chinese Buddhism and comparative religion at the University of Hawaii. His publications include T'ien-t'ai Buddhism: An Outline of the Fourfold Teachings and he was the founding editor of the journal Buddhist-Christian Studies. He has traveled the country interviewing many SGI-USA members for contributions to two forthcoming books. In the previous article in this issue, SGI President Ikeda recalls meeting with Dr. Chappell in 1996. (Foreign names and terms are in Sanskrit, unless otherwise specified)

THE arrival of the year 2000 will mark a new century and a new millennium. Within Mahayana Buddhism, each age has brought new questions and concerns to the Lotus Sutra, and often found fresh meaning not seen in previous periods. Today, however, the Lotus Sutra belongs not just to Nichiren Buddhism, nor even to Mahayana Buddhism, but to the world. In 1852 the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra was introduced to the West in a French translation¹ and since 1884 it has been advertised as one of the Sacred Books of the East and published in English from

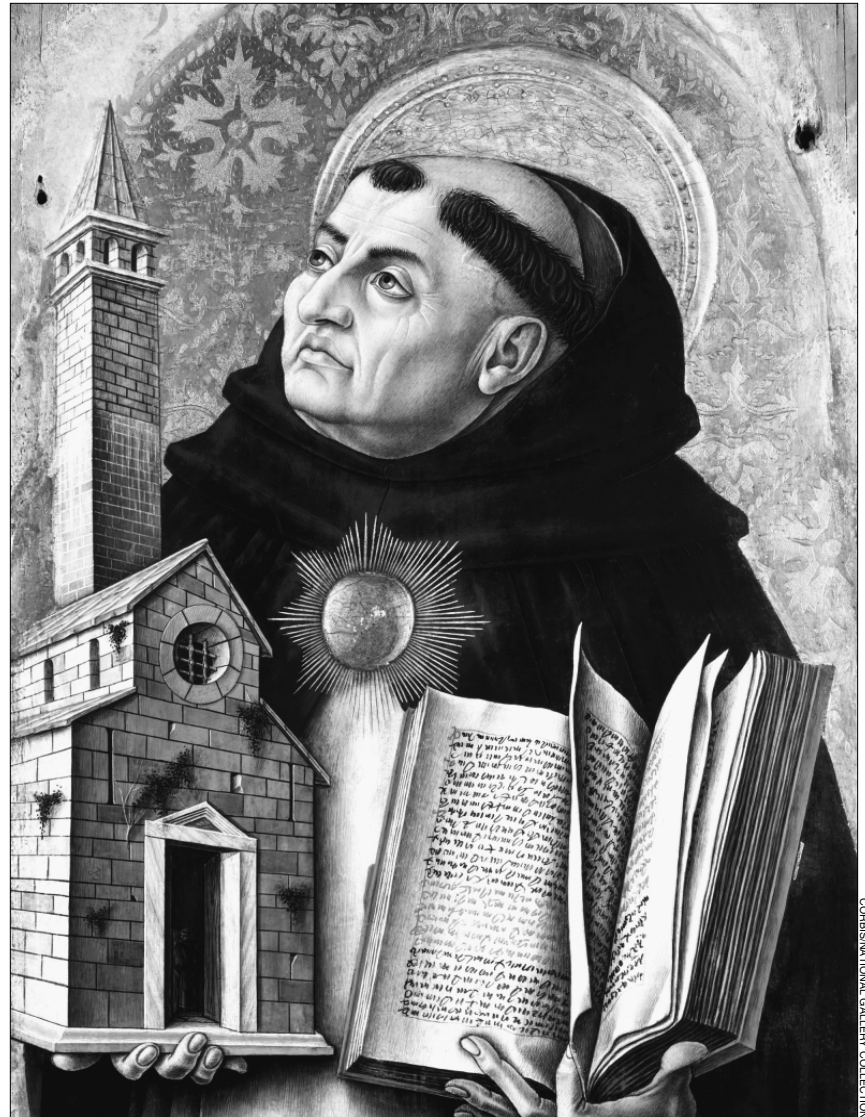
Oxford.² Not only has it had Buddhist devotees, but for almost a century it has also attracted attention from Christian scholars.³ Moreover, in the last twenty-five years, the Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra has received at least five new English translations.⁴

So today we can ask about its role not just for Buddhism, but for humanity. Accordingly, I shall consider the significance of the Lotus Sutra among other religious scriptures, and then its possible role in the midst of some of the more pressing challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Demidoff altar piece: St. Thomas Aquinas by Carlo Crivelli.
 “The Lotus position on pluralism seems to echo the Roman Catholic approach based on Thomas Aquinas. When confronted with the obvious value of Greek philosophy, Aquinas developed the distinction between reason and revelation.”

1. Challenge of Religious Pluralism

AS a global scripture, the claims of ultimacy made for the Lotus Sutra must be placed side-by-side with similar claims made by other Buddhist scriptures, as well as by non-Buddhist scriptures, such as the claims that Muslims make for the Holy Qur’an. To Muslims and to Lotus devotees, both scriptures are seen to be taught eternally, and to reveal the saving truth for all humanity. In the past, such a situation would constitute a challenge and competition over which was right. But after centuries of futile and wasteful religious war, humanity is learning that the most important question is not which religion is superior to others, but which one has the means to illuminate and help us to understand this religious diversity, and to bring peace and reconciliation in the midst of the world’s religions. Rather than become embroiled in interreligious competition over which scripture is best or truest, we first need to consider how the Lotus Sutra can be related to other scriptures, and how it can illuminate our diverse human religious life.



CHRISTIAN TONAL GALLERY COLLECTION

Fortunately, the Lotus Sutra gives a great deal of attention to the fact of other religious teachings, and affirms their importance. However, this affirmation is partial since they are all branded as skillful means (*upaya*, Jpn *hoben*). In contrast, the Lotus teaching is seen as the complete and ultimate teaching (*saddharma*, Jpn *myoho*). Other teachings may be useful for the specific needs and capacities of individuals at certain times and places, but all are incomplete and

will be swallowed up in the true and final teaching of the Lotus teaching.

This position means that the Lotus Sutra is not exclusivistic, but affirms that other religious teachings have positive value. However, it is not blindly tolerant of them either, but evaluates both their positive contributions in helping people at lower levels of growth, while judging them to be limited and unable to reach the highest levels. Accordingly, the Lotus Sutra

denies that all teachings are complementary: they are not different but equal paths to the same goal. Rather, the Lotus expresses a developmental approach to other religions which accepts other religions as useful at a lower level, but finally rejects the “three vehicles” as inadequate for attaining the highest truth which can only be attained through the “one vehicle” of the Lotus teaching.

The Lotus position on pluralism seems to echo the Roman Catholic approach based on Thomas Aquinas. When confronted with the obvious value of Greek philosophy, Aquinas developed the distinction between reason and revelation. Greek philosophy made great contributions at the universal level of human reason, but these rational truths needed to be completed and fulfilled by divine revelation that was only available through Christianity. Just as the Catholic Church has taught that there is no final salvation outside the Church, so the Lotus Sutra seems to be teaching that there is no final salvation outside the Lotus teaching.

A central issue to be decided is whether the ultimate Lotus teaching (*saddharma*) is to be totally identified with the Lotus Sutra preserved in Sanskrit and Chinese, or whether it is transcendent. Similarly, Roman Catholics have to decide whether or not salvation by God is limited to the Catholic Church, and Muslims have to decide whether salvation is limited to those devoted to the Arabic Qur'an. This is a major question for the twenty-first century, and how

followers of the Lotus Sutra deal with this issue of pluralism will greatly determine its future role.

In the past, *saddharma* (true teaching, Jpn *myoho*) in the Lotus Sutra has often been used as a polemical term to argue for the superiority of the Lotus above other, rival and lesser, teachings. Similarly, in the Lotus Sutra the word *upaya* (Skillful Means, Jpn *hoben*) refers to all other teachings, but not the Lotus teaching. From this point of view, the only viable religious peace in the future would be for all other religions to abandon their teachings and join the Lotus community. This attitude can be called “tolerant triumphalism” since it is tolerant of other religions in limited roles, but affirms that the Lotus is ultimate. For example, all references in the Lotus Sutra to the coming “age of decay” when other forms of truth will be in decline also affirms the continued strength, saving power, and triumph of the Lotus teaching.⁵

In spite of the many verses of praise in the Lotus Sutra for those who recite, chant, uphold, and teach it, in the context of global

pluralism some new interpretations of the Lotus Sutra may be necessary if it is to fulfill its own promise in the next millennium. Even though the Lotus Sutra may be saving and bring many benefits and become ultimate for many people, do these positive cases make it universally ultimate for all times, places, and people? I would argue that we can and should distinguish between the written text of the Lotus Sutra and the Lotus sermon [teaching] that is celebrated in the sutra. The Lotus Sutra says that the Lotus sermon contains the ultimate saving truth, but that sermon is not recorded in the Lotus Sutra. The sutra is a text that tells us about the contents of the Lotus sermon but is not identified with the Lotus sermon. I would propose that the saving truth that is celebrated in the written text is in fact beyond the written text, is beyond the chanted words, and is beyond our ability to own, read, write, or fully express it, even though we may have access to this saving truth through the written words.

The distinction between the written Lotus and the eternal



Lotus sermon is not different from the distinction between the finger that points and the moon that is pointed at. Although the finger may be important and necessary for the salvation of some, it is the moon that is the reality to be experienced and the source of saving truth. Based on this distinction, the effectiveness (*upaya*) of the written Lotus Sutra can be celebrated by those whose lives have been saved through it and by those who have experienced ultimacy by means of it. However, there is the possibility that other people may find other means to discover and be saved by the reality proclaimed in the transcendent Lotus sermon (*saddharma*).

To support this distinction, I would propose that we apply the teaching of the Lotus Sutra about *upaya* to the written text of the Lotus Sutra itself. Accordingly, the Lotus Sutra in its present form is to be cherished because it is skillful in pointing toward the *saddharma* and is helpful to the spiritual growth of people. But while revering and honoring it as a text and for the truth it imparts, we should also see that the text, unlike the truth to which it points, is constructed and partial, conditioned and impermanent, like all things that are made.

The primary role of a scripture is to bring ultimate salvation to beings by being a vehicle for saving truth. Even though some may worship the written text of the Lotus Sutra because of its unique role in bringing saving truth to them, cannot this be seen as an *upaya* that might be swept away

and disappear like the three vehicles by the one great vehicle of *saddharma*?

Etienne Lamotte has pointed out that, even though the Buddha's teaching about conditioned [dependent] origination is considered to be unchanging (*paramartha*), how it is taught, learned, and followed by people is part of the conditioned world of change (*samvrti*). Accordingly, it is not surprising that early in Buddhist thought, there developed the idea of *mappo*, [the Latter Day of the Law] a future period when Buddhism itself would one day decline and disappear.⁶ Even though one may believe that the truth preached in the Lotus sermon is eternal truth and will reappear in age after age, the Sanskrit, Chinese, English and French forms of the written and chanted text are finite, changing, and one day will disappear.

When the Lotus Sutra is seen within human religious history as an expression of the human tendency to revere certain texts as sacred, we discover that the role of Lotus practitioners and devotees

becomes very important. Scriptures are not born as scriptures, but become that way because of their role in human lives and because of human responses. In a historical context, the truth of scriptures has no external validity. Instead, their truth necessarily arises interactively with believers. Their significance is not found in isolation and abstractly, but only in the lives of people who respond to them, are changed through them, and value them. It is people who discover the Lotus Sutra to be supreme, not just because the text says so.⁷ Accordingly, it is people who have to decide how and in what way the text is ultimate.

The Lotus Sutra is filled with many sectarian messages that praise the preachers of the Lotus, and promise great rewards to them for suffering through persecution, while heaping vile threats against those who reject the Lotus teachings. However, by distinguishing between the saving truth (the *saddharma*) and its vehicle (the written Lotus Sutra), Lotus devotees and preachers may find some common



All people can understand and appreciate the importance of the Lotus Sutra if Lotus devotees are able to positively impact the world in the twenty-first century.

ground with other religious followers who may not know the written Lotus Sutra, but who may be devoted to the eternal truth (*saddharma*) conveyed through it.

In order for the Lotus Sutra to offer a saving and harmonious message for the twenty-first century, I am proposing that it be seen as affirming innumerable different forms of religion as *upaya* (including the written Lotus Sutra), while also affirming the universal truth that is beyond all forms (*saddharma*) that is saving and eternal. For devotees, the written and chanted Lotus Sutra still would be saving and ultimate and a unique expression of the one vehicle, but the *saddharma* which is made accessible through the written Lotus Sutra would not be confined to it, and could be available to others through other *upaya*. This interpretation provides a positive base to affirm the highest values of religion while respecting global religious differences, and is based on the key ideas of skillful means and eternity in the Lotus.

Can the various bodhisattvas in the Lotus Sutra be seen as practical examples to be followed in the next

century? Whereas T'ien-t'ai Chihi (538–597) found many important philosophical and meditative truths in the Lotus Sutra, it was the founder of the Three Stages Movement, Hsin-hsing (540–594), who implemented its teaching in social welfare programs. Like Sadaparibhuta Bodhisattva (Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, Jpn Fukyo), he never disparaged others but praised them as future Buddhas. Can Lotus devotees treat members of other religions like that? Also, the new problems of the next century will require many innovative solutions. Can Lotus devotees be like Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds (Jpn Kannon) and adopt many new and different forms in order to be helpful to others, even if these forms are in the garb of other religions and other scriptures?

It may be true that only those who have faith can understand the Lotus Sutra, but all people can understand and appreciate the importance of the Lotus Sutra if Lotus devotees are able to positively impact the world in the twenty-first century. Accordingly, let me outline three more urgent challenges that face the twenty-first century and invite Lotus

devotees to demonstrate the truth of the Lotus by bodhisattva actions in these areas.

2. Challenge of the Earth

In preparation for the centennial celebration of the 1893 Parliament of World's Religions, Gerald O. Barney published a book entitled *Global 2000 Revisited: What Shall We Do?* in which he carefully outlined how over-population, dwindling natural resources, and new forms of poverty, violence, hatred, and despair are threatening the life of the planet. To begin the recovery process, "requires as its first condition a sustainable, just, and healthy human relationship with Earth."⁸ How does the Lotus Sutra nurture this primary connection with the earth?

The Lotus Sutra is a product of what Karl Jaspers has called the axial age of religions, the period when most of the major world religions were formed. Basically, this axial period saw not only the emergence of great thinkers such as Plato and Confucius, but the founding of many new religions such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and Talmudic Judaism. These axial

The Lotus Sutra stands out for being named after a flower and for its numerous references to nature. The Lotus Sutra has the potential to be of great significance in helping us to recover our kinship with nature.

religions are distinctive since they arose as historical movements that broke from the rural cultures that focused on close relationships with the earth and sky. By contrast, these new revelations focused on social relations or inner thoughts and attitudes not connected with the land or sky or animals. This separation from kinship with the local environment also made these new religions more portable, and enabled them to spread.

Today various world religions that follow this axial model are beginning to see how their separation from nature has meant the loss of a natural wholeness fostered by indigenous cultures. When North American Indians visited the United Nations to see how each nation had a representative, they reportedly asked: But who will represent the animals and the birds? Modern society has devalued

nature, whereas native peoples have commonly revered nature. As the American Indian Chief Seattle reportedly said to President Pierce in 1885 when the president asked to buy the chief's land:

How can you buy or sell the sky—the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. Yet we do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people, every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

In a recent study in modern Japan, the importance of nature for elderly people was a remarkable discovery. When the elderly were asked what sights, sounds, and smells they wished to have when they are dying, invariably the sight of trees and nature, the smell of fresh air, and the sounds of birds and the wind were most valued.⁹ Similarly, most readers of this journal and most followers of the Lotus Sutra are probably preoccupied with social issues and neglect

nature. However the approach of death sets in sharp relief those things that are most important in life, and the primacy of the earth and sky emerges. Accordingly, the need to protect and cultivate nature not only is important for the health of our planet, but for our own spiritual growth as well.

Of all the major scriptures of the world, the Lotus Sutra stands out for being named after a flower and for its numerous references to nature. I would think that the Lotus Sutra has the potential to be of great significance in the twenty-first century in helping us to recover our kinship with nature. There is certainly enough imagery in the Lotus Sutra to inspire a recovery of our relations with nature, but whether or not this happens will depend on how the Lotus Sutra is interpreted by its devotees.

3. Challenge of the Economy

The major enemy of our kinship with nature is the greed of consumerism. As a consequence, the North consumes too much to satisfy its ego, while the burgeoning population of the South needs





Bronze statue of the American Indian Chief Seattle. In the background is the Space Needle, symbol of the city that bears his name. Seattle reportedly said to President Pierce in 1885 when the president asked to buy the chief's land: "How can you buy or sell the sky—the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us."

market places, but are the new temples of refuge, renewal, and recreation. Whereas fifty years ago malls were often closed on the holidays as representing work, now they are most active on holidays as the growing center of American community life.

What does the Lotus Sutra have to say about economic life? Perhaps this is the weakest area for Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, but it is the area that will dominate war in the twenty-first century. In the past in Europe, religious wars dominated life up until 1648 when the Holy Roman Empire collapsed, the Peace Treaty of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War between the Catholic and Protestants, and the nation-state system was born. After 1648 conflicts between nations dominated war and peace, and loyalty to one's nation could inspire people to die or to kill others. However, since 1945 and the founding of the United Nations, the major factor inspiring war has been economic conflict, as most vividly expressed in the Cold War struggle between Communism and Capitalism. Even though capitalism is now the world economic system, local wars are dominated by economics.

to consume more just to survive. "For the people of the South to live as the people in the North now live would require an increase by a factor of five to ten in the total economic activity on the planet."¹⁰ How ironic that just as capitalism has won world dominance with its free market-system economic model, increased production and consumption is proving to be a

disaster to the earth. The earth is now ruled not by the United Nations, nor by national governments, nor by military agreements, but by international business and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). People's worth is measured more in economic terms than national, cultural or religious values. The shopping malls of America are not just



“The shopping malls of America are not just market places, but are the new temples of refuge, renewal, and recreation.”

What finally is to be valued is not wealth or one’s body, but the Eternal Buddha and one’s Bodhi-sattva service to others.

4. Global Ethics

During the closing plenary meeting of the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions held on September 4 in Chicago, a solemn declaration was read outlining global problems and inviting those present to commit themselves to working toward a global ethic. Delegates then signed a document of intent, that included the passage:

By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without such a fundamental consensus on an ethic, sooner or later every community will be threatened by chaos or dictatorship, and individuals will despair.¹¹

There are some alternatives posited in the Lotus Sutra. The desolate son is secretly hired by his father not to increase consumption or production, but to enable him to achieve various personal, social, and spiritual virtues. The jewel hidden in the garment of the poor man by his wealthy friend is a symbol of his Buddha Nature,

his potential for enlightenment. Wealth is not denied, but placed in context under higher values. The magical city becomes a symbol for a lower level of nirvana, not the highest attainment. The Bodhi-sattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings finally burns his own body as an offering to the Buddha and becomes the Medicine King.

The quest for a global ethics arose from an initiative by the European theologian, Hans Kung, who has said:

No peace in the world until there is peace among the religions; no peace among the religions until there is dialogue among the religions.

Certainly the Lotus Sutra is committed to actively engaging others and to a final unity in the one vehicle. However, can Lotus devotees affirm the present value of other religious people as following helpful paths (*updyo*) in the short run, such as over the next century or next millennium, even though these paths may not have saving truth for Lotus devotees? Second, will Lotus practitioners also accept the idea that it is important to find ways to avoid human and ecological misery by forming a shared human commu-

nity based on a commitment to minimal ethical standards for all humans?

Concluding Reflections

The significance of the Lotus Sutra for the coming century is not an abstract question, but involves the visions, decisions, and work of those who are devotees of the Lotus Sutra. For it to be a guiding light for the dawn of a new age, it must become “the light that shines in the darkness” of our world. Certainly there are perennial forms of darkness that are shared in all ages by humanity, such as sickness, old age, and death, that the Lotus Sutra will continue to alleviate. However, there are also specific challenges that dominate each historical period, and already it is clear what some of these major problems will be for the twenty-first century: namely, religious pluralism,

the environment, economics, and the need for global ethics. How devotees of the Lotus Sutra are responding to these problems in the present can serve as a barometer to measure the significance of the Lotus Sutra for the future. □

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Illustrations by Elizabeth Pérez



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6. See David Chappell, “Early Forebodings of the Death of Buddhism,” *Numen* 27.1 (Summer, 1980): 122-154, and Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991).
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8. Gerald O. Barney, *Global 2000 Revisited: What Shall We Do?* (Arlington, VA: Millennium Institute, 1993): 52.
9. Public lecture on June 23, 1995 at the University of Hawaii by Carl Becker, Professor Human Sciences at Kyoto University reporting on unpublished field research among the elderly.
10. Gerald O. Barney, *Global 2000 Revisited*: 62.
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DIALOGUE

on the *Lotus Sutra*

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

This is the thirty-eighth 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 March 1998 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This time participants discuss the great benefit of joyfully and courageously spreading the Mystic Law based on the principle of “continual propagation to the fiftieth person” expounded in the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” (eighteenth) chapter.

38 Joyfully Spreading the Mystic Law

KATSUJI SAITO: The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter will be the theme of our discussion today.

DAISAKU IKEDA: When we respond with joy, we receive benefit—that, in essence, is the meaning of the title. In other words, we receive great benefit to the extent that we joyfully exert ourselves in faith. Here, again, we see that the heart is the all-important factor. If you’re going to practice Buddhism anyway, you might as well enjoy it rather than complain about it!

When you’re faced with a challenge, do you sigh deeply and say, “Oh no, not again”? Or do you confront it head-on, determined to use the situation to accumulate still more good fortune? This slight distinction in attitude makes a world of difference in the end.

The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter clarifies the great benefit that accrues from courageously encouraging others to practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

TAKANORI ENDO: We entered the transmission section¹ of the Lotus Sutra with “Distinctions in



“It is remarkable that in the three thousand years of Buddhist history, we of the SGI, virtually alone, can understand this chapter based on actual experience.”

Benefits,” the seventeenth chapter, which we discussed last month. It’s interesting that, parallel to our discussion of this part of the sutra, members throughout the country have intensified their propagation activities.

HARUO SUDA: Transmission, meaning to cause or allow to spread, plainly refers to propagation.

The Desire To Accomplish Kosen-rufu

[After the Buddha has entered extinction, suppose there are people who, hearing this sutra, respond with joy and] put forth effort in preaching and expounding for the sake of their parents and relatives, their good friends and acquaintances. These persons, after hearing, respond with joy and they too set about spreading the teachings. One person, having heard, responds with joy and spreads the teachings, and the teachings in this way continue to be handed along from one to another until they reach a fiftieth person.

Ajita,² the benefits received by this fiftieth good man or good woman who responds with joy I will now describe to you—you must listen carefully.

Or suppose there is a person who is sitting in the place where the Law is expounded, and when another person appears, the first person urges him to sit down and listen, or offers to share his seat and so persuades him to sit down. The benefits gained by this person will be such that when he is reborn he will be in a place where the lord Shakra is seated, where the heavenly king Brahma is seated, or where a wheel-turning sage king is seated. (LS18, 246–48)³

IKEDA: Transmission is kosen-rufu, the spread of the Law. The transmission section that we have begun studying is full of guidelines pertaining to the propagation of the Mystic Law. It is remarkable that in the three thousand years of Buddhist history, we of the SGI, virtually alone, can understand this chapter based on



“The SGI is an association dedicated to propagating the Mystic Law and accomplishing kosen-rufu. It is a body with a profound mission to realize the Daishonin’s will and decree.”

actual experience. It seems, therefore, that the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter was expounded for us.

In 1952, one year after his inauguration, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda proclaimed: “At this auspicious time of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, I declare that kosen-rufu will increasingly flourish from this point forward.”⁴

The SGI is an association dedicated to propagating the Mystic Law and accomplishing kosen-rufu. It is a body with a profound mission to realize the Daishonin’s will and decree. To develop this profound awareness is of utmost importance.

SAITO: I would like to read an excerpt from a speech titled “Toward the 704th Anniversary of the Founding,” delivered by Nichijun (1898–1959, the sixty-fifth high priest) in 1956:

I believe future historians will define the period leading up to the seven-hundredth anniversary of this school’s founding as the age of protection [of the Law] by the priesthood, and the period thereafter as the age of widespread transmission. Looking over the history of the priesthood until now, while there have been times of some prosperity, in the final analysis it never went beyond safeguarding the teachings...

The fact that, with the seven-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Daishonin’s Buddhism as the turning point, we have entered a period of widespread propagation indicates that there is something

preordained above the spread of the Law. I therefore believe that the emergence of the Soka Gakkai indicates its extraordinary relationship with the Buddha.⁵

ENDO: His remarks bear great significance.

SUDA: The “age of widespread transmission” that will unfold over the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law has indeed begun.

In his speech at the eighteenth Soka Gakkai General Meeting on May 3, 1958, Nichijun also commented on the appearance of so many Soka Gakkai members in the dawning of this age:

In the assembly on Eagle Peak described in the Lotus Sutra, the four great bodhisattvas, with Bodhisattva Jogyo in the vanguard, arrived one after another. They, in turn, were followed by great bodhisattvas as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, who also gathered at Eagle Peak. There, they made a resolute vow to propagate Myoho-rence-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law. Those people are now here in accord with the promise they made at Eagle Peak. I believe that the Soka Gakkai, with President Toda in the vanguard, summoned them forth; in other words, that the 750,000-strong membership built by President Toda represents the seven or five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo.⁶

He describes the Soka Gakkai as a great assemblage of Buddhas.

SAITO: These are the words of a former high priest. The Nikken sect, in betraying these crystal-clear statements, is guilty of serious slander in turning against its own predecessors. It has attempted to obstruct kosen-rufu, and consequently has become the archenemy of Nichiren Daishonin.

IKEDA: We chose to be born at this time in anticipation of the dawn of an “age of widespread transmission.” From that standpoint, it is impossible to overstate the profundity and nobility of our mission in this life. We are in the forefront of a movement that will continue over the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. This thought fills me with profound emotion. My heart dances with joy. We must cultivate this awareness through strong prayer to the Gohonzon.

The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter includes the well-known explanation of the “benefit

enjoyed by the fiftieth person.” It is the SGI that is in actuality putting this teaching into practice. Propagation is not simply a matter of explaining theory; the key is to convey the confidence and sense of fulfillment we gain from putting Nichiren Daishonin’s philosophy into practice. That is how we can touch other people’s lives.

The Boundless Benefit of the Fiftieth Person

SUDA: The explanation of the benefit of the fiftieth person goes as follows: Bodhisattva Maitreya (Miroku) asks how much benefit will accrue to those who respond with joy upon hearing of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha replies that after his passing—that is to say, in the Latter Day of the Law—there will be some who will delight upon hearing the Lotus Sutra. He adds that no matter what their particular circumstances, whether old or young, they will go into the city and to the country, to quiet places and bustling places, and, according to their ability, explain the teaching that they have heard to parents, relatives, friends and acquaintances. (The sutra says, “in accordance with what they have heard they put forth effort in preaching and expounding” [LS18, 246].) Those who hear the teaching from such people will in turn share the teaching with others. In this way, the teaching spreads continuously until it reaches the fiftieth person.

ENDO: One might wonder if the joy experienced would not be somewhat diminished by the time it reached the fiftieth person!

SUDA: Even if that were so, the benefit would still be immense. That’s the point of the principle of continuous propagation to the fiftieth person.

IKEDA: Addressing the question of just how vast that benefit is, the Daishonin says, “The benefit enjoyed by the fiftieth person who rejoices on hearing the Law is greater than that acquired by giving alms for eighty years” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 29).

ENDO: The idea of “giving alms for eighty years” supposes that there is a person capable of giving all living beings in “four hundred ten thousand million asamkhya worlds” (LS18, 246) anything and everything that they desire. According to the sutra, these alms

include all kinds of precious items, such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, agate, coral, fine vehicles, and palaces adorned with the seven kinds of treasure. This goes on for a period of eighty years. Not only do the donors offer material objects, but when they see that someone is growing old and approaching death, they share with that person the teachings of the Buddha.

SAITO: To give material things is to “make offerings of treasure.” To expound the teachings is to “make offerings of the Law.” No matter how wealthy one may be, material possessions themselves cannot enable one to grasp life’s fundamental issues, like old age and death. That’s why it is necessary to teach people about the Law.

IKEDA: Of course, the Law referred to in the sutra is a teaching prior to the Lotus Sutra.

ENDO: Yes. And the beings who hear it are said to attain higher states of life, such as that of *arhat*. This is the sort of enlightenment sought by voice-hearers. Still, it represents a superior state of life to which people aspired.

SUDA: The Buddha asks Maitreya whether he thinks that the benefit gained by a person who has thoroughly carried out such extensive offerings of treasure and of the Law would be sizable. Maitreya replies that the benefit of such a person would indeed be infinite and boundless. The Buddha then explains that the benefit of the fiftieth person who hears a verse of the Lotus Sutra and rejoices is even greater than that by hundreds, thousands, tens of millions of times.

IKEDA: And that is to say nothing of the benefit of those who hear the teaching before it reaches the fiftieth person. Such is the immense power of the Mystic Law.

Interpreted literally, the fiftieth person hears the teaching and rejoices, but does not share it with anyone else. However, even though he doesn’t carry out the practice for others, his benefit is still immense. The sutra explains that the benefit gained by those who not only rejoice themselves, but also endeavor to share the teaching with others, is incomparably greater (cf. LS18, 247).

From the standpoint of the Daishonin’s teaching, the “one verse of the Lotus Sutra” (LS18, 247) that these people hear is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In other words, they hear about the Gohonzon. This means that just hearing about the Gohonzon and thinking, “How

wonderful!” “I am so fortunate to learn of this teaching!” produces enormous benefit. Those who respond this way and then embrace faith and share it with others according to their ability will have all their prayers answered, gain tremendous good fortune, and attain the state in which all desires are fulfilled without fail. The passage about the fiftieth person is documentary proof of this principle.

The Daishonin says that a person who chants daimoku only once a day or only once in the course of a lifetime or who hears someone else chant it only once in a lifetime and rejoices and so on to the fiftieth person will gain blessings “a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand times greater” than those gained by persons of excellent innate ability and superior wisdom such as Shariputra, Monjushiri and Maitreya (MW-6, 3–4).

SAITO: He also includes in this those who “rejoice in hearing the voice of someone else rejoice in the hearing” (MW-6, 3).

A Movement To Bring Happiness to All

SAITO: In fact, there have been many instances where people living adjacent to homes where discussion meetings are held joined the SGI, their interest sparked by the sound of members’ joyful voices.

ENDO: I heard such an account from Toku Shirai, a women’s division leader of Niigata Prefecture. For many years, the Shirais’ home was used for discussion meetings. A neighbor had for a long time thought it odd to see many people in high spirits coming and going. She could hear the vigorous recitation of the sutra at the beginning of the meetings, followed by singing and the sounds of laughter. She wondered why they always ended at 8:30 sharp and why everyone leaving looked elated and refreshed.

Whereas in the past the Shirais’ neighbors overheard nothing but continual fights between husband and wife, they now heard only cheerful voices. And they were impressed by how polite the children had grown. This became the talk of the neighborhood.

After observing the Shirais for many years, the woman living next door came to the conclusion that the change must be due to the Soka Gakkai, and decided to

try practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism. So she asked Mrs. Shirai if she could join.

SUDA: You hear about many cases in which people decide to join our movement simply because they see the joy exuded by SGI members and want to acquire this themselves.

ENDO: I also heard from Mrs. Shirai about a men’s division member who had a speech impediment. When he reported on some activity at a discussion meeting, often he could only get out the words, “It was great!” He would try with all his might to speak, but he simply could say no more. So, in the end, he would just repeat, “It was great!” Although those listening didn’t have any clear idea of what exactly was great, they could clearly sense his enthusiasm. Often guests attending the meeting would be so moved from what few words he said that they would decide to join.

Mrs. Shirai’s conclusion, after having introduced more than a hundred families to the practice, is that dialogue means speaking with conviction and joy. This is just as you said a little earlier, President Ikeda.

IKEDA: She is truly noble. In this egoistic world, to offer prayers and work hard for the happiness of others, as well as one’s own, is magnificent. It is sublime. The fact that SGI members exert themselves for kosen-rufu day in and day out, even in the face of criticism and abuse, is proof that they are Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Of this I have not the slightest doubt.

On the subject of joy, the Daishonin says, “‘Joy’ means delight shared among oneself and others”; and “‘Joy’ is to share wisdom and compassion with others” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 761). The key point is that joy is something that we share with others. To be concerned only with one’s own happiness is egoism. To care only about the happiness of others is hypocrisy. Genuine happiness is becoming happy together with others.

President Toda said: “Just becoming happy oneself—there’s nothing difficult at all to that. It’s easy. Helping others become happy is the foundation of our faith.”⁷ The earlier passage by the Daishonin plainly states that such happiness is gained by sharing wisdom and compassion, sharing the life of the Buddha. To have wisdom but lack compassion is to lead a closed and constricted life. That is not true wisdom. To possess compassion but lack wisdom and be foolish is to be of no help to anyone, including

oneself. One who cannot help another does not know compassion at all.

SAITO: Both wisdom and compassion are vital.

IKEDA: And faith encompasses both. The Daishonin says: “Generally speaking, when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are expressing joy in the fact that they are certain to become Buddhas eternally endowed with the three enlightened properties” (GZ, 761). Attaining this state is itself “the greatest of all joys” (GZ, 788).

SAITO: Sharing happiness with others—this is the benefit of talking to others about Buddhism. I think that the discussion of continuous propagation to the fiftieth person indicates a dynamic movement to propagate happiness. And the SGI has spread the Mystic Law quite literally to the ends of the earth.

The Daishonin says that the “fifty persons” represents all living beings:

In its description of the continuous propagation to the fiftieth person, the numeral 5 in the number 50 [which in Chinese is written with two characters standing for “5” and “10”] represents the five characters of the Mystic Law, while the numeral 10 represents the living beings of the Ten Worlds. The term “continuous propagation” stands for the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

In terms of the surface meaning of the sutra, this chapter explores the vast benefit received by the fiftieth person who responds with joy to the teaching. The fifty persons here stand for all living beings. (GZ, 799)

This seems to suggest that when the living beings of the Ten Worlds embrace the five characters of the Mystic Law that is, when *kosen-rufu* is in progress then the principle of actual *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single moment of life) is being realized.

Achieving True Democracy

IKEDA: *Kosen-rufu* also includes the struggle to transform the “realm of the environment.” This is the meaning of actual (as opposed to theoretical) *ichinen sanzen*.

At any rate, propagation from one person to the next and so on to the fiftieth person is the democratic path



“Sharing happiness with others—this is the benefit of talking to others about Buddhism. And the SGI has spread the Mystic Law quite literally to the ends of the earth.”

of dialogue. Democracy is definitely not simply a matter of setting in place certain forms and institutions. Without content, democracy is an empty vessel that is easily crushed.

What is this content? It is individual self-reliance and self-improvement. It is individual happiness. Democracy must enable each person in society to live to the full. Without valuing the sanctity of the individual, democracy is a mere shell.

ENDO: That would certainly describe the state of affairs in Japan today.

IKEDA: When people’s hearts are vacant and hollow, democracy is imperiled, and the devilish nature of power starts to take advantage. That is when the dark shadow of nationalism begins to spread.

President Toda said that individual happiness and social prosperity must go hand in hand. It is a grave mistake for society to neglect the well-being of the individual while striving only for economic growth. Individual happiness is not self-centered; rather, it is the process of solidifying one’s humanity, of developing wisdom and compassion in both oneself and others.

This is an issue of global importance, affecting socialist and democratic countries alike. The Lotus Sutra, however, has the power to enable all people to realize both individual happiness and social prosperity. This is the meaning of actual *ichinen sanzen*.

In short, it is our efforts to pray for and help another person to become happy that represent the foremost popular movement and directly contribute to



“To be concerned only with one’s own happiness is egoism. To care only about the happiness of others is hypocrisy. Genuine happiness is becoming happy together with others.”

the creation of a truly democratic society. We are engaged in the transmission of joy from one person to another. No matter how long or broad the chain of transmission, the amount of fulfillment each person feels does not wane nor is anyone made to suffer. The propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s philosophy continues as each person becomes indestructibly happy. This is the path we have followed, raising our voices in a chorus of Gakkai songs along the way.

Over the years, in times of hardship and struggle and through bitter tears, we repeatedly revived our spirits by singing Gakkai songs. The remarkable task of spreading the Mystic Law that our pioneering members accomplished through their tenacious efforts could well be called the miracle of the twentieth century.

The Path of Indomitable Dignity

SAITO: For most Soka Gakkai members, the song “Ifu Dodo no Uta” (Song of Indomitable Dignity) is laden with many memories. That shows just how widely it has been sung throughout the country.

ENDO: Some say it’s the greatest hit of the post-war era!

SUDA: President Ikeda, you once introduced the background of the person who wrote the lyrics, Yukie Ohashi, saying that the song was born from the Kyoto

members’ unwavering spirit to continue amid severe circumstances. You also described it as a wonderful part of the history of our kosen-rufu movement.

Since Mr. Ohashi has died, I asked a number of people in Kyoto about him. He reportedly wrote the song in 1955 or 1956, shortly after taking faith. He operated a wholesale umbrella outlet, but the bankruptcy of a business associate resulted in his being saddled with enormous debt, making his daily life excruciatingly difficult. That was when he heard about this Buddhism.

The person who introduced him told him that this faith is truly remarkable and challenged him to give it a three-month trial. The friend guaranteed Mr. Ohashi that he would see results, promising that if he didn’t, he would give him his head.

“I don’t want your head,” Mr. Ohashi replied. “I need money.”

“How much do you need?”

“Thirty thousand yen,” he said. That was the amount that the associate had failed to pay him.

The person responded: “I see. You can absolutely pay off your debts. The only condition is that you must do gongyo without missing a single day and attend discussion meetings for three months. And you have to tell others about the practice with me.”

ENDO: What confidence! Great confidence is the soul of propagation.

SUDA: So for three months Mr. Ohashi joined his friend in sharing the Daishonin’s teaching with others. Before three months had elapsed, the business associate who had absconded came back and returned the 30,000 yen. Having gained confidence in faith through this experience, Mr. Ohashi told more and more people about Buddhism.

Around that time, there was a movement among districts in the organization to come up with their own songs. The Kyoto area had no song, and that made the members feel left out. When Mr. Ohashi pointed this out to one of his leaders, the leader handed him a pencil and paper and suggested that he go ahead and write one.

Mr. Ohashi had not an ounce of songwriting experience, but what he did possess was passion. Standing before a small desk in his shop, he thought it over. As soon as he had decided on indomitable dignity as the theme, it was as though his pencil began moving on its own and the words of the song just flowed out.

“Though I may currently be beaten down, when I enter the ranks of kosen-rufu, I stand up with indomitable courage.” He also worked out the melody by trial and error. The song changed slightly every time he sang it, and it took him a month to complete it. One verse goes:

Into this defiled and evil world go
we of the Gakkai
Whoever may stand in our way.

With indomitable dignity
we summon our faith and advance.
Herein lies our conviction.

There were no tape recorders in those days. People who heard the song took to it, and soon it was being passed by word of mouth from one person to the next. When Kyoto Chapter was inaugurated, it was made the chapter song, and the members, singing it proudly and vigorously, went on to make their new chapter the first in propagation in the nation. This sparked the enthusiasm of members across Japan.

IKEDA: I, too, heard this song in Kyoto. The song itself is wonderful. Seeing the Kyoto members hoist high the “banner of the Law” in the city that was Japan’s ancient capital for a thousand years with this song on their lips was more wonderful still. Immediately, I thought that I would like to make this a song for members throughout Japan.

SUDA: This episode is still a source of pride for the members of Kyoto. You proposed that the song be introduced to all members. Originally the third verse began, “Behold the peaceful land of Kyoto where we live.” You suggested that it be changed to “Behold the paradise of Japan where we live.” Everyone was inspired by your proposal, and after that the song spread around the country in no time at all.

Mr. Ohashi in the meantime saw his circumstances take a dramatic turn for the better. He started a silk-dyeing business, and it prospered. And he never again had to endure privations. He eventually took up residence in an estate people called the Ohashi Palace, and traveled overseas frequently.

When you introduced Mr. Ohashi’s experience at a meeting in Kyoto (in 1989), he was hospitalized with advanced cancer. Immediately afterwards, a senior

leader visited him to tell him about the meeting. He reportedly listened with great satisfaction to what you had said at the meeting. Shortly after that, having completed his mission of sixty-nine years, he passed away in peace.

People widely recognized Mr. Ohashi as a master of dialogue and an expert at giving individual guidance. It is said that even those in whom no one else could stir any response would listen carefully to what Mr. Ohashi had to say.

Not long before he died, Mr. Ohashi remarked to someone who had come to visit him at the hospital, “There’s more that I would like to do.”

“Are there more places in the world you would like to see?” the person asked.

“No, I would like to do more home visits,” he said. “I would like to do activities again together with everyone.”

It seems to me that Mr. Ohashi was a genuine champion of the people, true to the words of “Song of Indomitable Dignity.”

SAITO: “I would like to do more activities”—those must have been his real sentiments as he approached death. SGI activities are veritably the supreme “memory of our present life in this human world” (MW-5, 38).⁸

SUDA: That’s because they’re so enjoyable.

Rise Above Your Troubles

ENDO: Though at the time they may not seem all that enjoyable, the feeling of satisfaction you get from putting forth your best effort in activities is unsurpassed. It’s like how you feel after a nice hot bath!

IKEDA: We talk about experiencing joy, but that feeling itself does not last long. Emotions like excitement and joy tend to fade with time.

A Japanese author wrote: “The life of a flower is short. Of sufferings only are there many.”⁹ It’s simply a fact of life that joy is short-lived while suffering endures. For precisely this reason, we are most fortunate to embrace the Mystic Law, which embodies the principle for transforming earthly desires into enlightenment.

When faced with difficulties, we chant daimoku to solve our problems. When sad, we take our sadness to

the Gohonzon. When happy, we chant with a profound sense of appreciation. As we do so, we continue moving forward, gazing down on our troubles from the vantage of a lofty state of life. When we pray to the Gohonzon, it is as though we are surveying the entire universe, allowing us to observe impassively our own sufferings.

“Responding with joy” doesn’t mean that we are without worries or suffering. Precisely because we have worries, we can chant daimoku, bringing forth strong life force. Because there is suffering, there is joy. It is impossible to experience only happiness in life.

Buddhism is a struggle. Life is also a struggle. That is why we must develop the inner fortitude to strive continuously forward. A life that has been tempered and made strong will savor eternal joy.

Through faith we can establish a state of life where, no matter what happens, we experience joy, hope and confidence in the depths of our being. That gives us the power to go among those who are suffering and together with them find true happiness.

While it is difficult for us to fathom Nichiren Daishonin’s state of life, we can certainly discern such profound joy in his writings. President Toda once described the Daishonin’s exile to Sado Island, saying, “In modern terms, exile to Sado is comparable to being banished to the Sahara Desert.” And yet, in the midst of such great persecution, the Daishonin said, “I feel immeasurable delight” (MW-1, 94).

SUDA: It is hard to imagine how incredible his state of life must have been.

The Daishonin’s Immense State of Life

IKEDA: Throughout his writings, we can hear the Daishonin declaring in a great voice: “How joyful!” “What happiness I feel!”

Why don’t we look at some of these passages?

SAITO: OK. Well, to begin with, the passage you cited earlier reads in full, “I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile” (MW-1, 94). Elsewhere he says: “The greater the hardships befalling [the votary of the Lotus Sutra] the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith” (MW-1, 9); “Among all the persons since the beginning of our present kalpa who have incurred the displeasure of their parents or their

rulers and have been exiled to distant islands, there can be none who overflow with joy as we do” (MW-7, 26–27); “I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 188) and “With this body of mine, I have fulfilled the prophecies of the sutra. The more the government authorities rage against me, the greater is my joy” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 102).

ENDO: There are countless examples. In other places the Daishonin says: “[Hearing that the government was discussing whether to behead me or banish me from Kamakura] I rejoiced, saying that I had long expected it to come to this” (MW-1, 175); “You should be delighted at this great fortune [that I am to be executed for the sake of the Lotus Sutra]” (MW-1, 181); “When it is certain that Nichiren will be executed, you should feel particular joy. You should regard it like meeting a ruthless thief, but [instead of being robbed] exchanging great poison for a cluster of jewels” (GZ, 962); “How joyful! What delight I feel to have been able to live my life with the passage, ‘again and again he will be banished’” (GZ, 963); and “What joy is ours to expiate in one lifetime our slanders from the eternal past! How fortunate to serve the Buddha who has never been known until now!” (MW-1, 117).

IKEDA: These passages seem to reverberate with the rhythm of the Daishonin’s heart. This is the rhythm of great joy of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

To Be “Obedient” to the Gohonzon

SUDA: Incidentally, the original meaning of the term *rejoice* or *delight* [as used in many of the above examples and in the title of the Lotus Sutra’s eighteenth chapter] is “obediently believe and rejoice.” I think it could be said that “obedience” means faith. If so, then what is the object of one’s obedience referred to in the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter?

The fact that the benefit of the fiftieth person is so immense suggests that the teaching that the person “obeys” is incomparably broader than that of the person of great resources who makes offerings for eighty years that we talked about earlier. But while the sutra



“Responding with joy” doesn’t mean that we are without worries or suffering. Precisely because we have worries, we can chant daimoku, bringing forth strong life force. Because there is suffering, there is joy.

makes reference to the idea that one should obey this Lotus Sutra, the substance of this teaching is never made clear in the text.

SAITO: In other words, what does Shakyamuni indicate that we should believe and take as our object of fundamental devotion? This is not clear. And it has been a point of serious debate in Buddhist communities from ancient times.

IKEDA: That’s why it is necessary to elucidate the implicit teaching. At the start of this chapter, there is mention of those who will hear this sutra after the Buddha’s passing. The question is: What are people to do after Shakyamuni has passed away? Does the Lotus Sutra say that they should make Shakyamuni their object of fundamental devotion? No, it does not say that anywhere. Rather, it indicates that we should take as our object of fundamental devotion the Law that enabled Shakyamuni himself to become a Buddha. This is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

“Obedience,” therefore, means faith in the Gohonzon that embodies the oneness of Person and Law. And the benefit of this “obedience” is the “benefit of rejoicing.”

The Daishonin says: “The Person is the Venerable Shakyamuni, the dignified Buddha of *gohyaku-jintengo*. The Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of the ‘Life Span’ chapter. ‘Responding with joy’ [as in the chapter’s title] means to follow and take joy in this teaching”

(GZ, 761). The Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan says of those who fail to grasp this point, “Even though they praise the Lotus Sutra, they destroy its heart.”¹⁰

SUDA: Nichijun Shonin made an interesting comment on this passage: “What do the priests of the Tendai school say? If they understood this [the heart of the Lotus Sutra], they would say that the present is the age of Nichiren Daishonin. Those who don’t, continue to trample on the heart of the Lotus Sutra.... That is why there are many priests from that school who have converted to the Daishonin’s faith; because in the depths of their teaching lies the heart of the Lotus Sutra.”¹¹

ENDO: In that sense, the latter half of the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter should be read as describing the great benefit deriving from faith in the Gohonzon. Following the discussion of the fiftieth person, there is an explanation of three types of benefit received.

First, it says that a person who hears about the Mystic Law is sure to gain material happiness:

As a result of the benefits so obtained, when he is reborn in his next existence he will enjoy the finest, most superior and wonderful elephants, horses and carriages, and palanquins decked with rare treasures, and will mount up to the heavenly palaces. (LS18, 247)

Second, it says that the person will acquire the merit to become a leader:

The benefits gained by this person will be such that when he is reborn he will be in a place where the lord Shakra [Taishaku] is seated, where the heavenly king Brahma [Bonten] is seated, or where a wheel-turning sage king is seated (LS18, 247–48).

It says the person will become Taishaku, Bonten or a wheel-turning sage king. In modern terms, this means that if the person works in a company, he or she will become a manager or the company president



“In life, there are both mountains and valleys. But by maintaining faith throughout we attain a golden state where we can look back over our existence and say, “This was the best possible life I could have lived.”

or a leader in the community and a leader of propagation of the Mystic Law. This chapter is basically saying that one who takes faith will become a leader in any realm of society.

IKEDA: That’s right. The Lotus Sutra is the “science of leadership.” The training that we receive in our efforts for kosen-rufu in the present is the cause that enables us to become great leaders in lifetime after lifetime and world after world. Absolutely no effort that we make in our Buddhist practice is wasted.

ENDO: Third, it says that the person will acquire abundant wisdom and the benefit to enjoy excellent health in both body and mind.

The sutra goes on to describe fifty kinds of benefit from encouraging others to learn about the Mystic Law. In addition to keen faculties and wisdom, it says that they will be wholesome in appearance and healthy in mouth and tongue, teeth and nose, and in every respect. It concludes, “In each existence he is born into, he will see the Buddha, hear his Law, and have faith in his teachings” (LS18, 248).

SAITO: The person will possess an utterly free state of life, enjoying unsurpassed economic, spiritual and physical good fortune, wisdom and merit.

IKEDA: Last, it says that the person enjoys a state in which all desires are fulfilled. In life, there are both mountains and valleys. But by maintaining faith throughout we attain a golden state where we can look back over our existence and say, “This was the best

possible life I could have lived.” Just as the fire produced by a single match can set a vast field of dry grass ablaze, our strenuous work for kosen-rufu produces benefit as expansive as the universe.

The Joy of Living Based on the Daishonin’s Teachings

SAITO: I heard the experience of Fumiko Matsuda, who was a victim of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Mrs. Matsuda joined the Soka Gakkai in 1956. When she heard President Toda deliver his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons (in Yokohama in 1957), she was so moved that she decided to dedicate herself to spreading the Daishonin’s teaching.

Although she suffered from seven ailments, including anemia, rheumatism and gastrointestinal obstructions, all aftereffects of radiation exposure, she overcame these one by one in the course of doing activities. She has in fact become so healthy that to this day she continues vigorously carrying out activities as a senior leader of Hiroshima Prefecture.

About fifteen years ago, when she was sixty, she suddenly realized that she had not read all of the Daishonin’s writings. Saying she felt ashamed that she had never even looked at certain of the Daishonin’s writings, she challenged herself to read the entire *Gosho Zenshu* (The Complete Writings of Nichiren Daishonin). The first time through, it took her five years.

But she gradually improved her speed and is now reportedly on her fifth reading.

As to the benefit she has received as a result of this effort, Mrs. Matsuda explains that she has stopped complaining. She never complains of being weary or tired. “Nowhere in his writings does the Daishonin express such sentiments,” she notes, adding that her former complaints have now been replaced by a hardy optimism. I understand she is increasingly ardent in her passion to change the social environment, aware of the tendency of people to readily succumb to pessimism.

IKEDA: I have heard a great deal about Mrs. Matsuda. The fact that our membership includes countless such grass-roots champions is the pride of the SGI. This is wonderful.

“I will live exactly as the Daishonin teaches!” This is the faith of “rejoicing.” The SGI has fought with the fundamental spirit to live according to the Daishonin’s writings. It is by striving to do this that we can experience true joy and benefit.

In short, no benefit can compare to the joy of dedicating one’s life to kosen-rufu. No joy is greater than the joy of propagating the Mystic Law. Nothing is greater than the joy of seeing other people become happy as a result of our efforts in dialogue. And when we rejoice at others’ happiness, our own lives become increasingly pure.

Propagation has nothing to do with arrogance. On the contrary, it is motivated by a sincere desire to share Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with others, delighted at our good fortune to have been born as human beings and to be able to expound the Law. Whether or not the other person decides to take our advice is a separate matter.

Sharing Buddhism Is Itself Great Benefit

IKEDA: The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter explains that just by inviting someone to listen to a discussion of the Lotus Sutra, we accumulate immense benefit. It says that the act itself of making room for a visitor in a meeting place produces benefit. Accordingly, the benefit we receive by telling someone about Buddhism is truly enormous.

Whether or not the person begins practicing after hearing an explanation of the Mystic Law, our benefit is the same. President Toda once commented humorously about people who had difficulty taking faith no matter how many people talked to them, saying, “These people have given that many more members the opportunity to receive tremendous benefit.”

ENDO: So, if there is someone who decides to take faith after seven people have spoken to him about Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, all seven receive benefit.

IKEDA: That’s right. We receive benefit as a result of our efforts to enable others to hear about the Mystic Law, regardless of whether they practice or how many others talk to them. When we realize this, we know even greater joy.

Those who are carrying out the practice of propagation deserve hearty praise from all. They are supremely noble emissaries of the Buddha. When we have this spirit to applaud those who are carrying out propagation, then everyone experiences profound happiness, and kosen-rufu expands still further.

When we possess the kind of strong faith where we love the Gohonzon, love chanting daimoku, and love SGI activities, our life overflows with the “benefits of responding with joy.”

To be continued

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1. One of the three divisions of a sutra, along with preparation and revelation.
2. Ajita: Other name for Bodhisattva Maitreya.
3. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number and then the page number.
4. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 201.
5. From the January 1, 1956, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.
6. From the May 9, 1958, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.
7. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, p. 378.
8. This passage reads in full: “Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world.”
9. Fumiko Hayashi (1903–51), *Horoki* (Journal of a Vagabond).
10. *Hokke Shuku* (The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra).
11. From the November 8, 1957, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (15)

This installment on the history of the transcription of the Gohonzon is partly based on a translation of Mikio Matsuoka's pamphlet A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon in the Taiseki-ji School, published by the Institute of Oriental Philosophy in 1997.

The last installment (in the April issue) explained how the priesthood devised Operation C, a plan to destroy the SGI lay organization, and the excommunication of SGI members on November 28, 1991.

Chapter 15: The SGI's Conferral of the Gohonzon

(1) The Gohonzon: The object of devotion for all people

ON September 7, 1993, about two months short of the second anniversary of its excommunication by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the SGI announced its decision to issue the Gohonzon to its members worldwide. It was one of the defining moments of the SGI's lay Buddhist movement because the decision signaled the return of the object of devotion from the hold of clerical authority to its rightful heirs—ordinary people who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Gohonzon issued by the SGI were reproduced from a Gohonzon transcribed by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan, in 1720. This particular Nichikan Gohonzon was in the possession of Joen-ji, a temple in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan. In his June 6, 1993, letter to

Soka Gakkai President Einosuke Akiya, Joen-ji Chief Priest Sendo Narita, who had seceded from Taiseki-ji in protest to the high priest's abusive policy toward the SGI, proposed that the SGI start reproducing Gohonzon based on the Nichikan Gohonzon in his temple's possession (text of letter appears on page 37). In his letter, Chief Priest Narita states: "The existing situation, in which Nikken has unjustly terminated the conferral of Gohonzon upon Soka Gakkai members, convinced me that the best and most just course—as well as the course that, I feel, would win the approval of the Daishonin—would be to enable Soka Gakkai members to receive *okatagi* Gohonzon based on this Gohonzon" (*On the Conferral of the Gohonzon by the Soka Gakkai: A Collection of Reference Material*, p. 4). (Editor's note: *Okatagi* Gohonzon refers to any Gohonzon reproduced on a printing press. The word *okatagi* literally means a wood block print.)

On August 23, 1993, the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu and the Association of Youthful Priests Dedicated to the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu issued a joint resolution in support of Narita's proposal. In the resolution, the thirty reform priests who had seceded from Taiseki-ji stated: "We declare that the Soka Gakkai is qualified in every way to confer *okatagi* Gohonzon based on the Gohonzon transcribed by High Priest Nichikan, and assert that by so doing the Soka Gakkai will fulfill a sacred mission consistent with the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin" (Ibid., p. 6). Following the discussion and approval by the council and other committees, the Soka Gakkai decided to accept Chief Priest Narita's proposal.

Before this historic decision, conferral of the Gohonzon—the basis of the faith and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—was regarded by the priesthood as the high priest's prerogative. And lay believers had been long taught to support that view. After the excommunication in November 1991, many SGI members had been forced to practice without the Gohonzon. The priesthood had taken advantage of the situation and used its monopoly of the Gohonzon as leverage to entice Gakkai members to secede from their lay organization and join a temple parish.

UPON learning about the Gakkai's decision, the priesthood expressed its concern: "The Soka Gakkai will begin to independently bestow Gohonzons [sic] and, thus declaring complete independence from Nichiren Shoshu..." (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 2). In the same publication, the priesthood also said: "The Soka Gakkai is a group that has been excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu, and has absolutely no relationship with Nichiren Shoshu" (Ibid., p. 1). Those seemingly contradictory statements—declaring that the Gakkai had initiated independence, then that the priesthood's prior excommunication had severed the relationship—demonstrate the complex anxiety the priesthood felt toward its former believers; its wish was that even after being excommunicated, they would still feel dependent upon its clerical authority. The priesthood has been clearly aware that its continued prosperity may depend on the return of its former believers. The priesthood's dependence upon its excommunicated



KIRK CONDYLIS

laity, whom it despises, has been a source of mixed reactions toward Gakkai members.

The significance of the SGI's decision to issue the Gohonzon may be viewed from two perspectives. First, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for all people throughout the world. His fundamental desire was to make the Gohonzon available to all who sincerely practice his teaching, thus enabling them to create indestructible happiness. For example, the Daishonin writes to Abutsu-bo, an elderly believer on Sado Island: "Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the Treasure Tower especially for you" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 30). "The Treasure Tower" here refers to the Gohonzon.

The second perspective in the development of the priesthood's dispute with the Gakkai is that Nikken, using his position as high priest, arbitrarily stopped granting Gohonzon to SGI members. His purpose was clearly to undermine and eventually disable the SGI. Because members cherish the Gohonzon, and because Gohonzon were now unavailable to SGI members who sought them, people would feel compelled to leave the lay organization for the temple, which would provide them with Gohonzon so long as they renounced their

association with the SGI. Nikken's action clearly runs counter to the Daishonin's intent in inscribing the Gohonzon, which he described as "the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 212).

This is evident in light of the fact that the SGI has been the sole organization consistently dedicated to propagating Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in this century.

Because of these circumstances—and based on its sense of responsibility as a harmoniously united order (*samgha*) of the Daishonin's Buddhism—the SGI decided to make Gohonzon available to its worldwide membership. It was a decision made solely to preserve the integrity of the Daishonin's Buddhism by replying to the sincerity of those seeking the Gohonzon and, thereby, further promoting the spread of the teaching—a mandate that the Daishonin entrusted to his future disciples.

Since the SGI announced its intent to confer Gohonzon, the priesthood has been denouncing the Gohonzon issued by the SGI as "counterfeit." Their reasoning is as follows: 1) "It does not receive the sanction of the High Priest"; 2) "It is not bestowed by the Head Temple"; and 3) "It is arbitrarily manufactured by the Gakkai" (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, compiled by the

Nichiren Shoshu Doctrinal Research Committee. Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 1996, p. 12).

FURTHERMORE, the priesthood maintains that a Gohonzon issued without the high priest's "eye-opening ceremony" is counterfeit (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 9; *Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, pp. 36–39). According to the priesthood, however, the practical meaning of the eye-opening ceremony apparently is not that the high priest must infuse his presumed spiritual power, which he claims to have inherited from the Daishonin, into every Gohonzon issued by the head temple. In this regard, the priesthood states: "Up to now, the Gohonzons [sic] granted to believers at the branch temples have all been sanctioned by the High Priest, that is, their eyes have been opened" (*Ibid.*, p. 37). The priesthood also claims: "In Nichiren Shoshu from the ancient past, the High Priest's sanction was essential for everything related to the Gohonzon. The arbitrary copying of the Gohonzon and the conferral of the copies by the Gakkai today are unpardonable acts" (*Ibid.*, p. 39). In light of those statements, all the explanations that the priesthood has been putting forth against the SGI's Gohonzon essentially boil down to one argument:

The Origin of the Eye-Opening Ceremony

The practice of conducting an eye-opening ceremony began in about 100 A.D., when images of the Buddha were first produced in India. It is not a practice that dates back to the origins of Buddhism. The eye-opening ceremony was conducted to lend credence to images of the Buddha carved by Buddhist teachers of the day as objects of worship. Once a statue was made, its eyes

were "opened" through some religious ceremony.

After such ceremonies became an established practice, they served as an important source of support for both the authority and income of priests. However, looking at history, we see that this phenomenon, which appeared well after Buddhism was established, has no relation to the original and essential spirit of the Buddhist religion and today amounts to no more than a meaningless formality.

In Japan, the eye-opening ceremonies were especially a practice of the Shingon sect. In fact, the term *eye-opening* (Jpn *kaigen*) generally came to be associated with esoteric Shingon. Nichiren Daishonin criticized such ceremonies by that sect (MW-4, 35).

There is no record at all that the Daishonin performed an eye-opening ceremony for Gohonzon. It was a practice incorporated into the Fuji School later by the priesthood.

There was no mention of any exclusive power possessed by a high priest that would inject the Daishonin's soul into a transcribed Gohonzon.

They are counterfeit because the high priest did not authorize them.

The term arbitrary in the temple's usage can only be interpreted to mean "in a way not according with the high priest's intention," which was essentially to punish those affiliated with the Gakkai by depriving them of the Gohonzon. However, it is the high priest's sudden denial of the Gohonzon to those seeking it that better fits the definition of an arbitrary act.

Regarding the reproduction and conferral of the Gohonzon, the priesthood maintains: "The only person who is able to transcribe the innermost enlightenment of the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary is the High Priest who received the bestowal of the lifeblood to only a single person from the Daishonin.... During the seven hundred year [sic] history of Nichiren Shoshu, priests other than the High Priest, even if they were of eminent virtue, erudite or experts at calligraphy, have never transcribed the Gohonzon. However, there are instances where a retired High Priest transcribed the Gohonzon after being commissioned to do so by the current High Priest" (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, pp. 29–30). According to the priesthood, the reason the high priest alone can transcribe the Gohonzon and authorize its printing and conferral is that he alone "received the bestowal of the lifeblood to only a single person from Nichiren Daishonin." In a nutshell, the priesthood asserts that unless Gohonzon are transcribed by the high priest and their printing sanctioned by him, they are not legitimate and constitute a grave doctrinal error.

The history of the Fuji School, however, contradicts this. There are numerous recorded instances in which priests other than the high priests transcribed Gohonzon since the earliest period of the Fuji School. According to the priesthood, those transcriptions of Gohonzon would be "unpardonable acts," since no one but the high priest can transcribe Gohonzon.

Despite numerous records of such instances, however, there is no evidence of protest from anyone in the Fuji School, including the successive high priests. Its own history suggests, therefore, that the priesthood's assertions lack substance.

(2) The history of the transcription of the Gohonzon

IN February 1332, when Nikko and Nichimoku were still alive, Nissen, one of Nikko's six main disciples, transcribed a Gohonzon and conferred it to one of his parishioners (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 8, p. 214). There is no record of either Nikko or Nichimoku opposing Nissen's transcription.

According to a document written in 1340 and attributed to Nichizon, one of Nikko's disciples, Nikko instructed that in the Fuji School, only one designated disciple should transcribe Gohonzon in order to keep the "lantern of the Law" lit (*Complete Works of the Nichiren School*, vol. 2, p. 418). On the other hand, the same document records that after the Daishonin's death, his six senior disciples started to transcribe Gohonzon, and there was no dispute among them about their right to produce transcriptions (*Ibid.*). From those records, it may be surmised that Nikko made it a general rule that only one designated priest is to transcribe Gohonzon in order to maintain the order of the school.

For this reason, it was permissible for Nissen, who resided in the distant province of Sanuki, to transcribe a Gohonzon for one of his parishioners. It must be noted that Nikko's reasoning behind limiting the transcription of the Gohonzon to one designated person lay in maintaining order within the school. And the purpose of transcription was to keep the "lantern of the Law" lit—to keep the Gohonzon available to believers. There was no mention of any mysterious or



exclusive power possessed by a high priest that would inject the Daishonin's soul into a transcribed Gohonzon. Other records further confirm this point.

During the late fourteenth century, after the deaths of the second high priest Nikko and the third high priest Nichimoku in 1333, priests of the Fuji School other than the high priest at Taiseki-ji transcribed many Gohonzon (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 8). For example, Nissen transcribed two Gohonzon in 1337 and one in 1338. Nichigo, one of Nikko's six new disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed two in 1344, two in 1345 and one in 1350. (The dates of two additional Gohonzon transcribed by Nichigo are unknown.) In 1340, Nichizon had a wooden Gohonzon made from a Gohonzon by Nichimoku. Nichimyo, one of Nikko's six disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed one in 1344. Nichiman, Nikko's disciple on Sado Island, transcribed one in 1352 and another in 1357. Nichidai, one of Nikko's six new disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed one in 1388. While those Gohonzon were transcribed by priests other than the high priest during the tenures of the fourth high

priest Nichido (1333–39), the fifth high priest Nichigyo (1339–65) and the sixth high priest Nichiji (1365–1406), none of those high priests at that time left any record of denouncing those transcriptions as unorthodox. It is especially noteworthy that Nichigyo never accused Nichigo, his adversary in an embittered land dispute over Taiseki-ji, of transcribing Gohonzon in an unauthorized manner and thus violating the high priest's alleged prerogative.

In other words, during the early days of the Fuji School after Nikko established Taiseki-ji and appointed Nichimoku as his successor in 1290, the priesthood intended to limit the transcription of the Gohonzon to one designated person for the orderly management of the Fuji School. However, it did not consider transcription of the Gohonzon by a priest other than the high priest to be a grave doctrinal error. For this reason, Nichiu (1402–82), the ninth high priest, allowed chief priests of the branch temples to transcribe the Gohonzon. He states in "On Formalities": "Those at branch temples who have disciples and lay patrons may transcribe the amulet [i.e., the Gohonzon]. However, they should not place their seals on it.... Those at branch temples who have disciples and

lay patrons may transcribe the mandala [i.e., the Gohonzon] yet may not place their seal on it” (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 71).

Those Gohonzon transcribed by chief priests at the branch temples and without the transcriber’s written seal were considered temporary, conferred

Mr. Einosuke Akiya
President
Soka Gakkai

June 6, 1993

Dear Mr. Akiya:

The chain of events perpetrated by Nikken, including the arbitrary excommunication of the Soka Gakkai and, above all, the unspeakable injustice of terminating bestowal of Gohonzon upon its members, have filled me with a deep sense of indignation. Finally, in November 1992, after much soul-searching, I, as chief priest of Joen-ji temple [in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan] decided to secede from the head temple, Taiseki-ji.

Every deed and action of Nichiren Daishonin, the original Buddha, throughout his life was dedicated to kosen-rufu. His sole wish was to save all humankind. Thus, it deeply pains me to think how saddened and angered the Daishonin, who always displayed such infinite mercy and compassion toward his believers, would surely be if he learned that people’s seeking spirit toward faith was being denigrated and the flow of kosen-rufu obstructed. I firmly believe he would not tolerate such a situation.

There is nothing more terrible than the betrayal of the sacred intent of the founder, who

declared, “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity.” (MW-4, 272)

From the very first, I was deeply moved by the way in which the members of the Soka Gakkai, despite being unjustly denied the right to receive the Gohonzon by the head temple, have been advancing kosen-rufu in Japan and countries throughout the world with even greater vigor and energy than before, centering around SGI President Ikeda.

The Soka Gakkai members’ tenacious struggles to realize kosen-rufu only convinces me all the more that they genuinely practice correct faith and have a seeking spirit toward the Daishonin’s Buddhism. As such, no group of people is more qualified to pray before the Dai-Gohonzon that was bestowed by the Daishonin upon the entire world. Since the Daishonin’s Buddhism is dedicated to the realization of kosen-rufu, I have been filled with a fervent desire to lend my support and encouragement in some way to the members of the Soka Gakkai who are struggling with such sincerity and devotion to this cause.

Joan-ji temple, which was founded some 690 years ago, has among its treasures a Gohonzon transcribed (in 1720) by the 26th

high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nichikan Shonin. The existing situation in which Nikken has unjustly terminated the conferral of Gohonzon upon Soka Gakkai members convinced me that the best and most just course—as well as the course that, I feel, would win the approval of the Daishonin—would be to enable Soka Gakkai members to receive *okatagi* Gohonzon based on this Gohonzon. I have brought this matter before a meeting of my colleagues in the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu, where it was given unanimous approval. Hence, the reason for my tendering this proposal for your organization’s consideration.

If your organization should accept this proposal, nothing would give me greater joy. It is a proposal made solely on the basis of faith and inspired by my sincere wish to enable the members of the Soka Gakkai, who demonstrate such great seeking spirit toward the Daishonin’s Buddhism, to freely pray to the Gohonzon, for the furtherance of kosen-rufu.

Very truly yours,
Sendo Narita
Chief Priest
Joen-ji Temple



before believers received one transcribed by the high priest. By allowing chief priests to transcribe the Gohonzon, yet asking them not to affix their personal seals, Nichiu tried to accomplish two things: meeting the needs of believers who would not be able to receive Gohonzon otherwise, while maintaining order within the school regarding the transcription of the Gohonzon. Since Gohonzon transcribed by chief priests were considered temporary and usually without transcription date or name of a transcriber, not many of them survive today. Nonetheless, there are enough recorded instances to verify the Fuji School's practice of transcribing Gohonzon by priests other than the high priest. For example, according to Jundo Nose's *Miscellaneous Records* (Jpn Shokiroku), Nissho, the thirty-second

chief priest of Jakunichi-bo, a lodging temple on the head temple grounds, transcribed a Gohonzon for the parish of a Shinto shrine near the head temple in 1823 (vol. 7, p. 355). When Nissho transcribed this Gohonzon, the forty-ninth high priest Nisso and the retired forty-eighth high priest Nichiryō were residing at Taiseki-ji, so there was no immediate need for Nissho to transcribe a Gohonzon on behalf of the high priest. Nissho was a veteran priest at Taiseki-ji who served eight high priests, and he probably simply responded to a request from his local parish.

In 1860, Nichigen, a disciple of Nissho and the thirty-third chief priest of Jakunichi-bo, also transcribed a Gohonzon for one of his parishioners (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 7, p. 242). The dates and the transcribers' names for this Gohonzon appear on the back probably because it was customary that only the high priest place his seal on the Gohonzon. Both Nissho and his disciple Nichigen were high-ranking priests at Taiseki-ji but did not become high priests. Nevertheless, they still transcribed Gohonzon and conferred them to their parishioners.

There are also records of Gohonzon whose transcribers are unknown. Since the high priest customarily placed his seal on Gohonzon he transcribed, it is certain that these Gohonzon were transcribed by someone other than a high priest. In 1760, during the tenure of the thirty-third high priest Nichigen, someone other than the high priest transcribed a Gohonzon dedicated to a Shinto deity and kept it at Honjo-ji, a branch temple of Taiseki-ji (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 7, p. 226).

As a side note, during the eighteenth century, many Gohonzon were transcribed for Shinto shrines near Taiseki-ji and its other branch temples, supposedly to call forth the power of Shinto deities dwelling there. Often these Gohonzon, many of which were transcribed by high priests, were requested by lay parishioners for a Shinto shrine in their home village. Such parishioners rarely understood the tenets of the Daishonin's Buddhism concerning the Gohonzon, and incorporated into their beliefs aspects of Shintoism and other forms of Buddhism. The priests who transcribed Gohonzon for this purpose must surely have known this and that it violated the guidelines set down by Nikko, the founder of the Fuji School. One

Many Gohonzon were transcribed for Shinto shrines near Taiseki-ji.

such Gohonzon, for example, bears the inscription, “Bestowed to summon forth the body of the god of the Tenman Shrine.” Nevertheless, the doctrinal legitimacy of these “Shinto Shrine” Gohonzon was never questioned.

THERE were two Taiseki-ji priests who became chief priests of Myoren-ji, a prominent old temple of the Fuji School near Taiseki-ji, who transcribed Gohonzon for parishioners. On March 1, 1707, Nichiju, a disciple of the twenty-fourth high priest Nichiei, became the twenty-fourth chief priest of Myoren-ji. At that time, Nichiei still held office at Taiseki-ji. From that time until 1727, when Nichiju left his position at Myoren-ji, he continued to transcribe Gohonzon for his parishioners and the chief priests of branch temples that belonged to Myoren-ji. (Myoren-ji and its branch temples joined Nichiren Shoshu, under the head temple Taiseki-ji, in 1950. Before that, it was regarded as one of the eight head temples of the Fuji School that maintained its own branch temples. Taiseki-ji was also one of these eight.)

According to one source, Nichiju transcribed eleven Gohonzon while he was chief priest of Myoren-ji (*Ideas of the Fuji School* [Jpn Fuji Monryu Shiko], ed. Mitsuaki Osawa; no. 4, p. 9). During this time, Nichiei (24th), Nichiyu (25th), Nichikan (26th), Nichiyo (27th) and Nissho (28th) became high priests successively at Taseki-ji, but none of them criticized Nichiju for transcribing Gohonzon. Neither was Nichiju excommunicated by his teacher Nichiei. Even after he went to Myoren-ji, Nichiju maintained friendly ties with Taiseki-ji.

In 1727, when he retired, Nichiju appointed Nichiho, a Taiseki-ji priest and disciple of the twenty-seventh high priest Nichiyo, as chief priest of Myoren-ji. Between 1727 and 1732, Nichiho transcribed Gohonzon for his parishioners, for three of which records exist (*Ideas of the Fuji School*, ed. Mitsuaki

Osawa; no. 4, p. 10). After he left Myoren-ji, Nichiho returned to Taiseki-ji and became the ninth chief priest of Renzo-bo, one of the lodging temples on the head temple grounds. In 1736, the twenty-ninth high priest Nitto transferred the lineage of high priest to Nichiho, who then renamed himself Nitchu. There is no record of Nitchu being criticized for having transcribed Gohonzon before he received the lineage.

Nichiju and Nitchu demonstrate the Taiseki-ji priesthood’s view that the transcription and conferral of the Gohonzon is an administrative responsibility of priests. Myoren-ji, as a head temple, had to meet the needs of its own parish and branch temples.

UNDER circumstances similar to those of the thirtieth high priest, Nitchu, the nineteenth high priest Nisshun and the twenty-second high priest, whose name was also pronounced Nisshun (though spelled with different Chinese characters), both transcribed Gohonzon before they assumed the post of high priest. Earlier, the nineteenth high priest Nisshun became the chief priest of Taiseki-ji in the summer of 1641 without receiving the lineage of high priest from his predecessor, the eighteenth high priest Nissei. Nissei fell out of favor with Kyodai-in, an influential lay patron, which forced him out of office. With strong backing from Kyodai-in, Nisshun was selected as Nissei’s successor (*The Sacred Scriptures of Nichiren Shoshu* [Jpn Nichiren Shoshu Seiten], p. 763). (Editor’s note: Kyodai-in was an adopted daughter of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Edo shogunate government and widow of Hachisuka Yoshishige, a governor of Awa province in Shikoku Island.)

For approximately four years, though out of office, Nissei refused to transfer the lineage. Until he finally received the lineage of high priest from Nissei on October 27, 1645, Nisshun carried out various responsibilities—including the transcription and conferral of Gohonzon—as chief priest of Taiseki-ji, but not as

The current priesthood's claims against the Gohonzon issued by the SGI clearly contradict the precedents set down in the Fuji School's own history.

high priest of the school. There are two records of Gohonzon transcribed by Nisshun before he received the lineage of high priest. He transcribed one on January 8, 1645, and another on February 28 of the same year—approximately ten and eight months, respectively, before he received the lineage (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 2, p. 101; vol. 3, p. 104).

THE twenty-second high priest, also named Nisshun, received the lineage of high priest from the twenty-first high priest Nichinin in 1680 (*The Chronology of Nichiren Shoshu and the Fuji School* [Jpn Nichiren Shoshu Fuji Nenpyo], p. 257). In 1676, four years earlier, however, Nisshun transcribed a Gohonzon for the parish of Shinko-ji in the Chiba area (*Miscellaneous Records* [Jpn Shokiroku], vol. 7, p. 254). It is not certain where Nisshun was at that time, but he was not high priest of Taiseki-ji. Nisshun was the first Taiseki-ji priest who became a teacher at the Hosokusa Seminary in Chiba. Probably because of his reputation as an erudite priest, the parish of Shinko-ji near the seminary might have asked Nisshun to transcribe a Gohonzon.

In addition to the Gohonzon transcribed by persons other than the high priest, the school's history also reveals numerous records of ordinary priests reproducing the Daishonin's original Gohonzon as well as Gohonzon transcribed by some prominent high priests such as Nikko and Nichikan. In the process of reproduction, a priest would place the original beside the new reproduction and copy it as exactly as possible. Or the image would be traced on thin paper placed atop the original. An artisan would then use the copies made in this manner to carve a wooden Gohonzon, or a wood block template, from which further reproductions would be printed.

In February 1836, for example, Nikki, the chief priest of Butsugen-ji in Sendai, copied a Gohonzon

that Nikko had transcribed in 1303 and had a wooden Gohonzon made from the copy. He then removed a Gohonzon transcribed by the thirty-seventh high priest Nippo from the temple altar and enshrined this wooden Gohonzon in its place (*Miscellaneous Records* [Jpn Shokiroku], vol. 8, p. 215). While he described the process in writing on the back of the wooden Gohonzon, Nikki did not mention anything about receiving sanction from the high priest at Taiseki-ji to reproduce Nikko's Gohonzon or whether the high priest conducted an eye-opening ceremony on it. (At that time, the fiftieth high priest Nichijo and the retired forty-eighth high priest Nichiryō were present at Taiseki-ji.)

ACCORDING to *Miscellaneous Records*, while some wooden Gohonzon carry the high priest's signature, many others bear no such inscription or record. Furthermore, there is only one wooden Gohonzon in existence that bears a record of a high priest having performed an eye-opening ceremony upon it. This wooden Gohonzon was made after a Gohonzon transcribed by Nikko in 1306 (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 15, p. 445). Furthermore, in *Miscellaneous Records* and other documents, there are many records of Gohonzon reproduced through wood block printing whose templates were produced by those other than the successive high priests. These include Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin in 1282 and which were kept at Kyodai-ji in Tokushima Prefecture and widely distributed throughout Japan; Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon transcribed by Nikko in March 1306 and kept at Honko-ji in Shizuoka Prefecture and other temples; and Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan in 1718 and widely distributed during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The same 1718 Gohonzon

by Nichikan was also conferred upon Gakkai members after World War II. None of these *okatagi* Gohonzon bear the high priest's signature, indicating that their templates were transcribed by someone other than a high priest. Those numerous records indicate clearly that the high priest's sanction or eye-opening ceremony was not a necessary condition for the reproduction of Gohonzon.

SOME high priests of modern times have claimed that the lineage of high priest is an absolutely necessary condition for the transcription of the Gohonzon. For example, fifty-sixth high priest Nichio (1848–1922), states: “Unless one receives the bequeathal of the Golden Utterance to the direct successor, one can never transcribe the object of worship” (*Dispelling Illusion and Observing One's Mind* [Jpn Bennaku Kanjin Sho], p. 212, as translated in *Refuting the Soka Gakkai's “Counterfeit Object of Worship”: 100 Questions and Answers*, p. 29). Nichio's claim is either an indication of his ignorance of the school's history or a blatant attempt to revise the tradition for the sake of aggrandizing the high priest's authority. In light of the recorded history of the Fuji School, the high priest's prerogative over the transcription and conferral of the Gohonzon is merely an administrative device to maintain the orderly relationship between Taiseki-ji and its branch temples and thereby prevent internal schism. It was never meant as a doctrinal or metaphysical necessity. For this reason, there are abundant records of Gohonzon transcribed by priests without the lineage of high priest.

The current priesthood's claims against the Gohonzon issued by the SGI clearly contradict the precedents set down in the Fuji School's own history. Furthermore, the transcription from which this Gohonzon is derived was made by Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest recognized by both the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai as the “restorer of the Fuji School.” (For more discussions regarding the reproduction of the Gohonzon and its history, please refer to “A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon” and “The Recent History of the Conferral of the Gohonzon” in *Reaffirming Our Right to Happiness: On the Gohonzon Transcribed by High Priest Nichikan*, published by the SGI-USA in 1996.)

(3) The true meaning of the Gohonzon

WITH the priesthood's excommunication in 1991, the SGI was liberated from the priesthood's authoritarianism in several important areas. The SGI's decision to issue Gohonzon to its worldwide membership in 1993 freed the lay Buddhist movement from myths promulgated by the priesthood that shrouded the significance of the Gohonzon for a long time.

Before this epochal decision, the priesthood deliberately led lay believers to think that they must leave matters pertaining to the Gohonzon—especially transcription, printing and conferral—to the priesthood because they involve a level of mysticism beyond the grasp of ordinary practitioners. The priesthood's attitude toward the Gohonzon also promoted the view of the Gohonzon as an external entity endowed with mysterious powers that exert control over the lives of believers.

The SGI's conferral of Gohonzon, however, has helped to clarify correct faith in the Gohonzon. It is no longer a magical object, the understanding of which is veiled behind an alleged mysterious and exclusive heritage of an elite individual—the high priest. Meanwhile, the truly “mystic” quality of the Gohonzon has been made clear: that is, its power to call forth, in response to the believer's powers of faith and practice, the “Gohonzon”—the enlightened life-state of Buddhahood equal to that of the Daishonin—from within his or her life. As the Daishonin states: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone” (MW-1, 213). Put another way, from the viewpoint of SGI members, the Gohonzon has ceased to be an object of spiritual dependency and has become the genuine object of their religious devotion and practice as intended by the Daishonin—a mirror to reflect their own inner enlightenment.

To be continued.

Photos by J. Kirk Condyles



'Couldn't Sing To Save My Life!'

By Duncan Sheik, New York

Duncan Sheik's self-titled debut album went gold in 1996, selling more than 700,000 copies. One song, "Barely Breathing," was one of the longest charting songs in *Billboard* magazine history, and earned him a Grammy nomination. "All these visible rewards aren't so incredible in and of themselves. Lots of artists and bands break every year. But it is incredible in my case when you consider that, in 1990, when I began to practice in earnest and started helping out at the SGI-USA community center, I couldn't sing in public to save my life!"

I BEGAN practicing Buddhism in 1989 when I was 19 years old. I had been studying Eastern religions in college and reading people like Krishnamurti on my own, searching for a more profound view of life than the Catholicism I had been brought up with.

I went to visit Mari Gorman, my mother's cousin, in Los Angeles that summer of 1989. She had been a Buddhist for almost twenty years and, despite my protests that there was no one way to the truth, she quickly got me in front of the Gohonzon chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In fact, the first time I chanted for two hours. I might have kept going but Mari came back in the room, laughed and said, "That's probably good enough for today."

There were several reasons I let go of my skepticism at that moment. For one, though I was still in college, I wanted to begin my career as a musician and recording artist, and I felt a little bit at sea as to how to go about it. Also, earlier that year, I had become anxiety ridden. I felt like the world was upside down, and I had no place in it. Sometimes this feeling was debilitating, and I would have to leave in the middle of a class just to calm myself down. The genius of Buddhism, I later realized, is that, while not denying or avoiding the upside-down nature

of society, when you chant, it becomes clear that working to better yourself and your environment is in itself the road to happiness.

At a youth meeting in Boston in 1990 I agreed to help with some of the volunteer activities that ensure the safety and comfort of members at SGI-USA culture and commu-

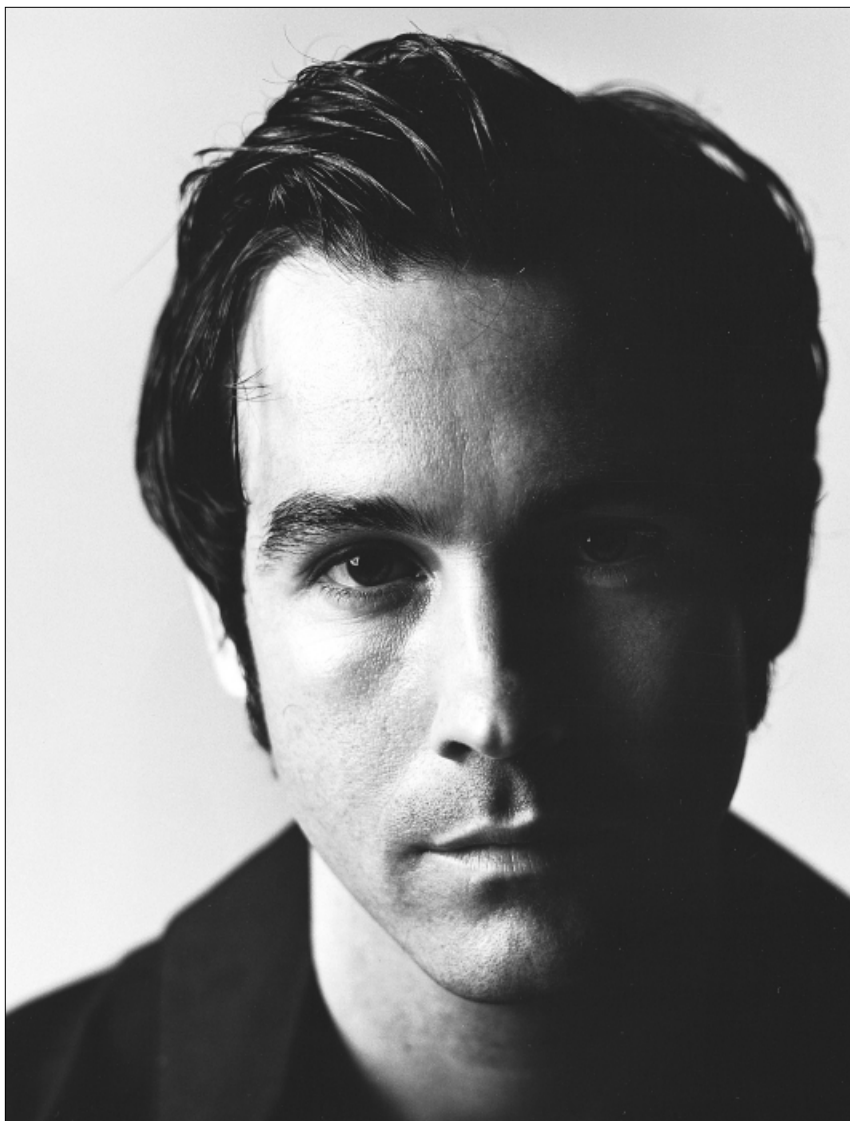
**I had
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nity centers. At first I was confused by the regimentation that seemed to contradict my understanding of Buddhism. I spent a lot of time worrying that my friends from college might see me wearing what I thought were ridiculous white outfits with horrible red polyester ties.

However, I continued to do those activities because I knew, somewhere deep inside, that it was an enormously positive thing to do. Without realizing it I was practicing for myself while practicing for others. I now know that this is the most effective way to practice Buddhism.

For the next five years I continued to volunteer my time and effort and sure enough, just as Nichiren Daishonin says, "unseen virtue" does bring about "visible rewards." The past three years of my life easily attest to this. I am a singer-songwriter and recording artist and I was signed to Atlantic records in 1995. After the success of my first album, I played on dozens of TV shows all over the world and toured the most fantastic places non-stop for more than two years. That success enabled me to set up my own recording studio and earned me the creative and financial freedom to record my second CD.

Although I have played guitar and keyboards for more than twenty years, I was self-conscious about my voice until very recently. One reason I started chanting was because I felt blocked creatively, and I hated the sound of my singing voice. When I began chanting I realized that I needed to sing and to communicate to people through my voice and my songs—and not just make instrumental music for my own listening



Says Duncan, "The SGI spirit to never give up, fighting until you win, seeped into my life."

life-force and making it flow energetically within one's own life. Actual practice brings out the Buddhahood dormant in the depths of our lives. By this I mean actual practice in the nine states of real life for they are the field in which Buddhahood operates as an active force.

THESE kinds of ideas, coupled with the SGI spirit to never give up, fighting until you win, seeped into my life. It gave me the courage to get up on stage, even when I felt really uncomfortable, and the strength to change my voice into something I could use by working hard on my technique. And that's the other part of the story—you have to take action, continuously! Just sitting there chanting, without taking action, is obviously just wishing on a star. That was a tough lesson for someone as inherently lazy as me.

Speaking of stars, I read something recently about star formation that intrigued me. The theory was that a star is born when a cloud of dust and gas is given sufficient time, peace and quiet to start its own gravitational collapse,

pleasure. Without the philosophy of Buddhism to give me hope and to galvanize me, I may well have resigned myself to my fears of not being a good-enough singer. There certainly seemed to be hurdles in front of me that I could not jump, and there were many times between 1990 and 1995 when I thought nothing would ever happen with my dream of making records.

But, of course, I was chanting a lot to be able to realize my dream,

doing a lot of activities at the culture center, and reading everything by SGI President Ikeda I could get my hands on. I particularly love his book *Life, an Enigma, a Precious Jewel* in which he states:

The fundamental way to establish Buddhahood as the basis of one's life is simply to practice Buddhism in everyday life and conduct. Continuous, tenacious practice of Buddhism is the means of absorbing the cosmic

**Our ultimate goal in our practice of this
Buddhism is to create value and help the
people around us overcome suffering.
We are only able to show the power of
Buddhism when we ourselves overcome the
obstacles that constantly arise.**

and it ultimately ends up imploding into a bright young star.

Recently, astrophysicists have discovered that, near the black hole at the center of our galaxy, stars are forming quickly and furiously where they thought stars would never have the peace and quiet to form. In fact, it seems that the intense bombardment of energy around a black hole actually whacks the would-be stars into advanced stages of development, speeding along the process greatly. This sounded to me like what it is like to practice Buddhism. One's life grows very bright, not despite adversity but because of it. Because of fear, I couldn't sing a note, and I had a pessimistic view of my future and the world. By chanting to overcome those obstacles, my faith deepened and I became stronger. Now it seems to me that the power of abundant prayer, coupled with the good fortune one earns doing Buddhist activities, along with constant determined action, is an unbeatable combination.

Last year I flew to Spain with an incredible group of musicians to record my second album, which would come to be called *Humming*. It was a truly joyous experience.

After recording string arrangements in London and mixing in Los Angeles, it was completed in August. I am really proud of it. What I am now realizing, however, is that the struggle must always continue. I don't think one attains Buddhahood and then just coasts through the rest of life with a big grin.

IN my case, despite the great critical praise *Humming* has earned, I'm having to work harder than ever to actually sell it to people! And it's made me ask many questions about what kind of music I want to make and what kind of artist I want to be: Should I make music completely on my own terms, or should I be thinking to please an audience? Now that I've found a voice how do I use it?

This brings me to my last point. Our ultimate goal in our practice of this Buddhism is to create value and help the people around us overcome whatever suffering they may be experiencing. We are only able to show the power of Buddhism when we ourselves overcome the obstacles that constantly arise when we try to create value. If there were no obstacles to overcome, there would be no

way to show the power inherent in Buddhist practice. This is a lesson I'm still learning.

The fact is that there is enormous room for improvement in the world we live in. It is filled with ideas and philosophies that are, at best, not very helpful and, at worst, dangerous and the cause of much suffering. Recently I began to feel like my practice had become a bit self-involved, I didn't feel like I was practicing for others in any direct way. I chanted about this and, with an uncanny immediacy, I was contacted by the head of Warchild USA. Warchild is an organization that gets children out of harm's way in war-torn countries or dangerous neighborhoods. Their ideals mirror those of the SGI in that their ultimate goal is to eradicate the very idea of war in the twenty-first century. I am currently committed to visiting refugee camps in Albania where I hope to focus on encouraging children thru my music. I am amazed at how quickly one's prayers are answered with the Gohonzon.

And I am truly grateful to be a part of this incredible group of bodhisattvas, the SGI. □

SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA, ALISO VIEJO



Cornerstone Laid for SUA, Aliso Viejo Library

ON May 3, 1999, the cornerstone for the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Library was laid on the campus of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, Calif. Founded by Daisaku Ikeda, the four-year liberal arts college will be dedicated on May 3, 2001. (The SUA graduate school in Calabasas, Calif., was opened in 1994.)

Among the 700 participants were representatives from surrounding cities and county, and musical groups including

those composed of local school children.

A message from the founder to commemorate the occasion reads in part:

If we desire to live a truly humane life, advancing toward happiness together with our fellow members of humankind, then I am convinced that the only recourse left to us is education. Education founded on the bedrock of the noble ideals of humanism may be considered a truly sacred undertaking that serves the innermost needs of the individual,

of nations and, indeed, of the entire world.

Among the speakers was the dean of faculty, Dr. Gail Thomas, a Fulbright scholar and previously on the faculty at Texas A&M University. Her address follows:

The Role of Educators Is To Bring Out the Creative Power in Students

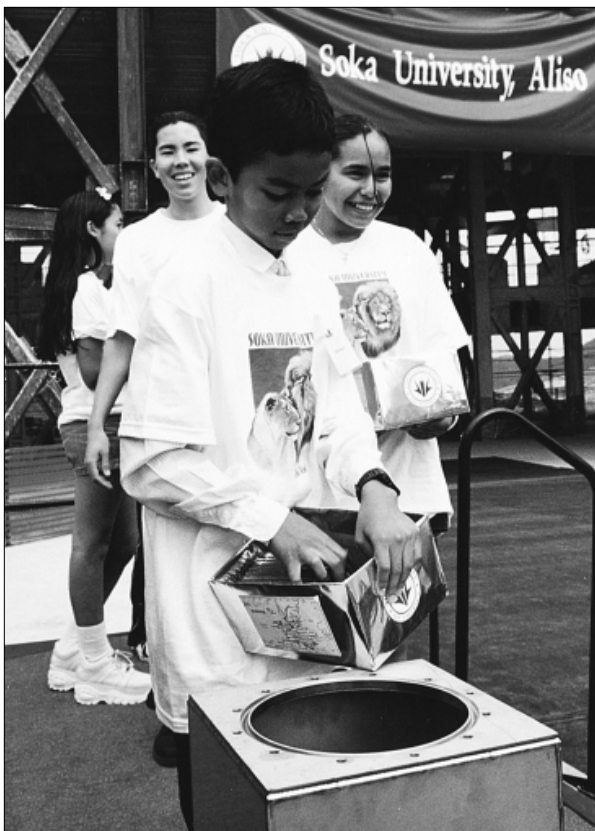
IWANT to briefly share my vision of the role and commitment of Soka University faculty.

Dr. Gail Thomas, dean of faculty, speaks at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the SUA, Aliso Viejo library. "Our major focus will always be on students. Our faculty will be committed to both teaching and mentoring students.... As faculty we will strive to exhibit patience, persistence, courage, compassion and affection in teaching."

Our major focus will always be on students and on creating and maintaining a student-centered environment. Our faculty will be committed to both teaching and mentoring students. We will teach in small groups and classes with a student/faculty ratio of 9:1.

Teaching and learning will be highly interactive and dialogue based. This will allow us to get to know students—and our students to get to know us.

My expectation is that Soka faculty will be committed life-long learners. We will be learning from our students, from one another, and from you, our community.



The founder of our university, Mr. Daisaku Ikeda, has said that "the role of educators is to bring out the creative power latent in students." Therefore, we will work to evoke creativity from our students. To do this, we must and will be creative ourselves.

We must and will be committed to constant renewal and continuous professional and personal development. In addition, as faculty we will strive to exhibit patience, persistence, courage, compassion and affection in teaching, mentoring and learning from our students.

Soka faculty will assist students in finding meaning to enhance their lives and those of others. Thus, in addition to nurturing and fostering academic excellence, we will work to enhance and foster personal and civic responsibility among students.

Students from local schools place coins from each of the countries that comprise the United Nations in a time capsule that will be sealed at the university's opening May 3, 2001.



(left) The 103-acre Aliso Viejo campus and surrounding community with the library at center, far left.

(Below) The view from the Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park.



It is also important that our students become global citizens. Therefore, each student will study a foreign language for three years and will participate in an internship abroad for a semester. The fee for this will be included in their tuition.

Our students will also work in "learning clusters." These will be small groups directed

by one or two faculty members in which students will pursue research or some service activity with faculty. Faculty will also engage in collaborative or team teaching. This will give students multiple views and approaches to subjects.

In conclusion, we envision that Soka faculty, staff and students will become a model of

diversity and harmony. Our goal is to become a real community that can educate and equip students with the ability to assist us in expanding our humanism and in deriving greater benefit and appreciation from our diversity and from what we commonly share.

Today, more than ever, I believe we need the kind of young people who can help us improve our world and assist in finding solutions to our human and social problems.

Our founder, Mr. Ikeda, noted that whether youth have the ability to improve society depends on the attitudes and behavior of the men and women who educate them.

To this end, we pledge as Soka faculty to model personal and professional excellence and to be an example of what we expect Soka students and graduates to be. Thank you! □

Student applications will be accepted in spring 2000. For more information, call (949) 472-3051 or e-mail Wendy Harder at wwharder@soka.edu.

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Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo



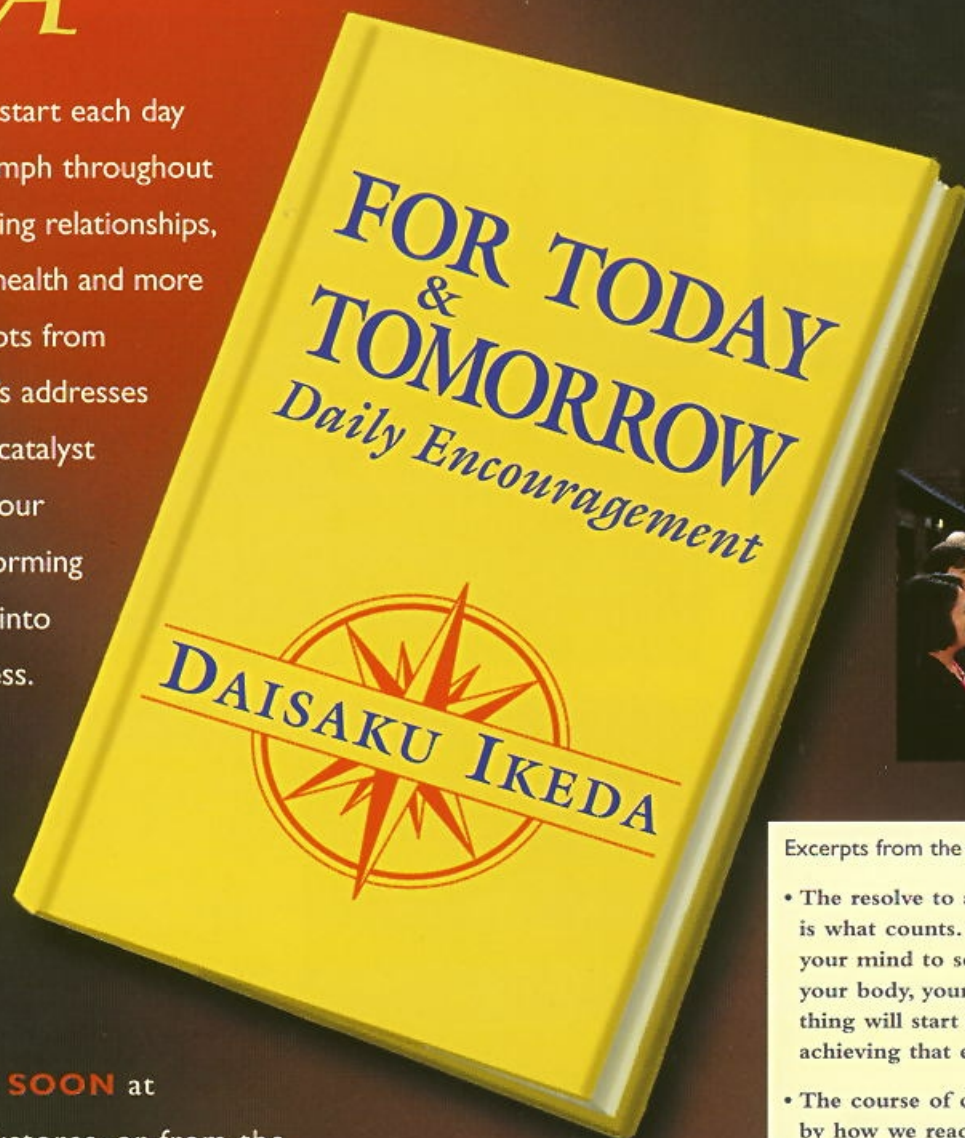
(From lower right, clockwise) An artist's rendering of SUA, Aliso Viejo campus. At the cornerstone-laying celebration: African drum group Adaawe; the cornerstone with (from left) Steve Davis from Summit Architects, Norman Pfeiffer from Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates, architects, Frank Foellmer from contractors Swinerton and Walberg, Orange County Supervisor Tom Wilson, president of SUA Daniel Habuki, a local student, Dean of Faculty Gail Thomas and Vice President for Academic Affairs Eric Hauber; some of the more than 700 participants; the campus as it looked on May 3, two years before opening.



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JUNE 1999



THE GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOTUS SUTRA
THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF THE FUJI SCHOOL: THE SGI'S CONFERRAL OF GOHONZON

NEW ENGLAND CULTURE CENTER



Hundreds of volunteers worked to remodel the SGI-USA New England Culture Center, which opened February 7. The 20,000-square-foot building was originally completed in 1933 as the Hovey Memorial Hall. In its heyday, townspeople gathered for lectures, education programs and a variety of civic functions. Among those who have given speeches there is the late governor of Massachusetts and U.S. president, John F. Kennedy.

Now the building has been returned to pristine condition for the members in the New England area. The center's auditorium can seat 1,100 and is constructed like an amphitheater. A new teal curtain frames the stage's proscenium arch, which overlooks a polished parquet floor.

In his message to the opening, SGI President Ikeda said: "I sincerely hope that this center will be a beacon of the New American Renaissance, sending many capable people into society with the message of hope and peace."