

# living BUDDHISM

August • 1999

Vol. 3 • No. 8

*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:** Children in front of mural at Tenderloin Community School, San Francisco, by Kingmond Young

LIVING BUDDHISM (USPS 385-750) (ISSN: 1093-5169)

Formerly Seikyo Times. Published monthly by SGI-USA Publications, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Monica, CA 90401, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster—send address changes and returns to *Living Buddhism*, SGI-USA Subscriptions, P.O. Box 1427, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1427. Copyright© 1999 SGI-USA. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription rate: \$50.00 per year, \$90.00 for two years, \$125.00 for three years. RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED.

# GLOSSARY

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

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

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

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

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

**karma:** Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny each individual creates through thoughts,

words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

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

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

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

**Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82):** The founder

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

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

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

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

The SGI-USA applies Buddhist principles through a nationwide network of grass-roots activities centering primarily on neighborhood discussion groups. Learn more about the SGI-USA, or find a discussion group in your area by calling our national office in Santa Monica, CA: (310) 260-8900. Check out our Web page at <http://www.sgi-usa.org>

# THE TRUE IMAGE OF BUDDHISM

The other day, I was thumbing through a magazine about Buddhism I found on the newsstand. The images it contained were of mostly Asian men in robes with shaved heads—monks or priests of various Buddhist groups. This, I reminded myself, is the image that most Americans have of Buddhism.

Buddhism is essentially a teaching of equality that is open to all people. Shakyamuni of India broke social convention by inviting into his religious order members of all classes of society. Under the Indian caste system, where people were strictly bound to the social class of their ancestors, the highest class was that of the Brahmins or Hindu priests. The lowest were the outcastes, the "untouchables," who did society's dirty work and were shunned.

Shakyamuni invited all people—from outcastes to the Brahmin nobility—to gather with him and practice the way to enlightenment. The sutras make it clear that he discriminated not in the least within his order as to the class or function of his followers. Brahmins who had embraced the Buddha's teachings were no more capable or qualified to attain Buddhahood than were those of any social rank.

Buddhism thus began not as a religious institution of monks and temples, but as a movement of all kinds of people. It was at once a religious order and a lay movement. Shakyamuni himself never resided permanently in a temple, nor declared a successor or specified a lineage of priests to succeed him. Shortly before his death he simply admonished all his fol-

lowers to work diligently together toward their salvation. He was constantly on the move, reaching out to and talking with the people. Only India's intense rainy season kept him inside.

Even in the sutras, lay practitioners are lauded for their wisdom and sincerity. The Vimalakirti Sutra depicts a lay person who is so wise and venerable, even Shakyamuni's most senior disciples hesitated to engage him. The message here is that sincerity, practice, faith and wisdom are what make one a Buddhist, not title or specific role within the Buddhist community or even mastery of Buddhist theory. The rise of monks and temples to central authority in Buddhism happened only after Shakyamuni's death, with monastic Buddhism becoming institutionalized in India, China and elsewhere many centuries later.

In thirteenth-century Japan, only those who became priests had access to education. Hungry for knowledge, Nichiren Daishonin became tonsured at a very young age. In the reality of his time, only by becoming a priest could he expose himself to the Buddhist writings by which he explained the core of his teachings. But unlike other priests of his day, he readily shared those teachings in great detail with ordinary lay practitioners.

In the course of his studies, the Daishonin perceived that what existed in Japan in his day was a formalized, ritualized or authoritarian remnant of what Buddhism was supposed to be. Priests, like the Brahmins of Shakyamuni's time, were a venerated

class in Japanese society. The Daishonin roundly criticized the most respected of his contemporary priests for their arrogance, doctrinal error and dishonesty. As a result, he was persecuted not only by those priests, but by the authorities who patronized them.

The Daishonin entrusted the future of his movement not only to his priest disciples but to lay followers. In his letter "The Property of Rice," he tells Takahashi Nyudo, a lay believer, "I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 151). And to Abutsu-bo, who lived on Sado Island, he writes: "Abutsu-bo, you deserve to be called a leader of this northern province. Could it be that Bodhisattva Jyogyo was reborn into this world as Abutsu-bo and visited me? How marvelous! It is beyond my power to understand why you have such pure faith!" (MW-1, 31). In addition, he left many of his most important writings to Toki Jonin, a lay believer who worked diligently to preserve them for posterity.

Among the six senior priests to whom the Daishonin left his teachings, only Nikko maintained his faith and exerted himself as his master had wished. The other five, seeking acceptance from the religious establishment and the government, downplayed their ties with the Daishonin. They even went so far as to destroy some of the letters he had addressed to his followers, feeling them uncomplimentary due to the common language they contained.

Nikko and his successor, Nichimoku, lived out their lives practicing and carrying on the Daishonin's spirit and teachings. Yet after them, squabbles over who was in authority broke out at the head temple and persisted for many decades. Over the centuries, while reformers such as Nichiu (the 9th high priest) and Nichikan (the 26th high priest) appeared, the Daishonin's spirit all but disappeared from the head temple.

By the time Tsunesaburo Makiguchi encountered the Daishonin's Buddhism in the early 20th



century Nichiren Shoshu had become one of the smallest and poorest of Buddhist denominations in Japan. Makiguchi was a humanistic educator who feared nothing. He had already experienced government repression for his educational policies, which challenged those of the militarist regime. Studying the Daishonin's writings, his heart and mind resonated with the

courage and compassion of the Daishonin. And when the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu ordered Makiguchi to instruct members of the fledgling Soka Gakkai to support Japan's war effort—to enshrine an amulet to the Shinto Sun Goddess—he refused. Though a lay practitioner, he directly challenged the views of the high priest, as well as the military authorities, regarding Buddhism. His stance led to his arrest and imprisonment and eventually to his death in prison as a martyr to his convictions. Nichiren Shoshu, on the other hand, sought to distance itself from Makiguchi and Toda to avoid government oppression.

Thus, even in this century, it was a lay person who, as the Daishonin's Buddhism was threatened, acted as the Daishonin himself would have: absolutely unafraid to lay down his life when it came to protecting Buddhism and thus the right to happiness of ordinary people. And it was Makiguchi's lay successors Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda who were the first to spare no effort or energy in spreading the Daishonin's teachings throughout Japan and the world. Both of weak health, they literally risked their lives to do so.

The significance of a lay religious movement is not foreign to America. The spirit of equality, democracy, self-determination and free enterprise upon which our country is founded has its roots in an essentially lay religious revolution—the Protestant Reformation. The energy of this reform was directed against the authoritarianism of the medieval Church, its hierarchy of priests and the inhumane tyranny of monarchs who colluded in its power. Fighting this battle, both in the religious and

secular realms, helped root the spirit of freedom and the institution of democracy in the soil of Europe. Many of those who settled in America had been engaged in this struggle in England and inherited its spirit, and this contributed in no small way to the founding of our nation.

As the Protestant reformers sought to rekindle the original spirit of Christianity, we of the SGI seek to reestablish the original supremely humanistic spirit of Buddhism. To do this, we must work to change the commonly held image of Buddhism from that of a religion that can be mastered only by monks and priests to a vital and dynamic philosophy whose full benefit is accessible to everyone.

In fact, society is beginning to recognize that we have been doing just that. Recently a number of books about Buddhism in America have appeared that attest to the important role we as a lay movement play, not only in sharing the teachings of Buddhism, but in contributing to the important goals of peace and education. In commenting on our movement, for example, religious scholar Jane Hurst, in a chapter she contributed to the book *The Faces of Buddhism in America* (University of California Press, 1998) writes: "This is a creative and dynamic time for the Soka Gakkai as it enters its most productive years for putting faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism into practice by working for peace, culture and education. As they have long taught, SGI members see this as a personal challenge that has global effects."

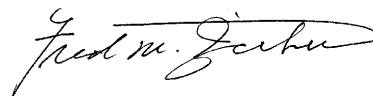
In Chinese, the term for a Buddhist priest or monk literally means "one who has left home." The term for a lay practitioner means "one who remains home." In other words, the original image of a monk is one who has severed family ties and renounced a normal livelihood to devote him- or herself to the study and practice of Buddhism and to the salvation of others. Such personal sacrifice at one time earned monks a degree of respect. Lay persons retained their family and work responsibilities while applying the principles of Buddhism to and within their daily reality.

Today, however, in Japan in particular, priests of most Japanese Buddhist denominations marry and

have children. And in many schools, including Nichiren Shoshu, there are no restrictions on diet or the consumption of alcohol. Moreover, unlike in the past or in other Buddhist countries, most Buddhist priests in Japan are relatively prosperous in terms of personal income. Few distinctions remain between the lifestyles of priests and lay persons. Yet today it is the members of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI who constantly "leave the home" to engage in activities to promote kosen-rufu and to encourage and support others in their efforts to become happy.

We of the SGI, witnessing the behavior of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under Nikken these past nearly nine years, have had a unique opportunity, I feel. We have seen and experienced the power of Buddhism as a movement by and for lay persons. We have come to learn that the essence of what it means to be a Buddhist lies neither in title nor job description nor dress nor education. It has little to do with our specific role or assignment in the Buddhist community. It is rather in our sincerity and behavior, exactly as Nichiren Daishonin taught when he wrote: "What does Bodhisattva Fukyo's [Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's] profound respect for people signify? The real meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha's appearance in this world lay in his behavior as a human being. How profound!" (MW-2, 281) It is now up to us to create, through our own behavior, a clear and accurate image of what it means to be a Buddhist in the hearts and minds of all who know us.

In a sense, transforming the popular misperception of Buddhism into this essential image is one of the most important tasks we face. Only by winning in this endeavor can we ensure that our movement does not lapse into formalism or lose its "profound respect for people."



Fred M. Zaitse  
SGI-USA General Director

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# Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (6)

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The teaching of  
*sunyata*:  
non-substantiality

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*Overcoming  
selfishness  
helps you find a  
world of new  
possibilities within!*

Have you seen the patterns formed by sand dunes? Depending on the size and shape of the sand grains, the direction of the winds and the surface features of the land, shifting sands can form myriad dune patterns. The scaly or wavy patterns are constantly changing. Just like those ever-shifting sand patterns, everything around us (ourselves included) is constantly changing. And like dunes of sand, how things or people change is a function of their relations with their surroundings.

Nagarjuna, the Buddhist teacher believed to have lived in India sometime around the late second century and the early third century, expounded the teaching of *sunyata* (Jpn *ku*), which is variously translated as non-substantiality, void or emptiness. He developed the concept of non-substantiality from Shakyamuni's principle of dependent origination (Skt *pratityasamutpada*; Jpn *engi*).

Nagarjuna asserted that since everything arises and continues to exist by virtue of its relationship with other phenomena (i.e., dependent origination), it has absolutely no fixed or independent substance of its own (i.e., non-substantiality). Viewed from this perspective, there is nothing that cannot be changed. Nothing exists entirely on its own, and no form is absolute and immutable. The universe, then, is full of new situations at every moment.

This open-ended nature of the universe also applies to human beings. Our lives are full of new possibilities for the future. It all depends upon how we view ourselves—how well we recognize these possibilities—and what kind of relationship we create with our surroundings.

According to the perspective of non-substantiality, everything changes not only in its appearance or shape but also in its nature or meaning. A raft, for example, may be useful for a traveler to cross a river. But it would be foolish for him to carry the raft a long distance after crossing the river. The raft then becomes a heavy burden, an obstacle to his journey. In this sense, the concept of non-substantiality suggests that it is foolish for us to base our lives on and grow attached to things that we possess, such as wealth or position. Like the raft, they are only of immediate value, and attachment to them can even become a burden on our journey toward self-perfection. And from the standpoint of eternity, they are nothing at all.

The important thing is that we create a positive relationship with our ever-shifting surroundings at every moment and thereby create value. If we base our lives on the belief that there is permanent value and meaning in money or social status, our expectation will be miserably betrayed sooner or later. For example, we would be endangering ourselves if we were to cling to a bundle of dollar bills rather than a jug of water when walking across a desert. If we attach ourselves to material wealth while ignoring our spiritual well-being, we will eventually become miserable as well. At the same time, if we develop the ability to utilize material wealth to support our happiness and to benefit others, neither shunning it nor enslaving



ourselves to it, our lives can be more fulfilling.

Nagarjuna's concept of non-substantiality points out that there is no absolute value—good or evil—assigned to the things or events in our lives. Their meanings are essentially what we make of them. No matter how painful or unfortunate an event we may encounter, we can still create a positive meaning from it, depending upon how we view it and what we do about it. Our views and resulting actions, however, are determined not merely by our intellectual understanding but by our essential consciousness or the state of our innermost being. This is where our practice of Buddhism can effect positive change.

The concept of non-substantiality also helps us discover within us a world of new possibilities. Sometimes we limit our potential, thinking that we will remain the way we are forever. "This is something that I was born with. It'll never change!" As the concept of non-substantiality illustrates, however, nothing is exactly the same from one moment to the next. As much as things may get worse, they may also get better. Changing our lives for the better is therefore always possible, and it is always up to us. In this sense, putting limitations on ourselves amounts to living under the illusion that our present self-image is a fixed reality. In reality, it is non-substantial and changeable.

Probably the most important implication of the teaching of non-substantiality is that we do not exist entirely on our own. The meaning of our lives—and our happiness—arises through our interconnectedness with those around us, with the community and world in which we live. An analogy used to describe this principle in Buddhism is that of two bundles of reeds that remain standing as long as they are leaning on each other. The implication is that there is no fundamental distinction between our happiness and that of others. To fall under the illusion that we are independent of others is to alienate ourselves from the world around us. This kind of selfishness becomes self-defeating. The concept of non-sub-

stantiality teaches that all things, including our lives, exist as they are only in the context of their relations with other phenomena. Nothing has an independent substance of its own. For instance, a human being in the vacuum of space will be quickly transformed into a lifeless mass—scorched to coal on one side by the direct rays of the sun and frozen on the other. Without air and water and other forms of life to provide nourishment, a human being will die. And in our modern world, few of us could easily survive without the system of commerce that surrounds us, which includes transportation, food distribution, etc. Many people are involved in these endeavors and all of us depend on them. To fail to recognize and appreciate this due to an illusion of independent identity will cause imbalance and unhappiness.

Isolated, our lives lose meaning. But depending upon how we relate to others and our environment, we can realize the infinite potential we possess and our own value to the world around us. In this sense, the most unfortunate are those who withdraw to the prison of their own self-centeredness and lock the door from the inside by insisting that their lives are fundamentally separate. In an ironic reversal of intent, those who seek absolute value in their own existence while ignoring the happiness of others are, in fact, voiding their lives of meaning and substance. With the absence of such relationships, all that remains is "non-substantiality" or "emptiness."

In the final analysis, the concept of non-substantiality is a teaching through which we awaken compassion and transcend our selfish ego so that we may actively engage with others. When we view the happiness of others as our own and extend them genuine care, our lives transform themselves from "emptiness" to "substance." In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin states: "To dwell in the seat of non-substantiality is to practice with selfless dedication" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 737). As the Daishonin succinctly explains here, when we live for the sake of others' happiness with selfless dedication, we are putting the teaching of non-substantiality into action. As noted Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura explains, Nagarjuna himself esteemed and upheld the values of "thankfulness" and "the ideal of the bodhisattva."<sup>1</sup> He saw the importance of realizing the interconnectedness of all lives as well as of expressing appreciation and compassion in altruistic action. The concept of non-substantiality suggests that selflessness may be the shortest path to meaningful selfhood. □

*By Shin Yatomi, Associate Editor  
based on the book Yasashi Kyogaku  
(Easy Study), Tokyo: Seikyo Press*

1. Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers: 1987, p. 252.

# THE COURAGE TO RESPECT ALL PEOPLE:

## Learning from Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

By Shin Yatomi,  
SGHUSA Vice Study Department Leader

### Introduction

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*“I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” (The Lotus Sutra, trans. Burton Watson, p. 267). With these words, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Jpn Fukyo) goes among the people, trying to awaken them to their innate potential for enlightenment. In return, he is met with hostility and abuse, both verbal and physical. In spite of this, however, the bodhisattva perseveres in his practice of showing respect to all people. He eventually attains enlightenment, not only for himself, but also leading everyone he has come in contact with toward happiness.*

*As we live in society where intolerance and abuse are increasingly the norm, the behavior of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, described in the Lotus Sutra, offers a concrete guide for our daily living. How can we develop our humanity in an increasingly inhuman society? How can we respond to and transform a hostile environment? The “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter of the Lotus Sutra sheds light on these important questions.*

1

#### **Background: The “heart” of our Buddhist practice**

The Lotus Sutra’s twentieth chapter, titled “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging,” is in the closing section of the Lotus Sutra, known as the “transmission” portion. Sutras are often interpreted as having three parts: preparation, revelation and transmission. Preparation points to the introductory passages in which the reason for expounding the sutra is clarified. Revelation is the discussion of the sutra’s main teaching.

Transmission, the concluding portion, explains the benefit of the sutra and encourages its transmission into the future. The Lotus Sutra’s transmission section is said to begin with the latter half of the “Distinction in Benefits” (17th) chapter and extend through the last chapter “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (28th), and through the Sutra of Meditation of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, which is considered an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra. A part of the sutra’s transmission section, the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter explains both the benefit that

accrues from spreading the Lotus Sutra and the retribution that befalls those who abuse its practitioners.

The significance of the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter, however, lies not merely in its belonging to the sutra’s transmission section. Its portrayal of the attitude and behavior of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging contains the chapter’s real message in that these serve as a model for practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. His spirit and actions embody the essence of the sutra—humanism based on an absolute respect for the inherent dig-

nity of all people. In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin explains: “The heart of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is expounded in the *Fukyo* [“Never Disparaging”] chapter. What does Bodhisattva Fukyo’s profound respect for people signify? The real meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance in this world lay in his behavior as a human being. How profound!” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed], p. 240).

**2 Who is Bodhisattva Never Disparaging?**

The following is a brief synopsis of the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter: In the distant past, when the teaching of the Buddha Awesome Sound King was beginning to fall into formality and decline, a certain bodhisattva appeared and started to practice the Buddha’s teaching. At that time, people practiced Buddhism, but they had lost sight of its purpose and meaning. Furthermore, “monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power” (LS20, 266). The bodhisattva, unswayed by these circumstances, firmly believed that all people have the Buddha nature. So whenever he saw people, he said to them: “I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood” (LS20, 266-67). Because the bodhisattva always repeated those words, people mockingly called him “Never Disparaging”

(LS20, 267). They “spoke ill of him and cursed him, saying, ‘This ignorant monk—where does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestowing on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!’” (LS20, 267). Some “would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him” (LS20, 267). But Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did not quit his practice and attained enlightenment, receiving the benefit of purifying the six senses. Those who persecuted him invited hellish suffering for lifetime after lifetime. But after eradicating their past offenses through eons of suffering, they eventually met the bodhisattva once again and, with his instruction, attained Buddhahood.

**3 Practicing humanism in the real world**

The circumstances surrounding Bodhisattva Never Disparaging are similar to our present circumstances in some significant respects. Furthermore, the bodhisattva’s ideas and actions provide us with valuable insights into how we can practice Buddhism today. I would like to discuss nine key points in this regard:

**1. In a time of corrupt religious authority, true Buddhist practice means directly and forthrightly speaking the truth.**

One reason why the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter is useful as a guide to our

practice today is that the circumstances under which the bodhisattva practiced are strikingly similar to ours. The sutra describes the time in which the story is set as follows: “After the original Awesome Sound King Thus Come One had passed into extinction, and after his Correct Law had also passed away, in the period of his Counterfeit Law, monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power” (LS20, 266).

It was a time long after the Buddha’s passing; it was a time of confusion with regard to the teachings of Buddhism. The Buddha’s correct teaching was obscured, and instead, people practiced a “Counterfeit Law,” that is, a formalistic or ritualistic remnant of the Buddha’s teaching. The sutra explains that it was “monks of overbearing arrogance” who contributed to the decline of Buddhism. Ignorant of the purpose and intent of Buddhism and manipulated by the religious authorities, people were unable to grasp the essence of Buddhist practice and devoted themselves to it in vain. In such a time of confusion and corruption, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appeared and declared the ultimate truth of Buddhism—the existence of Buddhahood in all people, and thus the equality and dignity of all people.

Ours is a time when the “Correct Law” of the Daishonin’s Buddhism is obscured and “monks of overbearing arrogance” exert their influence. The Daishonin, therefore, explains that we should spread Buddhism in the present Latter Day

of the Law following the example set by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, saying “The method of propagation is also exactly the same both at the end of the Buddha Ionno’s [Awesome Sound King] Middle Day and now at the beginning of the Latter Day” (“On the Buddha’s Prophesy,” MW-1, 113). The Daishonin encourages us to do the same as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did in his day—to speak the truth of Buddhism against the wishes of corrupt religious authority.

## 2. Self-identity is defined by action

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s real name is not known. His was a nickname given by those who held him in contempt

because he always repeated the words, “I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” (LS20, 267). His name is significant in this regard. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni asks the assembly: “For what reason was he named Never Disparaging?” (ibid., p. 266). Our name identifies us. Here the sutra indicates that the identity of a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is ultimately determined by that person’s actions. This is consistent with the long tradition of Buddhism emphasizing one’s actions, rather than one’s status or wealth, as the essence of his or her identity.

One of the earliest Buddhist verses attributed to Shakyamuni reads: “A man becomes not a Brahmin by long hair or family or

birth. The man in whom there is truth and holiness, he is in joy and he is a Brahmin” (*The Dhammapada*, Penguin 1973, p. 90). A Brahmin is a member of the highest or priestly caste among the Hindus. Brahmins, or Brahmans, were considered the noblest class of Indian society. Shakyamuni’s message here is that a person becomes noble not because of status or image, but because of action. Similarly, if we wish to identify ourselves with Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, we may do so only in terms of our actions—recognizing and respecting the Buddha nature inherent in all people. Our actions—thoughts, speech and deeds—determine who we are. After all, what we consider “self” is nothing other than the totality of our accumulated



“I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” With these words, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging goes among the people, trying to awaken them to their innate potential for enlightenment.

Illustrations by Larry Ashton

*karma*. And karma means “action”—our thoughts words and deeds. We are therefore fundamentally free to shape our identity exactly in the way we want to. Our Buddhist practice provides a powerful tool for creating and defining our self. We refer to the process though which we accomplish this as our “human revolution.”

**3. The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to attain Buddhahood**

Why do we practice Buddhism? The simplest questions are often the most important and the most difficult to answer. When Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appeared in the time of the “Counterfeit Law” of Buddha Awesome Sound King, though Buddhism was widely known, people had completely lost a sense of purpose in their Buddhist practice. People’s confusion about Buddhism is aptly demonstrated in their remarks to the bodhisattva: “This ignorant monk—where does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestowing on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!” (LS20, 267). Their responses are absurd in the sense that they are the very antithesis of the purpose of Buddhism.

People were deluded by clerical authority to believe that they should practice without ever expecting to attain enlightenment. Not attaining Buddhahood (*or remaining dependent upon religious authority*), therefore, became their goal or their accustomed state of Buddhist prac-

tice. The bodhisattva’s notion of practicing Buddhism to become a Buddha appeared strange or even blasphemous enough to persecute him for uttering such an idea. We practice Buddhism to reveal ourselves as Buddhas, that is, to be absolutely happy, unswayed by any circumstances. When people become confused about this fundamental purpose of Buddhism, they inevitably fall into a state of spiritual slavery.

From one perspective, the struggle of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was to free people from such confusion and awaken them to the true purpose of Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra teaches us that in a time of confusion, we must first clarify what all Buddhists must ask when they start practicing: Why do I practice? Without answering this question correctly, our practice will become what the Daishonin describes as “an endless, painful austerity” (“On Attaining Buddhahood,” MW-1, 4).

**4. Respecting others is a cause to reveal our own Buddhahood**

From the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging we find a key to realizing our happiness. The bodhisattva demonstrates that if we wish to see our own Buddhahood and reveal it, we must see it in the lives of others as well. There is no such thing as attaining our own enlightenment while remaining blind to the same potential in others. In fact, attaining enlightenment means, in one sense, to recognize the universality of Buddhahood. In this regard, the Daishonin, through skillful analogy,

explains: “There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 769).

If our attitude is “I will treat people right when everybody starts treating me right,” then we will be more likely to lose people’s respect and trust and drive them further away. Or it may be said that such an attitude is in itself the cause for disrespect and mistrust. Similarly, if we try our utmost to see Buddhahood in the lives of others and even start treating them on that premise, we will see a remarkable change both within our lives and in others’ lives. Taking the initiative to respect those around us for their Buddhahood is mutually beneficial. In this sense, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging carried out his practice not only for the sake of others, but also for his own sake.

To believe in Buddhahood—our own and someone else’s—is difficult. This is why the action of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is so noble and rare. But at the same time, it is within anybody’s grasp. Everyone is capable of respecting others; it is certainly not as difficult as levitating an assembly of people and suspending a gigantic tower in midair—the acts portrayed elsewhere in the sutra. Unlike these, the action of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging *can* be emulated by all of us. In this sense, the Daishonin

explains: “To believe that Buddhahood exists within Humanity is the most difficult thing of all—as difficult as believing that fire exists in water or water in fire. . . . Bodhisattva Fukyo saw the Buddha in everyone he met, and Prince Siddhartha was a man who became a Buddha. These examples should help you to believe” (“The True Object of Worship,” MW-1, 54-55). What enables us to act in the way that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging did, the Daishonin teaches here, is nothing other than our faith in the universality of Buddhahood. And to continue our work we need strong faith—strong enough not to be discouraged by superficial reactions from others. Whenever we recognize and respect others’ Buddha nature, their Buddhahood is bowing back in return, no matter how they react to us on the surface. The Daishonin, therefore, urges us to have courage to take the first step ourselves and not to wait vainly for the image in the mirror to bow first.

### 5. True tolerance stems from faith in humanity

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, despite the relentless abuses he was subjected to, never lost his temper or quit his practice. The sutra describes his perseverance as follows: “Many years passed in this way, during which this monk was constantly subjected to curses and abuse. He did not give way to anger, however, but each time spoke the same words, ‘You are certain to attain Buddhahood’” (LS20, 267). In the verse section of the “Never Disparaging” chapter, the

sutra reiterates the point: “When the people heard this, / they giped at him, cursed and reviled him, / but the bodhisattva Never Disparaging / bore all this with patience” (LS20, 269-70).

His tolerance and tenacity stand in sharp contrast to that displayed in an episode about Shariputra. According to this account, in a past existence, Shariputra renounced his bodhisattva practice because of the abuse and disrespect shown him by a certain Brahman. The Brahman had begged for Shariputra’s eye, which the latter provided him. Upon receiving it, however, the Brahman expressed disgust, tossed the eye on the ground and stepped on it, complaining of its foul odor. After renouncing the Bodhisattva practice and deciding to focus on his own enlightenment, Shariputra suffered for a long time. No longer able to recognize and respect the Brahman’s Buddha nature, Shariputra renounced his bodhisattva practice. But in doing so, he not only denied others’ Buddhahood, but his own as well.

The source of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s tolerance for people lay in his profound faith in humanity. No matter what cruel reactions he received from those he met, his faith in their potential Buddhahood never wavered. He was so surely convinced of this truth expounded by Buddhism that he had no use for resentment or impatience. He was confident that he stood on the side of truth, and this helped him transcend any ordinary emotionalism that he may have felt from time to time.

The kind of tolerance demonstrated by Bodhisattva Never

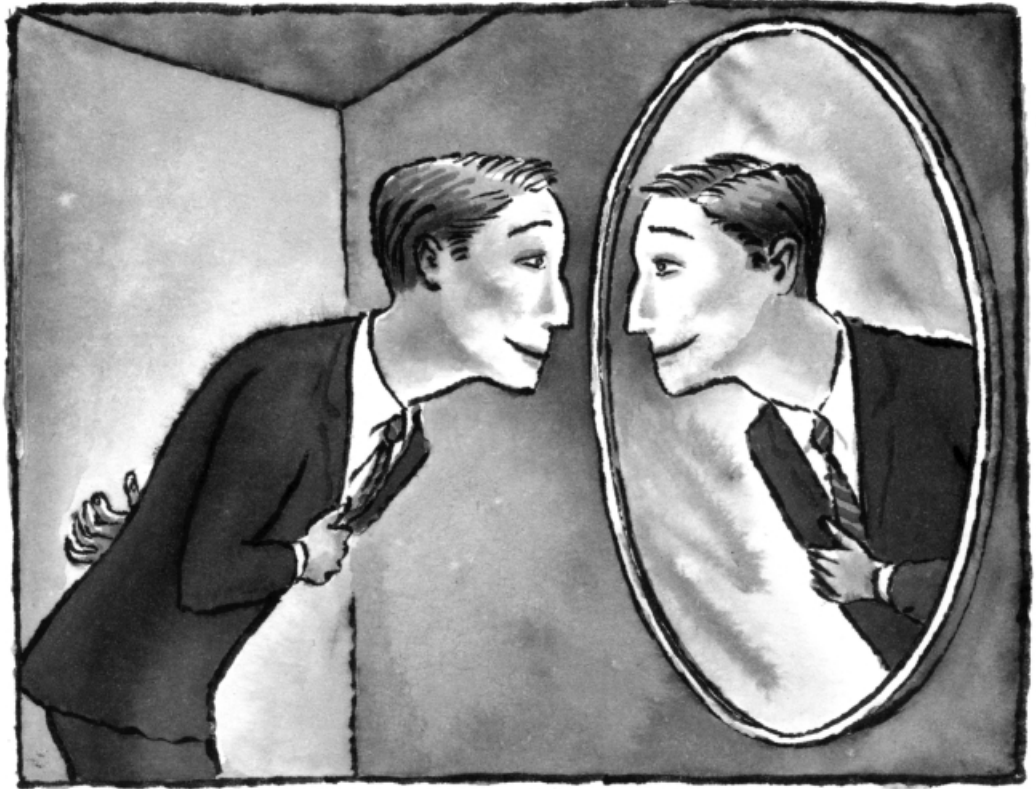
Disparaging is not ordinary. His was not *passive tolerance*—that of accepting what one thinks is wrong just to protect one’s own tranquil space and avoid conflict or confrontation. He sought interaction with people and freely expressed his belief. His persistence in communicating his message to people annoyed them greatly. No doubt his contemporaries viewed him as an intolerant man who would not leave them alone. To leave people in confusion, however, is not an act of tolerance; it actually constitutes a lack of compassion. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging unconditionally accepted everyone on the basis of their inherent Buddhahood. His was *active tolerance*—a kind that brings about a real change in the world.

### 6. To practice non-violence is to be wise and strong

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is a model for non-violence. He demonstrated his commitment to dialogue as the only means to address differences among people. He never resorted to violence of any kind because his abusers were never his enemies; he viewed them as extensions of himself who shared the supreme potential that he recognized in his own life.

It is important, however, to ask how he could remain committed to non-violence in a violent society without falling victim to violence. He was able to do so because he was wise and strong enough to avoid violent attacks, yet maintained a close enough contact with his abusers to continue to communicate his faith in

There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging made his bow of obeisance, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of arrogant people bowed back, just as when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back.



their Buddhahood. The sutra explains: “When he spoke in this manner, some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him. But even as he ran away and took up his stance at a distance, he continued to call out in a loud voice, ‘I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!’” (LS20, 267).

He was not so meek or careless as to allow himself to be victimized by violent people. Presumably, he had the capacity to outrun anyone and to speak in a clear, loud voice. He was shrewd enough to protect himself. Here, the Lotus Sutra teaches us that to practice non-violence in the real world, we must exercise wisdom. His ability to run fast may be seen as the care and resourcefulness one must exercise to

avoid being victimized in an abusive society. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging seems to tell us not to be anyone’s doormat in practicing tolerance and non-violence in today’s world.

### 7. Purifying our six senses through helping others

As a result of his consistent practice, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging gained numerous benefits. Besides vastly extending his life, for example, he was able to purify his senses to perceive the world correctly. The sutra explains: “Immediately he gained the kind of purity of vision and purity of the faculties of the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind . . .” (LS20, 267).

From one perspective, what we call benefit in Buddhism comes from

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

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

### 8. Sincerity is true eloquence

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

also gained eloquence, goodness and tranquility as the sutra here explains: “At that time, when the four kinds of believers who were overbearingly arrogant, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had looked with contempt on this monk and given him the name Never Disparaging—when they saw that he had gained great transcendental powers, the power to preach pleasingly and eloquently, the power of great goodness and tranquility, and when they heard his preaching, they all took faith in him and willingly became his followers” (LS20, 267-8).

In one sense, it seems that he suddenly gained those wonderful qualities of eloquence, goodness and tranquility. It may be more natural, however, to conclude that his persistent sincerity to communicate the universality of Buddhahood finally reached the hearts of those people who had long been abusing him. His sincerity opened their eyes, and for the first time they saw the greatness of the man they had despised. Here the sutra suggests that true eloquence comes from sincerity, which ultimately transcends arrogance and prejudice.

#### 9. The “poison-drum relationship” and “lessening one’s karmic retribution”

Through experiencing numerous persecutions on account of his faith in the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was also able to change his negative karma, as the sutra describes: “His offences had been wiped out” (LS20, 270).

Here the sutra explains the prin-

ciple of “lessening one’s karmic retribution,” which the Daishonin describes in the following passage: “Bodhisattva Fukyo was not abused and vilified, stoned and beaten with staves without reason. He had probably slandered the True Law in the past. The phrase ‘after expiating his sins’, indicates that because Bodhisattva Fukyo met persecution, he could eradicate his sins from previous lifetimes” (“Lessening One’s Karmic Retribution,” MW-1, 17). Here the Daishonin teaches us that all the hardships we undergo for the spread of Buddhism are never wasted; they are proof that we are positively transforming our negative karma and solidifying the foundation for lasting happiness.

The sutra states that those who vilified and abused Bodhisattva Never Disparaging had to suffer for a long time before they finally attained enlightenment: “At that time the four kinds of believers, . . . because anger arose in their minds and they treated me [Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, that is, Shakyamuni in a past existence] with disparagement and contempt, were for two hundred million kalpas never able to encounter a Buddha, to hear the Law, or to see the community of monks. For a thousand kalpas they underwent great suffering in the Avichi hell. After they had finished paying for their offences, they once more encountered the bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who instructed them in anuttara-samyak-sambodhi” (LS20, 268-9).

Thus, even those who abused the bodhisattva were able to form connections with the Lotus Sutra

and eventually awaken to their Buddhahood, which they themselves had denied so vehemently. In regard to the power of the Lotus Sutra to save even those who oppose it, the Daishonin comments: “One should by all means persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra and causing them [the people of the age] to hear it. Those who put their faith in it will surely attain Buddhahood, while those who slander it will establish a ‘poison-drum relationship’ with it and will likewise attain Buddhahood” (“How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra,” MW-6, 197). The Daishonin here stresses the importance of communicating the benefit of the Mystic Law to all people.

#### 4 Nichiren Daishonin and Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

Throughout his writings, the Daishonin repeatedly identifies himself with Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. The twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra has particular bearing to his life since his entire life, in one sense, was dedicated to validating the message of this chapter. Here are some significant passages from the Daishonin’s writings regarding Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Bodhisattva Fukyo):

- “The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences. The past events described in the *Fukyo* chapter

I am now experiencing as predicted in the *Kanji* chapter; thus the present foretold in the *Kanji* chapter corresponds to the past of the *Fukyo* chapter. The *Kanji* chapter of the present will be the *Fukyo* chapter of the future, and at that time, I, Nichiren, will be its Bodhisattva Fukyo” (“Letter from Teradomari,” MW-4, 105-6).

- “The words of the twenty-four characters<sup>1</sup> of Fukyo are different from the five characters of Nichiren, but their spirit is the same. The method of propagation is also exactly the same both at the end of the Buddha Ionno’s [Awesome Sound King] Middle Day and now at the beginning of the Latter Day” (“On the Buddha’s Prophecy,” MW-1, 113).
- “In the past, I was struck several times in the face with the fifth scroll of the Lotus Sutra, but I felt no resentment at it. In fact, I was actually delighted. For to be attacked in the manner described in the *Fukyo* chapter, to suffer assault as predicted in the *Kanji* chapter, is a great honor indeed” (“Letter to Myomitsu Shonin,” MW-5, 202).

As those passages indicate, it is clear that the Daishonin used the action of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging to guide his own life. So as practitioners of the Daishonin’s Buddhism we also have much to learn from the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging”

**5** chapter of the Lotus Sutra.  
**Conclusion: Courage to respect all people**

Although there are many important points in the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter to be stressed, when we compare the life of this bodhisattva with that of the Daishonin, one quality that both shared clearly stands out—that is courage. Both had courage to speak the truth and to respect all people. Courage indeed was what enabled them to do what they set out to accomplish despite the abuses they underwent. The Lotus Sutra explains this point as follows: “Among the four kinds of believers he preached the Law with no fear in his mind” (LS20, 268). The Daishonin also stresses the importance of courage in our Buddhist practice in numerous passages. For example, to his disciples he states: “Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion and never succumb to threats from anyone. The lion fears no other beast, nor do its cubs. Slanderers are like howling jackals, but Nichiren’s followers are like roaring lions” (“On Persecutions Befalling the Buddha,” MW-1, 241). To use the action of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as a guide to our daily practice, our first step may be to develop the courage to look for the brilliance of Buddhahood in the lives of others as well as our own. □

1. The phrase repeated by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging consists of twenty-four characters in Kumarajiva’s Chinese

**Topics for Discussion**

**1**

**How can we apply the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging to our understanding and stance regarding the temple issue?**

**2**

**In light of the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, what is the role and importance of courage in sharing Buddhism?**

**3**

**What lesson can we learn from Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in our dealings with others and winning in our daily lives?**

# DIALOGUE

## ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

### The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra— A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century

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This is the fortieth 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 May 1998 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This time participants discuss the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter, which Nichiren Daishonin describes as explaining the “heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra.” They investigate the teaching that *Bodhisattva Never Disparaging* expounded, and the modern significance of his practice of revering others, which they contrast with nationalism.

#### 40 A Struggle Against the Forces of Arrogance

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** The cherry blossoms this year are spectacular. The seventeenth-century Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho says, “Myriads of things past / Are brought to my mind— / These cherry blossoms!”<sup>1</sup> As in these lines of verse by Basho, each time the cherry trees blossom, I am reminded of how the blossoms looked on that day, that spring forty years ago, when Mr. Toda passed away. On the day of the funeral, the air was filled with falling cherry petals. As they floated to the ground, each petal shone as if it were alive. It seemed as though the cherry trees, too, were saddened at the departure of this great champion of the Mystic Law.

Nichijun, the 65<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, who had rushed to the scene when he learned of Mr. Toda’s death, said: “President Toda was a truly remarkable person. . . . He was a Buddha.” Throughout his life, Mr. Toda expended every ounce of energy for the sake of the people, and continually struggled against the forces of nationalism.

It occurs to me that during World War II even cherry blossoms were enlisted to serve Japanese nationalism. Propagandists glorified death for the nationalist cause with

slogans like “To fall vigorously and suddenly like a cherry petal is what it means to be Japanese.” This was appalling.

In fact, in Japan cherry trees have traditionally symbolized living one’s life to the fullest. In ancient times, people observed the cherry blossoms to ascertain the duration and extent to which the flowers would be in bloom. It was held that if the cherry blossoms were numerous and stayed in bloom for a long time, there would be a rich harvest that year.

**KATSUJI SAITO:** So if they bloomed in full force and then fell all at once, people would have had cause for concern.

**TAKANORI ENDO:** This traditional view has been turned on its head.

**IKEDA:** From around the middle of the nineteenth century, a type of cherry tree called *Someiyoshino* (*Prunus yedoensis matsum*) was planted throughout the country. It was the rapidly scattering blossoms of this tree, in particular, that were used to create the nationalistic image of “suddenly falling” in battle, which I mentioned earlier.

**HARUO SUDA:** Cherry trees in places such as Tokyo characteristically blossom before the leaves appear, with the flowers blooming all at once and quickly scattering.

**ENDO:** Power will twist anything it can to its advantage.

**SAITO:** Moreover, after a while, people gradually forget the original meaning behind certain images and just accept the new meaning as a given.

**SUDA:** Learning that cherry blossoms originally were not a symbol of death but of a resolute and fulfilling life, comes as a shock to me. It never occurred to me that these blossoms had once been entrusted with people’s hope for an abundant harvest.

**IKEDA:** President Toda was committed throughout his life to realizing the hopes of the people. As a result of the two years he spent in prison, he was physically in very bad shape. But summoning every ounce of his strength, he dedicated himself fully as the disciple of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, who had been killed by the injustice perpetrated by the state. Mr. Toda’s life force was truly miraculous. His life epitomized the teaching of the “Life Span” chapter.

On January 1 of the year President Toda died, he delivered what would be his last New Year’s lecture. Although very weak from a long battle with illness, his voice was full of energy. Interestingly, on that occasion he discussed the integration of the three mystic principles<sup>2</sup> in the “Life Span” chapter.

**SAITO:** He continued to lecture on the Lotus Sutra until the very end. Why did he choose to talk about the

integration of the three mystic principles at that time?

**IKEDA:** He emphasized the point that Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha of True Cause, and that the true Buddha does not exist anywhere apart from this real *saha* world, the world of suffering.

**ENDO:** That pertains to the mystic principle of the True Land, which is based on the passage, “Ever since then I have been constantly in this *saha* world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting” (LS16, 225).<sup>3</sup>

**IKEDA:** Although mythical Buddhas were mentioned [by Shakyamuni] as expedient means, a Buddha is not an imaginary being. A genuine Buddha dwells in this real, impure world, going among those who are suffering the most, sharing their misery and sadness, and leading them to happiness. Only one who lives this way can be called a Buddha.

Moreover, because the Buddha is dedicated to helping people become happy, the Buddha meets persecution from such arrogant forces of authority as secular leaders and priests, and is hated even by the very people he is trying to help. He is subject to “curses and abuse” and is struck with “sticks of wood or tiles and stones” (LS20, 267). The Buddha dwells in the midst of such great hardship.

A Buddha is not an other-worldly being basking in enlightenment. A Buddha is the first to dive in among the fierce waves of society. And one who does so will absolutely encounter persecution and even be subjected to physical harm. One who lives in a calculating manner, on the other hand, disregarding the people and looking only to protect



CORBIS/Michael S. Yamashita

Nothing was immune to the manipulation of World War II Japanese nationalism including simple cherry blossoms.

oneself, is something other than a Buddha. Such a person is actually a devil.

The members of the Soka Gakkai, including President Toda himself, have ceaselessly striven to achieve peace and happiness for all humanity. The light of genuine Buddhism shines nowhere apart from such endeavors. That's what President Toda taught in what could be called his last lecture on the Lotus Sutra.

**SAITO:** To carry on a struggle in the midst of society and undergo persecution—this in itself is the teaching of the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

**IKEDA:** Nichiren Daishonin says, “The heart of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is expounded in the *Fukyo* [Bodhisattva Never Disparaging] chapter” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240). Basically, the ultimate teaching of Buddhism is the Lotus Sutra. And the concrete practice of the Lotus Sutra is explained in the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

**SUDA:** The passage you just cited is followed by the famous line: “What does Bodhisattva Fukyo’s profound respect for people signify? The real meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance in this world lay in his behavior as a human being” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240).

**ENDO:** In other words, Shakyamuni made his advent in the world and expounded the Law in order to instruct people how to conduct themselves as human beings, how they should live. And the conclusion that he arrives at is the way of life of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

**IKEDA:** With these extraordinary words, the Daishonin is explaining the essence of Buddhism. On that premise, let us commence our study of the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

## Helping Those Who Are Suffering the Most

**SUDA:** To begin with, the three chapters that follow the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter—“Distinctions in Benefits,” “Benefits of Responding with Joy” and “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law”—explain the benefit of propagation. The subsequent “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter explains the good fortune and benefit that those who spread the Lotus Sutra receive, as well as the unfortunate circumstances met by those who slander the sutra’s votaries.

**SAITO:** It explains this recounting the experience of one practitioner, a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging.

**IKEDA:** There are various interesting explanations regarding this bodhisattva’s name. In contrast to the way it



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Mother Teresa holding a child 1979. She became world renowned for aiding the poorest and most outcast of society. The idea that the state takes precedence over people is “worship of power.” In a word, such thinking produces a society of survival of the fittest. This is the exact opposite of the love of humankind exhibited by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

is rendered in Kumarajiva’s Chinese-language translation as meaning someone who never disparages or looks down on others, I understand that in the original Sanskrit text it can be interpreted as meaning someone who is “always disparaged.”

**ENDO:** That’s right. Another Chinese translation of the sutra by Dharmaraksha renders the chapter title as “The One Who Is Always Scorned and Treated with Contempt.”

**IKEDA:** This could certainly be said of the Soka Gakkai. We have been constantly ridiculed by Japanese society, where there is a pronounced tendency to revere the powerful and scorn the masses. Many once sneered at our organization as a gathering of the poor and the sick. But President Toda indomitably declared that helping the poor and the sick is the main focus of a genuine religion.

So-called religious organizations that only aim to make money wouldn’t concern themselves in the least with people of scant resources, much less with sick people, unless, of course, they intend to open a hospital!

A true religion exists for the sake of those who are suffering. Its purpose is to enable those faced with severe hardship to achieve real happiness.

We have been “constantly disparaged” by people who fail to understand this sublime spirit. Nevertheless, we have courageously reached out to people who are suffering and offered them genuine support. While showing them we care, we have helped them realize that they can definitely become happy by cultivating the world of Buddhahood within their own lives. We have steadfastly encouraged

them and made them aware of the Mystic Law. We have expended great energy in educating and caring for people on a person-to-person basis. This is the conduct of bodhisattvas who never disparage others.

**SAITO:** It is certainly impossible to teach others Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and encourage their practice without genuinely respecting them. The fact is that once we give up on someone, thinking that no matter what we say to them they'll never listen, we close the door on any chance for meaningful exchange.

**IKEDA:** When we observe only the outer aspect of the circumstances of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, we can see without a doubt that he was constantly disparaged. But if we go a step further and consider the essence and spirit behind his actions, it becomes all the more apparent that the translation "never disparaging" is correct.

**ENDO:** I think this rendition, which takes into account the fundamental spirit of the sutra itself, shows the genius of Kumarajiva's translation.

**SAITO:** President Ikeda, I recall that you once answered a question from a journalist on the reason for the SGI's development by saying, "It's because I directly meet and talk with each individual member."

**IKEDA:** My intention at that time was not to speak about myself. It goes without saying that the foundation for the SGI's development has been the hard work of all the members.

My point was that you cannot build such solid unity among many people simply by the power of organization or by giving orders. The SGI is strong because we have sincerely treasured each person. I wanted to emphasize that spirit.

Leaders in society tend to rely on giving orders. While carefully avoiding the hard, painstaking tasks, they steal the fruits of others' labors. There are all too many such leaders. The SGI is striving to revolutionize this style of leadership.

**ENDO:** Treasuring each person—that's certainly an arduous undertaking.

**IKEDA:** A leader who does not work to the point of exhaustion is a fraud. Misery in the world largely stems from the fact that we have so many leaders who are merely looking out for themselves. When it comes down to it, such people are concerned only with protecting their positions and leading a comfortable existence.

The SGI exists to empower those who are fatigued from their earnest labors and ardently striving to live their lives to the fullest, and to help them become happy. Leaders of such an organization must be willing and ready to take on even the most difficult tasks to the best of their ability.

Of course, this is not to say that we should push ourselves unreasonably. As we get older, we naturally need to

exercise wisdom and common sense to safeguard our health. But if we lose the spirit to exert ourselves with selfless dedication, we are finished. This goes for leaders in our organization as well as in society.

### The Twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra

For what reason was he named Never Disparaging? This monk, whatever persons he happened to meet, whether monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen, would bow in obeisance to all of them and speak words of praise, saying, "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood." (LS20, 266–67)

**SUDA:** In summary, the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter introduces a Buddha named Awesome Sound King Thus Come One living at a remote time described as "an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhya kalpas in the past" (LS20, 265). It relates how after the Former Day of the Law and toward the end of the Middle Day of the Law when this Buddha lived, his true teaching is lost and "monks of overbearing arrogance" (LS20, 266) become all powerful. That is the state of affairs when Never Disparaging appears.

**IKEDA:** It is a time when the Law has perished. The Chinese character used to denote *Middle Day of the Law* means "likeness" or "image," referring to similarity of appearance. It is a time when the spirit of the Former Day has been lost and only the outward framework of the teaching remains, an age when Buddhism is reduced to a mere skeleton of its former self.

**ENDO:** The designation "end of the Middle Day" corresponds to the start of the Latter Day of the Law, which is when Nichiren Daishonin lived. I think there is also significance in the fact that the Soka Gakkai began to flourish at a time when Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism was clearly in crisis, when the Law was in danger of becoming extinct on account of the priesthood's negligence.

**SUDA:** There are certainly a lot of "monks of overbearing arrogance" around. It is in such a time that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appears.

**SAITO:** He salutes all people, be they men or women, clergy or laity, with these words: "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood" (LS20, 266–67).

**ENDO:** Since this passage is written with twenty-four characters in Chinese, the Lotus Sutra that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging propagated is called the “twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra.” In terms of the concept of the comprehensive, abbreviated and essential expositions of the sutra, the twenty-four-character passage represents the abbreviated Lotus Sutra.

*The “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) says: “These twenty-four Chinese characters that make up this passage are interchangeable with the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo; [though the wording is different] the meaning is the same. These twenty-four characters represent the abbreviated Lotus Sutra (Gosho Zenshu, p. 764).*

**IKEDA:** Just what does the Lotus Sutra teach? The sutra is condensed into this twenty-four-character passage: “I deeply respect you. I would never slight you or behave arrogantly toward you. For if you carry out the bodhisattva practice you can become a Buddha without fail.” All living beings have the Buddha nature, the world of Buddhahood. It is this world of Buddhahood that Never Disparaging reveres.

The twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra does not explicitly state that all people have the Buddha nature, but this is without doubt what it is affirming. This is the highest philosophy of the sanctity of life.

While there are any number of religions that preach equality, often what they mean by this is that human beings are all equally sinful. But the Lotus Sutra teaches that all people are noble children of the Buddha; that they are equal as entities of the world of Buddhahood. This is a very important difference.

**SUDA:** Even if someone is an adherent of a different teaching and doesn’t perceive the world of Buddhahood in his or her life, this does not in any way alter the fact that life is an entity of the world of Buddhahood. This is just as Never Disparaging states in his declaration. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra absolutely never condones violence.

**SAITO:** Religious strife accompanied by violence would be totally antithetical to the sutra’s spirit.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the Lotus Sutra directly oppose all forms of violence. The Lotus Sutra is a teaching of struggle on a spiritual plane, not of violence.

**SAITO:** Yes. And though totally nonviolent himself, Never Disparaging is showered with both physical and verbal abuse.

**ENDO:** He is struck with sticks, tiles and stones, and

is slandered and mistreated. Seeing the four kinds of people<sup>4</sup> from afar, Never Disparaging approaches them, intoning the twenty-four-character passage and bowing in reverence.

**SUDA:** To this day, it is a common practice in India for people to greet one another by joining their palms together and saying *namaste* in a sign of respect. I imagine Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as making a similar gesture.

**ENDO:** But arrogant people, far from feeling any appreciation, only became angry and rebuked him: “This ignorant monk—where does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestowing on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!” (LS20, 267).

They would constantly berate him, saying in effect: “You’re no Buddha. How presumptuous of you to talk about us becoming Buddhas. You are an ignoramus who doesn’t know his place.”

**IKEDA:** As the sutra indicates when it says, “monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power” (LS20, 266), these people commanded considerable power and influence. That probably made them all the more highhanded.

As long as people rely on some kind of force—be it authority, power, wealth, physical strength, position, organization, fame, talent or knowledge—they have a hard time being humble. All too often, it is only after a person has lost everything that he or she can really listen for the first time. This is a tragic human failing.

Most people are destroyed by their own arrogance. Before that happens, we must ask ourselves what kind of human beings we would be if we were stripped of all such externals and ornamentation.

**SAITO:** Even when arrogant people derided him, Never Disparaging was not the least taken aback. No matter how he might be mocked, without becoming angry he would simply repeat, “You will surely become a Buddha.”

**IKEDA:** This is the practice of forbearance. The Buddha is called “One Who Can Forbear.” Everything depends on whether we can endure the hardships that are an inevitable part of life and Buddhist practice.

**ENDO:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging underwent this treatment for many years. It did not stop with being vilified and mocked; he was also struck with sticks, tiles and rocks. When this happened, he would retreat to a safe distance and repeat in a loud voice the twenty-four-character passage.

**SAITO:** That shows agility and strength of character.

**SUDA:** After all, there’s no need to pointlessly subject oneself to violence. You can’t just stand there and do nothing. While tactfully dodging the onslaught, he contin-

ues to spread the teaching without being the least intimidated. He is a dauntless practitioner.

**SAITO:** And he steadfastly carries out a nonviolent struggle.

**IKEDA:** President Toda once said: “We ourselves are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Therefore, even if we should be struck or vilified, since we have determined to chant daimoku, as long as we are alive we should continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo through everything and exert ourselves for kosen-rufu, even if it means having to survive on water and grass. This is faith.”

With regard to propagation, he said:

There is no art or technique for carrying out shakubuku. There is no way to spread the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin without the solid conviction that you yourself are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Knowing this is the essence of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. This is the only way.

There are no rules for spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or for sharing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with others. We ourselves are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo! Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is all there is! We must be staunchly determined that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is all we have and that, if that is not enough, then even if we should be killed or die, there is nothing else to do. Firmly convinced of this, we must continue to tell others about the Gohonzon.<sup>5</sup>

This is also the attitude of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Even when vilified or injured, he never ceases to plant the seed of the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra. He continues struggling through all, having determined that this is how he will live regardless of other people’s reaction. What becomes of him as a result?

**SAITO:** The sutra says:

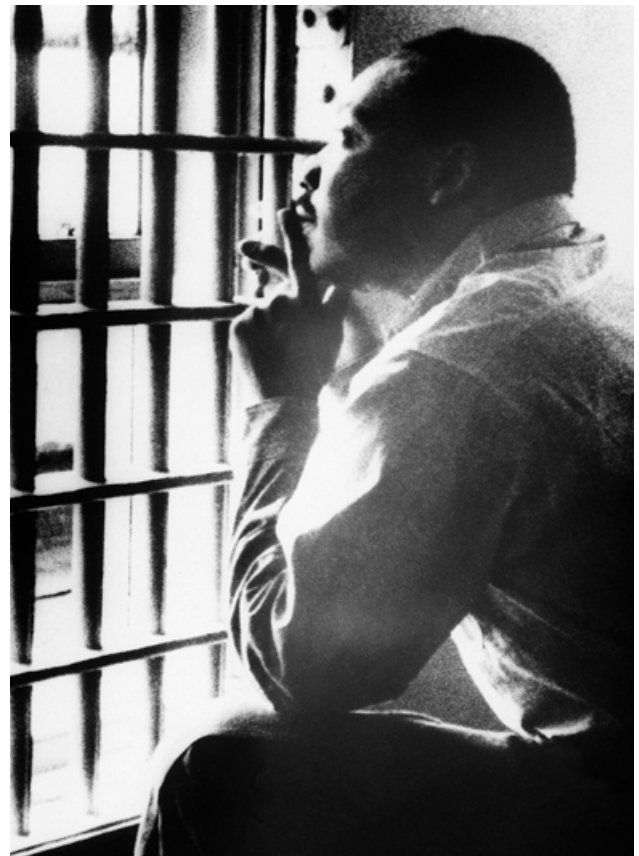
When this monk was on the point of death, he heard up in the sky fully twenty thousand, ten thousand, a million verses of the Lotus Sutra that had previously been preached by the Buddha Awesome Sound King, and he was able to accept and uphold them all. Immediately he gained the kind of purity of vision and purity of the faculties of the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind that have been described above. Having gained this purity of the six faculties, his life span was increased by two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of years, and he went about widely preaching the Lotus Sutra for people. (LS20, 267)

**IKEDA:** That’s right. His life span is extended. He lives long, he survives. While “life span” here carries the literal meaning of longevity, it can also be interpreted as life force. Even if a person’s life is short, if he or she lives with abundant life force and dies having created much value, then the person has had a long life. Also, there is no greater longevity than to have contributed to kosen-rufu and enabled many people to accrue strong life force.

In any event, Never Disparaging receives the benefit of the purification of the six sense organs. This indicates actual proof of human revolution. As a result, those around him come to view him in a new light.

**SUDA:** The text continues:

At that time, when the four kinds of believers who were overbearingly arrogant, the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had looked with contempt on this monk and given him the name Never Disparaging—when they saw that he had gained great transcendental powers, the power to preach



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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in jail. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging waged a spiritual struggle against power and arrogance. He fought violence with nonviolence. He stood up alone to the tyranny being perpetuated against the people. In the modern age, this is reminiscent of the struggles of King.

pleasingly and eloquently, the power of great goodness and tranquillity, and when they heard his preaching, they all took faith in him and willingly became his followers. (LS20, 267–68)

**IKEDA:** Those people are very calculating!

Up to that time, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was not an eloquent speaker. All he did was repeat the twenty-four-character passage and bow to people. That is probably even the reason people ridiculed him so.

But the tables turn completely. The wretched person whom everyone had laughed at becomes splendid and dignified. At that point those who had ridiculed him may have all thought, “Oh, no! What have I done?”

President Toda once remarked, “When those who are presently so arrogant toward us ask themselves, ‘Oh, no! What have I done?’—that will be kosen-rufu.”

**ENDO:** These people who have a change of heart and come to believe in and follow Never Disparaging are in better shape than those who do not. Even so, they fall into the state of hell because of their offense.

The Daishonin says:

The people who cursed and struck Bodhisattva Fukyo [Never Disparaging] at first behaved with such animosity, though later they took faith and became followers of the Lotus Sutra, looking up to Fukyo and treating him with great respect, honoring him as the heavenly deities would Taishaku, and standing in awe of him as we do the sun and moon. However, they were unable to wipe out the great offense of their initial slander, so that for a thousand kalpas they were condemned to the Avichi Hell, and for twenty billion kalpas they were abandoned by the three treasures. (MW-6, 54–55)

As for those who had slandered Bodhisattva Never Disparaging but do not have a change of heart, their offense is so great as to defy comprehension.

## The Buddha Lives in the Present

**SAITO:** In the meantime, lifetime after lifetime, Never Disparaging continues to serve the Buddhas and dauntlessly strives to widely propagate the Lotus Sutra. And finally he becomes a Buddha.

**IKEDA:** When Shakyamuni reaches this point in his discourse, he suddenly declares, “In fact he [Never Disparaging] was none other than I myself!” (LS20, 268). This is a truly dramatic moment.

**SUDA:** What had seemed like a discussion of events

long past turns in a flash into a discussion of the reality before their eyes. Everyone is stunned.

**IKEDA:** Exactly. Nichiren Daishonin reads even deeper into the passage “In fact he was none other than I myself!”, looking at it in terms of his own life. Having summoned forth the greatest persecution and facing imminent execution at Tatsunokuchi, he discards his transient status and reveals his true identity, and so extends his life.

While at Teradomari en route to exile in Sado Island, he writes:

The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences. The past events described in the *Fukyo* chapter I am now experiencing as predicted in the *Kanji* [“Encouraging Devotion,” thirteenth] chapter; thus the present foretold in the *Kanji* chapter corresponds to the past of the *Fukyo* chapter. The *Kanji* chapter of the present will be the *Fukyo* chapter of the future.... (MW-4, 105–06)

**ENDO:** He is saying in effect: “I have called forth the three powerful enemies<sup>6</sup> described in the ‘Encouraging Devotion’ chapter.” He explains that he himself is now waging the battle that Never Disparaging carried out in the past. And, from the vantage of the future, people will recognize that his struggles are the same as those of Never Disparaging.

**SAITO:** This is what he means by “The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences.”

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin says, “Shakyamuni lives today; this is the age of the Buddha” (MW-1, 185). One must not vaguely think of the Lotus Sutra as simply a twenty-eight-chapter text. Buddhism exists only in the here and now, in the reality of people’s lives. The Lotus Sutra teaches that in the depths of the present, we find the remote past. Fully grasping this profound truth is called attaining Buddhahood.

It’s the present that counts. Myoho-renge-kyo lives only in the spirit and determination to work for kosen-rufu in the present, keeping in mind the words: “In fact he was none other than I myself!”

The Daishonin teaches that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is Shakyamuni. And he reveals that he himself, who was encountering incredible persecution at the time, is in fact also Shakyamuni, the Buddha. Unless we grasp this, he says, we have not delved into the Lotus Sutra.

**SUDA:** By “Lotus Sutra” he does not mean a written text.

**IKEDA:** Someone once asked this question of

President Toda: “It is said that Buddhism no longer exists in China and India, but isn’t it true that many sutras remain in these countries?” President Toda replied: “The sutras are all that exist. Where there is no correct faith, there is no Buddhism. The sutras, just by themselves, are simply texts; they are not Buddhism.”

**SAITO:** The same can be said of the Daishonin’s writings. Unless we read them and take action with the spirit that the Daishonin lives today and this is the age of the Daishonin, we will not profit from their study. We will only be reading old texts.

For that matter, if we should become haughty because of the knowledge we gain from Buddhist study, then, far from doing us any good, it will result in our manifesting the nature of the four groups of arrogant people.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was not an eloquent speaker. He did not put on an air of greatness. He merely traveled around planting the seed of the Lotus Sutra in people’s hearts with such direct simplicity that it

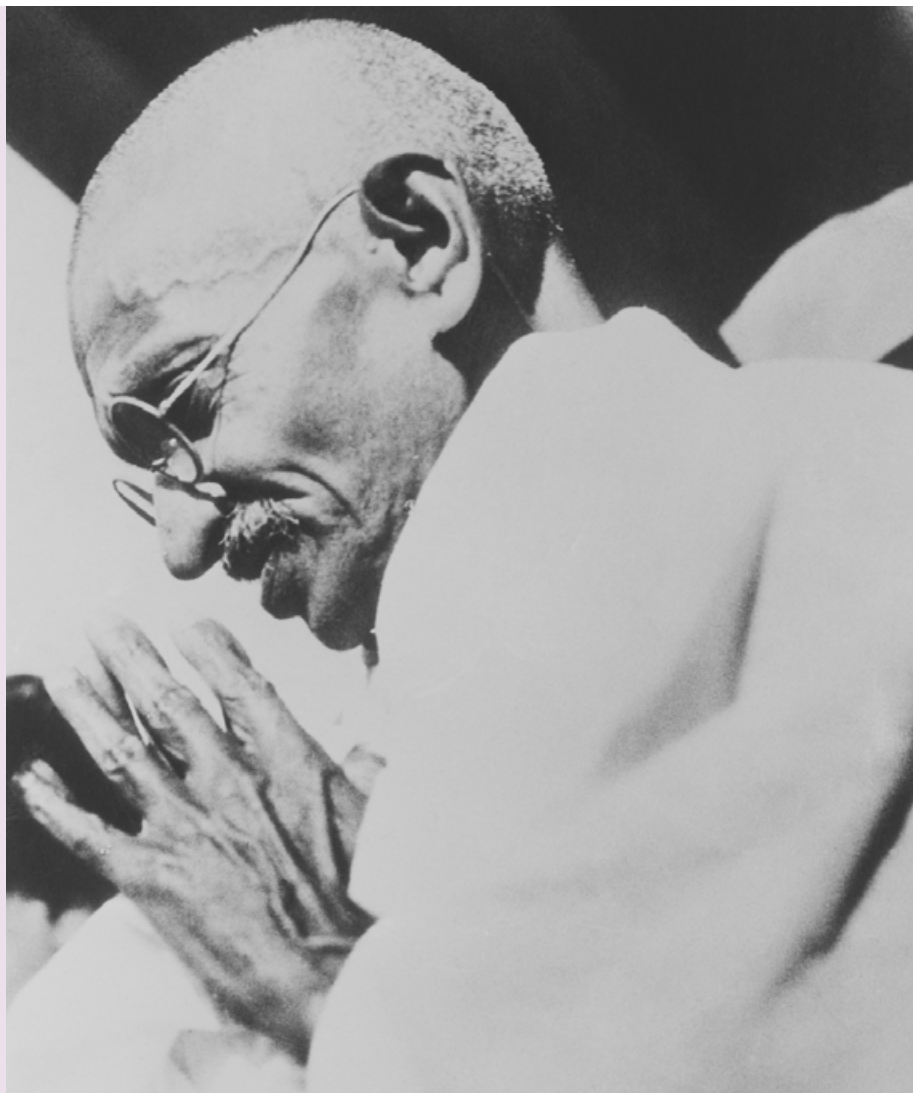
bordered on naiveté. Across past, present and future, the spirit of the Lotus Sutra lives in such conduct.

In a word, this is the behavior of SGI members. Those struggling in the forefront of our movement are themselves Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. On the other hand, those who are widely revered in society and who are filled with self-importance belong to the four groups of arrogant people.

Whatever our standing in the organization, whether or not we have a leadership position, we can vigorously take action and realize success in all endeavors because of the strength of the SGI, a wondrous body that is carrying out the Buddha’s decree. Those who fall under the illusion that they can do everything on their own, grow decadent and begin a downward spiral.

At any rate, we need to carry out the practice of never disparaging others, aware that “In fact he was none other than I myself!”—that we ourselves are Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and entities of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Mahatma Gandhi,  
1931. In this  
dialogue, Haruo  
Suda brings up the  
Indian tradition of  
greeting people with  
one’s hands together  
as sign of respect.  
“I imagine  
Bodhisattva Never  
Disparaging as  
making a similar  
gesture,” he says.



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**ENDO:** Speaking of the practice of never disparaging, you once composed a poem, President Ikeda, celebrating our departure toward the Soka Gakkai's seventieth anniversary:

The benefit of friends of kosen-rufu  
who embrace the brilliant spirit of never disparaging  
endures for millions of *kalpas*.

Since the Mystic Law is the teaching  
without beginning or end,  
by dedicating our lives to it  
our offenses have all been expiated.<sup>7</sup>

**SUDA:** This is saying that the benefit received by SGI members, who in the spirit of never disparaging have opened a path of kosen-rufu where none existed before, is eternal. Also, the line "our offenses have all been expiated" points to a very important doctrine expounded in the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter.

**ENDO:** Yes. The sutra explains that the reason Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is persecuted by the four groups of people is that he had slandered the Lotus Sutra in the past, and that by spreading the Lotus Sutra while enduring such persecution, he expiates his past serious offenses.

**IKEDA:** This means that no matter how people might oppose or vilify us in our efforts to spread the Law, we should gladly accept this in the knowledge that we are thereby expiating our negative karma. We should not deplore such treatment.

I recall how President Toda described being struck four times while he was in prison. The jailer, brandishing his authority, punched President Toda once and then again for no reason. Though he burned with deep anger, since he was a prisoner he had no choice but to grit his teeth and endure it. Eventually, through studying the Lotus Sutra and intensively chanting daimoku in his cell, he came to the realization that the purpose of this event was to enable him to erase his negative karma.

The third time was on a day in early spring when he was bathing. The jailers herded the prisoners, forty to fifty in all, into the tiny bathroom. Though he was chilled to the bone from having waited for thirty minutes, President Toda bathed carefully so as to waste as little hot water as possible out of consideration for the prisoners who would bathe later.

When a guard saw this, he started shouting at him: "Hey you! What are you doing taking such a leisurely bath! You must be a troublemaker!" And as he said this, he viciously struck President Toda in the face several times.

This time, while shedding bitter tears, he thought to himself with utmost conviction: "Yes! I have been hit again! When I am struck a fourth time, I will be free to leave!"

On another occasion, a furious guard gave President Toda twenty-some lashes on his back with a hemp rope. This was of course a horribly painful ordeal. But in his heart President Toda shouted with delight: "At last! The fourth time! Now my offenses are completely expiated!" Shortly thereafter, President Toda attained enlightenment in prison.

**SAITO:** Just listening to this account gives me the shivers—both at the profundity of Buddhism and at the cruelty of power.

## The Religion of Nationalism

**IKEDA:** What is nationalism? It is a way of thinking about the world that finds the worship of power at its root. This is the exact opposite of the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

**SUDA:** Worship of power as the basis of nationalism—that's a difficult concept to grasp.

**ENDO:** I think some people have a hard time clearly understanding what nationalism is.

**IKEDA:** Nationalism could be described as a cult of power. It is based on the perverse notion that the state comes before the people. Nationalism is a "religion" that has existed since ancient times.

**SUDA:** A "religion"?

**IKEDA:** I discussed this at length with the British historian Arnold Toynbee. As I think I have noted before, Dr. Toynbee remarked that the vacuum created in the West by the recession of Christianity was filled by three distinct religions: "belief in the inevitability of progress through the systematic application of science to technology, nationalism, and communism."<sup>8</sup>

What kind of religion, then, is nationalism? It takes collective human power as its object of worship. And worship of collective power is worship of the state.

Incidentally, Toynbee declared that nationalism, fascism and communism all share a common reverence for collective power.

In the religion of nationalism, people are nothing more than components of the state. They are turned into tools, means to an end. It is a religion in which the ego of the state tramples on the dignity of human beings.

**ENDO:** I think we can find many signs of such nationalism in Japan today.

**IKEDA:** Toynbee also writes that the collective ego is dangerous "because it is . . . less patently unworthy of



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British historian Arnold Toynbee, 1968. He saw the vacuum created by the recession of Christianity being filled by the “belief in the inevitability of progress through the systematic application of science to technology, nationalism and communism.”

devotion.” He says:

Bad behaviour that would be condemned unhesitatingly by the conscience in an individual culprit is apt to be condoned . . . under the illusion that the first person is absolved from self-centredness by being transposed from the singular number into the plural.<sup>9</sup>

**SUDA:** He is saying that when operating in numbers as a “we,” people are more likely to carry out immoral acts that they could not possibly commit while acting as individuals.

**ENDO:** This is the same mentality as thinking that it’s safe to cross the street on a red light if you are in a group. It’s frightening when you think about it.

**SAITO:** The guards who tormented President Toda exemplify what becomes of people once they have been poisoned by nationalism. They identify with the great power of the state and carry on as though they themselves possess such power.

**ENDO:** They borrow and hide behind the authority of a presumed higher power.

**IKEDA:** We see the same thing in war. Ordinarily,

people regard killing another person as the most heinous of acts. But when it is “for the country,” someone who kills many people becomes a hero.

**SUDA:** The perverse religion of nationalism causes people to lose their senses.

**IKEDA:** President Toda wrote:

There are a number of things that have puzzled me since I was a boy. Among these, the thing that baffled me the most is how some relations between countries can be so far removed from culture.

What I mean is that people living in “civilized” countries receive a great deal of “cultural training,” such as education in manners, language and attitudes. Despite the fact that such people live cultured lives based on a shared sense of value and awareness, when diplomacy between countries is the issue, although things may seem cultured on the surface, in actuality they are an exercise in brute force. Once diplomacy breaks down, isn’t it often the case that countries discard courtesy and custom and become arenas of anger?<sup>10</sup>

President Toda declared that genuine religion is the driving force that can enable people to end this vicious cycle, including the wars that result from it, and construct an eternal paradise for humankind. The human being is most important. Society and the state exist for the sake of people; not the other way around.

The idea that the state takes precedence over people is “worship of power.” In a word, such thinking produces a society of survival of the fittest. This is the exact opposite of the love of humankind exhibited by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Under such conditions, it is ultimately the people who suffer. People need to recognize this. They need to open their eyes.

### Rejection of State Worship

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi keenly perceived that the iniquity of the state was something to be feared. When he refused to accept the Shinto talisman forced upon him by the authorities, some Nichiren Shoshu priests implored him to take it, saying that it was just a formality. But Mr. Makiguchi would not relent in the slightest.

Before Mr. Makiguchi was imprisoned, officers of the special police maintained a presence at Gakkai discussion meetings. If the talk turned to the talisman, they would immediately shout, “Stop!” When President Makiguchi, after discussing other subjects, came to the issue of household Shinto shrines, they would again

shout for him to stop speaking.

The leaders around him wondered why Mr. Makiguchi returned time and again to these issues even though he was aware that he was in serious jeopardy. They failed to understand his spirit.

In rejecting the talisman, President Makiguchi was essentially rejecting worship of the state. "Aren't people more important than the state! We can't just sit back and watch everyone become miserable! Never!" This was his irrepressible cry.

**SAITO:** Early Christianity also rejected worship of the state, firmly rebuffing the Roman Empire, which was the supreme collective power of the day.

**IKEDA:** Toynbee also discusses this history.

*In his work Civilization on Trial, he says: "The early Christians challenged the apparently irresistible might of the Roman Imperial Government rather than compromise with a Leviathan-worship that was persuasively commended to them as being nothing more sinister than an amiable formality."<sup>11</sup> Hobbes (1588–1679) uses Leviathan, an enormous mythical creature appearing in the Bible, to symbolize the power of the state.*

**SUDA:** Japan's religious denominations compromised with and gave in to the nationalists' efforts to control religion. In the name of protecting their organizations, they abandoned the essential spirit of faith and became utterly spineless.

**ENDO:** This is true of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood as well. It lost its soul.

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi and Mr. Toda safeguarded the Daishonin's spirit by waging a magnificent struggle against the power of the state.

**SAITO:** I think we could say that theirs was a fight against the erroneous religion of Japanese nationalism.

**ENDO:** The state wielded enormous power.

**IKEDA:** Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda fought to save people from becoming slaves to the state. Everyone has the right to become happy, and the right to live freely. People are definitely not merely cogs in the machinery of the state. Because they cherished such conviction, they were persecuted by the authorities. Theirs were truly actions of "never disparaging."

**ENDO:** It seems to me that your actions, President Ikeda, also exemplify this idea that the person comes before the state. When asked why you were going to visit the Soviet Union, given that Soviet ideology rejected religion, you replied, "Because there are people there." Again, when you went to China, to a young girl who asked you

why you had come to China, you replied, "I came here to meet you." More recently, you also went to Cuba and opened a path with that country at a time when the international situation was very tense.

Your efforts to unite the world based on faith in human beings are truly the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of the present day.

**IKEDA:** I am opening a path. But unless young people follow in my footsteps, it will not develop into a great road.

In any event, the four groups of arrogant people described in the account of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, broadly speaking, can be identified with the evil of the state. No one is more arrogant than people of power.

A passage in the "Ongi Kuden" says that the actions of the four groups are the conduct of the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven.

**SAITO:** Yes. It reads:

The four groups of people in their overbearing arrogance curse Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, calling him an "ignorant monk." To call "ignorant" a bodhisattva who reveres all people is the work of the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven. (GZ, 765)

**IKEDA:** The four groups of people, priding themselves on their "great authority and power," ridiculed and persecuted Never Disparaging, who had no such power. And Never Disparaging waged a spiritual struggle against their power and arrogance. He fought violence with non-violence. He stood up alone to the tyranny being perpetuated against the people. In the modern age, this is reminiscent of the struggles of Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States. It is a struggle for human rights motivated by love of humankind and championed by ordinary people.

## The Oneness of Good and Evil

There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back. (GZ, 769)

**IKEDA:** Let's examine the spirit of never disparaging in more depth and from other angles. For instance, the

Daishonin says regarding the relationship between the four groups of arrogant people and Bodhisattva Never Disparaging:

To set up distinctions between good and evil by regarding Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as a “good” person and the arrogant ones as “bad” persons is a sign of ignorance. But when one recognizes this and performs a bow of obeisance, then one is bowing in obeisance to Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the principle of the oneness of good and evil, and of true and false. (GZ, 768)

In terms of life tendency, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is the opposite of the evil people who accost him. But both are human and both are entities of the Mystic Law. Evil people also possess the good of the world of Buddhahood, and good people likewise possess evil. Therefore, no matter how he might be persecuted, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging continues striving to achieve the widespread propagation of the Lotus Sutra. Confident that the world of Buddhahood lies dormant inside these evil people, he enables them to form a connection with Buddhism through a poison-drum relationship.<sup>12</sup>

**SUDA:** In the Buddhism of sowing, enabling people to form a relation with Buddhism is very important. The Daishonin says:

Therefore one should by all means persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra and causing them [the people of today] to hear it. Those who put their faith in it will surely attain Buddhahood, while those who slander it will establish a “poison-drum relationship” with it and will likewise attain Buddhahood. (MW-6, 197)

He says that we should “by all means persist” in this effort.

**SAITO:** When people hear the Mystic Law being expounded, the Buddha nature in the depths of their lives is sure to be aroused. Whether they reject this or are inspired to take faith depends on the individual. But without a doubt, such discourse stimulates their dormant Buddha nature.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. The Daishonin says, “When one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back” (GZ, 769).

**ENDO:** The entire passage goes:

There is a fundamental oneness of self and others.

Therefore, when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back.

**IKEDA:** Put another way, respect invites respect, and contempt breeds contempt. When we ourselves change, the other person changes, too.

The task of raising capable people also hinges on treating people with respect, and believing wholeheartedly in their inherent ability. Treating people as though they are subordinate will not bring out their potential.

Those who genuinely respect their fellow members are great. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging reveres even people



Title page from Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan. Hobbes (1588–1679) uses Leviathan, an enormous mythical creature appearing in the Bible, to symbolize the collective power of the state.



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Suspected mass graves in Kosovo, Yugoslavia. When operating in numbers as a “we,” people are more likely to carry out immoral acts that they could not possibly commit while acting as individuals.

who do not embrace faith because he knows that the world of Buddhahood resides within them. Those who treat people poorly, especially their comrades in faith, will certainly suffer the consequences.

**SAITO:** Leaders must be very careful about how they conduct themselves. To be inconsiderate of others or behave arrogantly goes against the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

**IKEDA:** No matter what the other person’s attitude, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging steadfastly maintained his convictions. And he won. It might seem on the surface that the powerful people who constantly abused him had won, but in terms of state of life, the difference between him and them could not have been greater.

Come to think of it, Nichiren Daishonin, while living in exile on Sado Island, said, “I pray that before anything else I can guide to the truth the sovereign and those others who persecuted me” (MW-1, 117). What sublime words! Like a peal of thunder and a grand symphony, this statement resounds high into the heavens and across tens of thousands of years of human history.

**SAITO:** Those who irrationally attacked the Daishonin, unaware of his profound and sincere spirit, were truly pitiful. And such people exist in the world today.



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Soldiers at sunset in Kosovo, Yugoslavia. Human life is often sacrificed at the altar of the religion of nationalism.

The Daishonin says of them, “They will fall into the hell of incessant suffering for a long time, and later they will meet Nichiren again and will be saved” (GZ, 766, 1123).

**IKEDA:** The concept of the oneness of good and evil doesn’t mean to simply recognize evil as evil. It means resolutely struggling against and defeating the negative functions in life, and turning them into allies.

To practice Buddhism is to wage a decisive battle. To be defeated by such forces is not establishing the oneness of good and evil in one’s life; rather, it is to allow good to be overpowered by evil. By resolutely winning in our endeavors to vanquish evil, we are able to turn even the ill-intentioned into positive influences.

**ENDO:** The Daishonin says, “It is the Regent Hojo Tokimune above all who has been of the greatest aid to me. Hei no Saemon is to me what Devadatta was to Shakyamuni” (MW-1, 185). He says that Hojo Tokimune, the ruler of Japan who sent him into exile, is an ally, and that Hei no Saemon, his chief persecutor, is his Devadatta—an evil person whom Shakyamuni turned into a good friend of Buddhism.

**IKEDA:** A passage in the Lotus Sutra says, “Although

the devil and the devil’s people will be there, they will all protect the Law of the Buddha” (LS6, 108). Kosen-rufu becomes a reality when we turn even enemies into allies. And the only way to do this is for those who have this awareness to stand up with fierce resolve and forge an iron unity of the people.

At the outset of this discussion, I mentioned cherry blossoms. Millions and tens of millions of noble irreplaceable lives have been destroyed by the perverse ideology of nationalism. It was President Makiguchi and President Toda who cried out for an end to the massacre. Theirs were actions of the ultimate patriotism.

And they willingly devoted their lives to the Lotus Sutra, which can be called the religion of humankind. They gave their lives not for the state, but for the sake of people. Thoroughly aware of this history, we need to stand up and oppose the new nationalism and cult of power that is now emerging. This is what it means to truly read the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

*To be continued*

1. Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Basho* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), p. 28.
2. Integration of the three mystic principles: This refers to the fact that the three mystic principles of True Cause, True Effect and True Land are all taught in the “Life Span” chapter.
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 are given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number and then the page number.
4. Four kinds of people: Monks, nuns and lay men and lay women. Broadly speaking, this refers to all people.
5. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 466–67.
6. Three powerful enemies: Three groups of people who persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra after Shakyamuni’s passing.
7. Our offenses have all been expiated: This corresponds to

the line from the sutra, “his offenses had been wiped out” (LS20, 270).

8. *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue: Man Himself Must Choose* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1976), p. 292.
9. Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 34.
10. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1981), vol. 1, p. 20.
11. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial / The World and the West* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964) p. 224.
12. Poison-drum relationship: Another term for reverse relationship, i.e., a bond formed with the Lotus Sutra by opposing or slandering it. The expression “poison drum” comes from the Nirvana Sutra, vol. 9, which states, “Once a poison drum is beaten, all the people who hear it will die, regardless of whether or not they have a mind to listen to it.” Similarly, when one preaches the Lotus Sutra, both those who embrace it and those who oppose it will equally receive the seed of Buddhahood.



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The  
Lotus Sutra  
and the  
Twenty-first Century

By Burton Watson

*Burton Watson is a distinguished translator from the Chinese and Japanese literature. Among his many translated books are The Lotus Sutra and Selected Writings of Nichiren.*

I have been invited to write on the topic, “The Lotus Sutra and the Twenty-first Century,” by which I assume is meant the degree to which the Lotus Sutra may be timely for persons of the coming century, and what aspects of it make it timely. Being a person of the twentieth century, I can naturally only surmise how the sutra will appear to men and women of the next century. And being American, I will of necessity be looking at these matters through the eyes of an American, or, more broadly speaking, of an individual of Western cultural background and

upbringing.

Ideally speaking, if a text dealing with religious or philosophical matters is truly sound in its ideas, it would seem that it ought to be relevant and timely for any century, regardless of how many years may have elapsed from the time of its origin. But though the fundamental truth of the text may remain unchanged with time, we are all aware that the receptivity to that truth, the ability to accept it or even to understand it correctly, may vary greatly with the age and the cultural conditions that prevail in the world. The Lotus Sutra itself makes clear

reference to this fact when it warns of the hostility and disbelief that will confront the sutra in the ages following the death of Shakyamuni Buddha.

In this connection I would like to note that not only the Lotus Sutra but all the texts of Buddhism and the Buddhist religion as a whole at present face a relatively favorable time and environment. The long era of European cultural and territorial

expansion that began with the voyages of exploration of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and culminated in the colonialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has now come to an end. Beliefs concerning the cultural and racial superiority of the European peoples, so prevalent during that era, no longer command widespread acceptance, and Christianity, the religion of the colonizers, is now simply one of a

number of major religions competing for attention among the countries of the world.

In the town in the suburbs of New York City where I was born and grew up, all the people I knew invariably fell into one of three religious categories: Jewish, Catholic, or Protestant, the last group divided into a dizzying number and variety of subgroups. Other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam



Large numbers of immigrants from Asia and the Near and Middle East have varied the religious affiliations of the American population.

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were to us only names that we learned about in school.

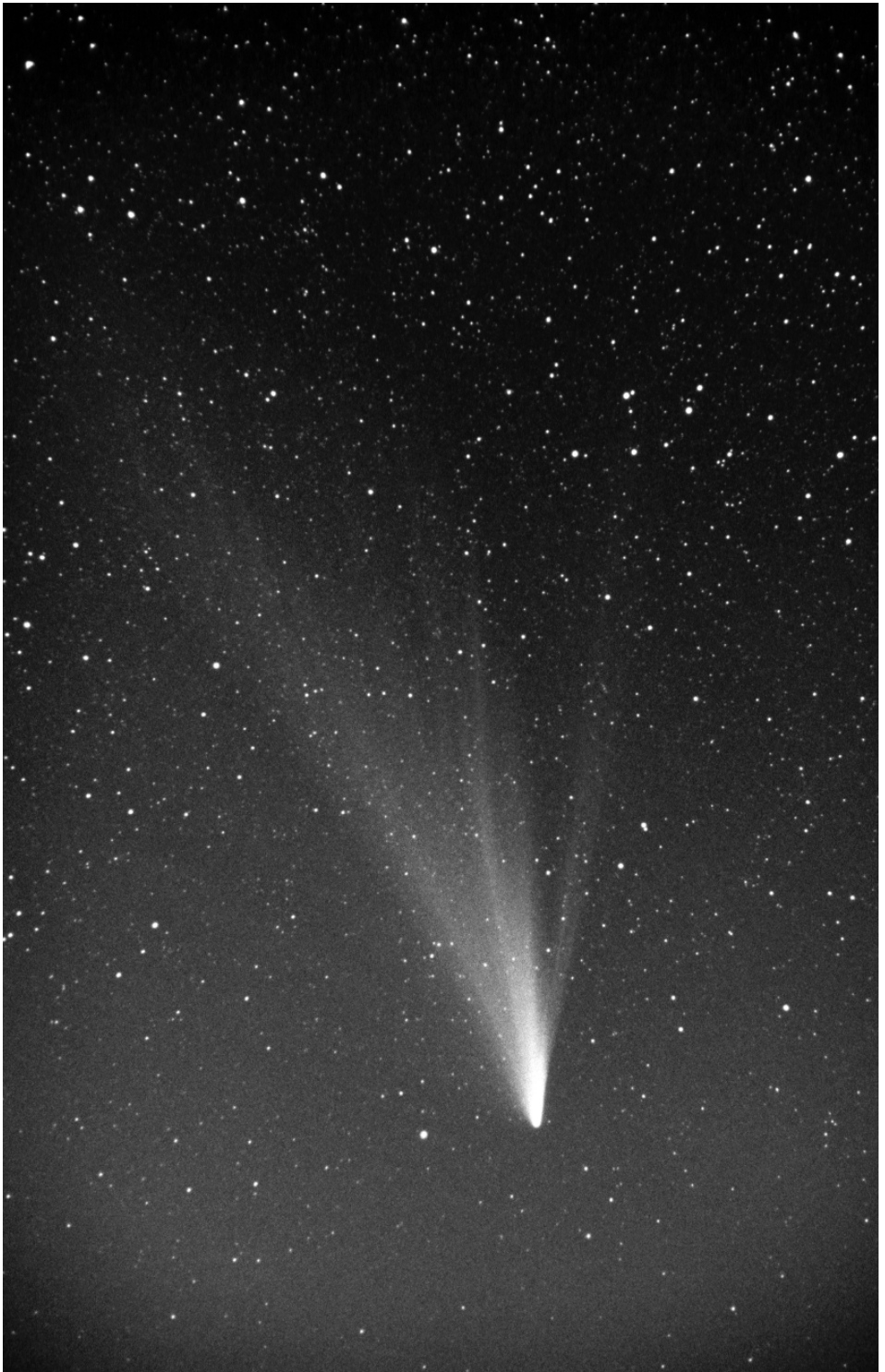
Now, however, the situation in America has changed greatly. In recent decades, large numbers of immigrants from Asia and the Near and Middle East have settled in many different parts of the country and the religious affiliations of the population have become far more complex and varied than in the past. Americans may now become acquainted with such religions as Buddhism or Islam not only through schoolbooks, but through actual contact with persons brought up in those faiths, and these religions are rapidly becoming a part of the "American experience." The last time I taught a course in the great books of China and Japan (including the Lotus Sutra) at Columbia in the spring of 1991, I had a number of students in my class who were of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese ancestry, and many of them already had some acquaint-

tance with Buddhism through what they had learned from their parents or grandparents. For most Americans today, and, I would assume, for many Europeans as well, Buddhism is no longer the

strange and exotic religion that it was in earlier centuries, the creed of "backward" Asian nations whose ways of thought are looked on as inscrutable, but a world religion whose texts and teachings are to be

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Comet seen in  
Massachusetts sky, 1975.  
From what we know today  
of the universe, the  
descriptions in the Lotus  
Sutra of vast numbers of  
worlds and periods of time  
beyond calculation are not  
so fantastic as they  
seemed centuries ago.



CORBIS/Dennis di Cicco

viewed with serious attention and respect.

One may argue, of course, that this kind of religious pluralism that characterizes America today and the air of tolerance with which people of different religious groups view one another simply reflects the fact that, for most people of the present century, religion is not as important a concern as it was to those of earlier centuries. Religion has ceased to be the binding force that it once was in social or ethnic groups; children are no longer required or even expected to embrace the religion of their parents or forebears. Though such a situation perhaps leads to greater religious tolerance as a whole, it may also lead to sheer ignorance or indifference in matters of religion, which is hardly desirable, or may cause young people who have been cut adrift in religious matters and are “shopping around” for some belief they can call their own to fall prey to the attractions of bogus leaders or unsavory cults.

But to return to the subject of the Lotus Sutra, there is another way in which our present century, and presumably the century to come, provide an atmosphere that is favorable to the reception and understanding of the Lotus Sutra and other texts of the Buddhist canon. This is the fact, often pointed out, that modern science speaks so frequently in terms that are strikingly similar to those found in the sutras. Men and women of earlier centuries, with their limited knowledge of astronomy or the his-

tory of the formation of the earth and the planetary system, were accustomed to think of time and space in relatively modest and limited terms; even, in Christian countries, viewing the creation of the world as an event that had taken place a mere several thousand years in the past. Now, however, science describes the nature and extent of the universe in terms of spatial and temporal dimensions that are so vast they are all but incomprehensible to the imagination of the average person.

Moreover, this type of language and imagery of modern science has been taken over and popularized through the books and movies and TV productions of science-fiction, so that it has in a sense become a part of everyday life. We are therefore no longer astonished or repelled, as Westerners of earlier times would no doubt have been, by the seemingly fantastic language and imagery to be found in the Lotus Sutra, by descriptions of vast numbers of universes other than our own, of periods of time so long that they defy calculation, or of beings who travel freely from one universe to another. Indeed, one reviewer of my recently published translation of the Lotus Sutra immediately commented on the striking similarity between the imagery of the sutra and that of works of science-fiction.

Of course, in the Lotus Sutra such language and imagery is not intended to convey scientific information but is basically metaphorical and religious in intent. And yet

because of such language, the words in the sutra and the message they are attempting to convey seem to us much less exotic or far-fetched in nature than they must have seemed to Western readers of earlier centuries, and instead to be rather in keeping with the modes of thought and expression of our own time.

There is another way in which, it seems to me, the imagery of the Lotus Sutra has, or ought to have, particular appeal to Western readers of our time. I am referring to the markedly mild and peaceful tone that characterizes both the thought and imagery of the text. Whenever I am back in New York after a stay in Japan, I like to go to the Metropolitan Museum and wander through the galleries of the painting collection. And in recent years, perhaps in part because of my long exposure to Buddhist art in Japan, I am always struck by the shocking and violent quality of so much of the imagery in the galleries devoted to European art of the premodern period, art that is largely religious in nature and devoted to depictions of Biblical figures or events in the lives of the Christian saints. From the Old Testament come scenes of David slaying Goliath or Judith with the severed head of Holofernes, while Christianity provides inspiration for paintings of the Massacre of the Innocents, Saint Sebastian shot full of arrows, Saint Catherine on her wheel of torture, or, of course, that most brutal and shocking of all events, the Crucifixion.

Needless to say, as with all true religious art or literature, we are

meant to see beyond the mere surface aspects of such imagery and to appreciate the truths that underlie them. But one can hardly avoid a certain instinctive reaction to the images themselves, particularly when they carry such a strong emotional impact. The central metaphor of the Christian religion is sacrifice, as exemplified by the

symbol of the Cross, the wooden frame upon which persons in ancient times were put to death, and sacrifice inevitably involves a victim and suffering. By contrast, the overriding theme of the Lotus Sutra and the other Mahayana texts is that of teachings bestowed and alms and praise offered in gratitude for such teachings. The atmosphere is one of

peace and rejoicing, there is little reference to acts of violence or evil, and the offerings made to the Buddhas are not the blood sacrifices of the old Brahman religion but flowers, incense and music, emblems of innocence and joy. This peaceful and basically optimistic outlook of the Lotus Sutra I for one find particularly appealing, and I



Depiction of David slaying Goliath by Pietro da Corto. In contrast to the Biblical imagery depicted in European art, the imagery of the Lotus Sutra is markedly mild and peaceful.

CORBIS/David Lees

would expect it to have a similar appeal for other Westerners of my time and of the century to come.

Another aspect of the thought and imagery of the Lotus Sutra that appeals to me is the sutra's view of what I might call the continuity or interrelatedness of the various levels of existence. In the Bible, and hence in Christian theology, all the different inanimate and animate beings of the world are described as being created by the hand of God. And it is stated in the very opening pages of the Bible that human beings were created so that they could "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26). Thus man or humankind is pictured as the "lord of creation," to use the traditional phrase, standing on a level separated from and high above that of the beasts and birds and other living beings, and invested with the right to exercise control over them all.

Above human beings are the various types of angels, though it is not clear whether or not there is any hard-and-fast barrier or line of demarcation that separates human beings from angels. And at the very top sits God, so perfect and all-powerful that he is completely removed from all of the objects of his creation. Thus, in this system of thought, the various levels or categories of being appear to be fixed and static, with little or no possibility of moving up or down from one level to the other. The line separat-

ing human beings from the lower forms of life is particularly pronounced, while God, the creator of the whole system, exists on a plane so wonderful and exalted that he is in a category by himself.

This Biblical view, which has so deeply influenced the thought and culture of Western civilization, is very different from that reflected in Buddhist texts such as the Lotus Sutra. These texts, drawing upon

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highest level of  
understanding.

■

earlier Indian concepts of the structure of the universe and the nature of being, show us a concept of levels of being that is much more fluid and less rigorously compartmentalized. It is customary to speak of the Ten Worlds depicted in the thought of the Lotus Sutra, ranging from that of hell dwellers on the lowest level, through the ascending levels of hungry spirits, animals, asuras,

human beings, and so forth until one reaches the highest level, that of Buddhahood or the Buddhas. Not all of these ten levels of being are clearly delineated in all the sutras, but in the Mahayana texts this general concept of the ascending levels of being is evident. And it is important to note that there are no hard-and-fast barriers separating one level from another. Depending upon the deeds that beings do and the degree of understanding they achieve, they may move up or down from one level to another, those committing evil or stupid actions in one existence being reborn in their next existence on a lower level, even perhaps on the very lowest, that of hell. On the other hand, those who do good and strive for enlightenment may in a comparable fashion rise in the scale of being until they attain the highest of the ten levels, that of Buddhahood. And if one follows the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai in viewing the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* or "three thousand realms in a single moment of thought" as part of the fundamental teaching of the Lotus Sutra, then one need not even wait for the process of rebirth in order to move from one level to another. According to T'ien-tai's doctrine, all the ten levels of existence are potentially possible to an individual at any moment, regardless of the level that that individual occupies at the time, and hence, through good deeds, understanding and faith, or through the lack of these, one may move up or down on the ladder within the span of a single lifetime.



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Aerial photo of forests in British Columbia, Canada, showing the effects of deforestation. "It has become increasingly clear that unless human beings cease to act as unrestrained 'lords of creation' and learn to integrate living with other forms of life, they will not only continue to drive other species into extinction but will bring about their own annihilation as well."



These are highly complex philosophical and doctrinal matters and I have no intention of trying to go into them in detail here. The point I wish to make is that this view of the interconnectedness of the different levels or categories of life expressed in the Lotus Sutra, and particularly the manner in which the sutra interprets the relationship between human beings and other forms of life, is much more in accordance with the trends of present-day thinking on the subject than is the Biblical view I have outlined earlier. If human beings are supposed to be the supervisors of other forms of life on our planet, we can only say that they have so far, especially in the present century, been very poor caretakers indeed. Through their predatory activities, or their careless treatment of the environment and exploitation of natural resources, they have succeeded in wiping out or driving to the verge of extinction any number of other species of life, of which the *toki* or Japanese crested ibis is simply one of the latest and most publicized examples. It has become increasingly clear to thinking people all over the world that unless human beings cease to act as unrestrained “lords of creation” and learn to integrate their activities and manner of living with those of other forms of life and levels of existence, they will in the future not only continue to drive other species of beings into extinction but will bring about their own annihilation as well.

One of the things that pleases

me most about the Lotus Sutra is the way in which both human and nonhuman beings—*nimpinin* is the phrase the Kumarajiva translation of the sutra uses to express it—are depicted as attending the Buddha and listening attentively to his teachings. To be sure, Western legend tells us that Saint Francis of Assisi preached to the birds, and certain of the Christian mystic thinkers express a sense of the oneness or wholeness of existence that is quite close to the Buddhist view. But in Christianity in general, because human beings are the only creatures who are thought to possess an immortal soul, they are viewed as the only ones who are in need of salvation and hence the only ones for whom the teachings of religious truth are intended.

In the Lotus Sutra, by contrast, the Buddha’s message is preached not only to beings of advanced religious understanding such as the bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas and voice-hearers, or to the dwellers in the heavenly and human spheres of existence, but to a vast number and array of nonhuman beings as well. Many of these have strange-sounding Sanskrit names and are difficult for those of us not familiar with the Indian cultural tradition to imagine or visualize. But that they are not simply to be regarded as inferior forms of life, second-rate listeners standing in the back rows of the assembly while the front rows are occupied by gods and humans, is dramatically illustrated by the fact that one such being, the dragon king’s daughter, gains enlighten-

The Lotus Sutra is preached not only to dwellers in the heavenly or human spheres but to a vast array of nonhuman beings as well. The concept of the universal potential for enlightenment possessed by all beings is one of the features of the Lotus Sutra.



CORBIS/Neil Preston

ment in a fashion that is so rapid and exemplary that it astounds all the other members of the assembly and puts them to shame.

To be sure, the occupants of the lowest levels of existence, the hungry spirits and hell dwellers, are not shown taking part in these assemblies at which the Dharma is preached, presumably because the karma that caused them to fall into those realms of existence does not for the moment allow them to do so. But since the sutra makes clear that the beings in all realms of existence possess the Buddha nature and that all alike are potentially capable of attaining Buddhahood, there is no doubt that the Buddhist teachings will be conveyed to them at some appropriate time. For, as the sutra again and again reiterates, it is the aim of the Buddhas to save “all sentient beings,” *issai shujo*, which

means those on every level of existence. And T’ien-t’ai’s doctrine, basing itself on the Lotus Sutra, goes a step farther to assert that even plants and trees or inanimate things such as stones possess the Buddha nature and are capable of responding to the teachings of the Buddhas.

This concept of the universal applicability of the teachings, or the potential for enlightenment possessed by all beings, is of course one of the features of the Lotus Sutra that is most frequently pointed out. I have already mentioned the dramatic incident in which the dragon king’s daughter, in the presence of the assembly, demonstrated that she has achieved enlightenment and can become a Buddha. Earlier Buddhist teaching had insisted that women could not attain Buddhahood, at least as long as they remained in female form, but this idea is clearly

refuted in the Lotus Sutra, a fact that aligns it with the trends of feminist thinking in our own time. And elsewhere in the Lotus Sutra we are told that Devadatta, a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who is depicted in most Buddhist writings as the epitome of evil, will attain Buddhahood in a future existence. Thus the Lotus Sutra makes clear that no category of beings, no matter what terrible deeds they may have committed in the past, are forever barred from the achievement of enlightenment.

Earlier forms of Buddhism had tended to draw a rather sharp line between monks and nuns, the men and women who had abandoned family life and become members of the Buddhist Order, and the ordinary lay believers who gave alms to the monastic community and helped to support them. The members of the Order of course had to obey numerous precepts or rules of conduct and to live quite different lives from those of ordinary believers. But in exchange for such dedication they were believed to be able to achieve levels of understanding and spiritual attainment that were far beyond the reach of lay believers.

In Mahayana Buddhism, however, this sharp line of demarcation between the laity and the members of the Order becomes blurred or ceases to be of such great importance. In the Lotus Sutra the Buddha is shown preaching to members of the Order and lay believers alike, and it is clearly indicated that both groups have an equal chance for spiritual advance-

ment and attainment of the highest level of understanding. What is important is the faith and sincere striving of the individual, not whether he or she belongs to the Order or to the lay community. This point is even more clearly brought out in another of the major Mahayana texts, the Vimalakirti Sutra, in which the principal figure, Vimalakirti, a rich lay believer of the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, has reached a level of spiritual attainment that is as high or higher than that of any of the Buddha's monk disciples.

In Christianity there are certain sacraments or rituals such as baptism, holy communion, marriage, etc., that, at least in many forms of Christianity, are believed to be valid and effective only if they are performed by ordained members of the clergy. The clergy thus possess spiritual powers that are not accessible to the members of the lay community, and the lay community must in turn be dependent upon the clergy in situations where the exercise of such powers is required, situations that in many cases are of the most vital concern to the lives and faith of the believers.

So far as I know, Buddhism has never had a separate priestly caste or class with power to bestow blessing or spiritual benefit upon lay believers, such as existed in Brahmanism, ancient Judaism, or Christianity. In Buddhism, those believers who choose to leave secular life and become members of the Buddhist Order have always been regarded with special respect because they are

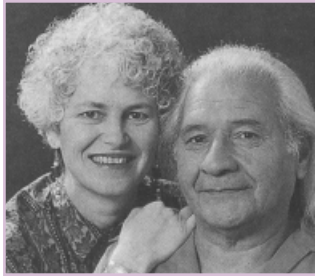
able to devote more time and energy to religious matters than is possible for most lay followers and can become expert in the texts and rituals of the religion. But, like the rabbis of later Judaism, their role is principally that of teachers, preachers of doctrine, and leaders of the religious community. They have no power to confer enlightenment or spiritual advancement upon believers. That must come through the faith and spiritual practice of the individual, whether the individual is a monk or a nun, a man or a woman of the lay community. This emphasis upon the importance of the individual believer, and upon the potentialities for spiritual advancement open to him or her, regardless of social background or status, represents another aspect in which Mahayana teaching as exemplified in the Lotus Sutra accords well with the prevailing attitudes of our present century.

This is not to say, of course, that all the ideas of the Lotus Sutra will necessarily be appealing, or even easily understandable, to readers of our time, particularly those like myself whose upbringing has been in Western culture. The concept of karma—that one's good or bad deeds have inevitable results and shape the course of one's life—seems reasonable enough, and in fact would appear to be a part of the thinking of almost all religions to some degree. But the view that such a process operates over a very long span of time, its effects manifesting themselves in different forms over the course of successive reincarna-

tions, will seem strange to most Westerners, who tend to think of the life of the individual as a separate and self-contained unit. And the concept of *ku*, Emptiness or nondualism, as I know from my experience in trying to teach it in classes at Columbia, is extremely difficult for most persons to grasp, whatever their cultural background. Moreover, though the tone of the Lotus Sutra is for the most part mild and sunny, its language can be surprisingly harsh when it describes the punishments that await those who speak slanderously of the sutra. And when the sutra depicts persons burning their own bodies or arms as a form of offering, its imagery becomes close to repellent, though such imagery is undoubtedly meant to be understood metaphorically and not in any literal sense.

Despite these minor drawbacks, however, the Lotus Sutra undoubtedly has, as I have tried to indicate above, many aspects that should make it attractive to Western readers of the present age. If it is made available in an accurate and readable translation with suitable explanatory material, and if it is allowed to circulate freely in an "open market" of religious ideas, I can well imagine that many Westerners, young people in particular, will be drawn to it. I will be interested to see how it is received in the years to come and how its ideas and images influence the shape and direction of the twenty-first century. □

This article was originally published



Constance Brissenden and Larry Loyie, Canada

# Bringing Hope and Healing to First Nations People

**SGI** Canada member Constance Brissenden met her partner Larry Loyie five years ago while teaching a creative-writing class at the Carnegie Community Center in Vancouver. Larry, of Cree First Nations descent, was involved in volunteer work promoting literacy at the center. In pursuit of his lifelong dream of becoming a writer, he attended Constance's workshop. Two years after he participated in this workshop, Larry had written his first play, *Ora Pro Nobis* (Pray for Us), which is based on his painful childhood experiences in a residential school in northern Alberta. Like many other First Nations children in Canada, Larry was separated from his family at an early age and forced to attend a residential [public] school. There he was forbidden to speak his birth language or practice the spirituality of his people. He was also subject to verbal and physical abuse.

A theater major with a specialization in playwrighting

and directing, Constance felt that Larry had an important message to convey in his writing about First Nations people, and she was able to help him with his play. She directed productions of *Ora Pro Nobis* in Vancouver, Toronto and in Larry's home community in northern Alberta.

Larry has gone on to write *No Way To Say Goodbye*, commissioned for the Kinuso, Alberta, First Nations AIDS Conference held this May, and *Fifty Years' Credit*, a work in progress dealing with the media's view of native life.

Constance and Larry have continued to work together on various teaching and writing projects. They have just finished writing a children's book, *As Long As The Rivers Flow*, which will be published in Toronto, and are currently working on a guide to native traditions.

In addition to collaborating on writing projects, the couple also works together in First Nations communities, often as volunteers. Since 1990, Larry has traveled extensively, researching First Nations traditions and literacy issues. Now Constance frequently accompanies him on his speaking engagements before students and native groups. She helps organize presentations and co-teaches creative-writing workshops.

Working in the First Nations community has been a gratifying experience for Constance. As a non-First Nations person she felt awkward at first, but her Buddhist practice helped her overcome her self-consciousness and connect with people on a life-to-life basis. As a result, she has made many treasured friends in the native community.

When Constance joined the SGI in 1978, she had finished her graduate studies and was working as an editor in charge of play publication for a playwrights' union. In spite of her accomplishments, she says, "I felt like a disappointment to my family and friends. I didn't have much depth. When I scratched the surface of myself, I was very shallow, without the inner resources needed to struggle and succeed, or to support others in their difficult times."

Now, after 20 years of Buddhist practice, Constance is proud of herself. In addition to being author of more than 1,500 feature stories and seven nonfiction books, having worked as managing editor and head writer for Expo 86, as a writer for CKVU television in Vancouver and being a teacher of creative and business writing, she has found the energy and commitment to support Larry in his work to help the First Nations people.

Given the different social and cultural backgrounds, in which they grew up, it was unlikely that Constance and Larry would ever meet—let alone become life partners. Larry, named Oskiniko (Young Man), was born in Slave Lake, Alberta, to a traditional Cree family. He attended three years of public school before being taken



Constance Bissenden

Traditional dancers at the annual Pow Wow in Wabasca-Desmarais, Alberta (June 1998).

from his family at age 10 and placed in a residential school. At the age of 14, he began working on farms and logging camps.

After joining the Canadian Forces, he spent two years in Europe and then returned to Alberta where he spent more than 25 years working as a fisherman, long-shoreman, logger and native counselor. Then a knee injury in 1984 made it impossible for him to continue doing heavy outdoor work. While recovering from knee surgery in Vancouver, he found himself doing a lot of reading at the Carnegie Community Center library, where he met Constance.

In fact, it is not surprising that Larry could make the shift from laborer to writer. After he left school at the age of 14 and began working as a logger, Larry became an avid reader. He recalls, “I read everything in the bunkhouse. Because of my age, I could not participate in what the other workers were doing on weekends.... When I first saw the Carnegie Center’s poster about a free creative-writing class, I realized that I had always wanted to write.”

Larry has used his ability as a writer to heal his personal wounds as well as the wounds of his people. He says: “A lot is required for native people to heal. What we went through in the residential schools will not be resolved in my generation or the next. For native people, writing—whether it be traditional stories or life experiences—is a good way to ease the pain. It helps others understand who we are and what we went through. It’s a way to share our traditions and our healing journeys.”

Larry feels a deep sense of gratitude to Constance and the SGI. He says: “The SGI has filled a void in my life.... Every time I hear the philosophy of the SGI, especially the letters of Nichiren, I think deeply of their meaning.... After going to a meeting with Constance, I

feel very fresh and clear.... We usually continue to talk about the topics on the way home. I appreciate my partner and am thankful that she has let me join her in her endeavors.”

Constance also feels deep gratitude to Larry for allowing her to share in his life with the First Nations people and for giving her the chance to grow as a person. Both she and Larry have had to work through many of the problems that come with a cross-cultural relationship, and they continue to struggle with cultural differences that impede mutual understanding. Larry explains: “A non-native person will have a hard time understanding the way we think. Our culture is so different. Most people perceive native culture as something from Hollywood films when it is really nothing like that at all.”

Both Larry and Constance have no disagreement when it comes to the philosophy of the SGI, however. They both feel that the SGI has helped them shape meaningful, fulfilling lives. Constance says: “Looking back, I see that I have come a long way from my early days in Vancouver in 1983. I had no money and little experience as a writer. Today I have a steady freelance job with British Columbia Transit. My contract is flexible, and I take time off whenever I want. In this way, I can continue to work with Larry in the native communities whenever the opportunity arises. I truly enjoy my life and appreciate every minute. I feel confident and hopeful every day and embrace every new experience as a chance to give something back to society.”

As Larry and Constance build a beautiful legacy together, they continue to bring hope and inspiration to the First Nations people. They can be reached at [livingtradition@bc.sympatico.ca](mailto:livingtradition@bc.sympatico.ca) □

(From the July 1999, *SGI Quarterly*)

Recollections  
of My Meetings  
with Leading  
World Figures—  
King  
Juan Carlos I  
of Spain

By SGI President Ikeda

On February 11 of this year [1998], the Manila Hotel in the Philippines was filled with a lively gathering of well-dressed people. A happy warmth, quite distinct from the steamy tropical weather outdoors, flowed through the crowd. A ceremony for the conferment of the Knight Grand Cross of Rizal on the king of Spain was under way. As a recipient of the same honor as well as the First Rizal International Peace Award from the Order of the Knights of Rizal of the Philippines, I had been invited to join the celebrations.

The Philippines was once a Spanish colony, taking its name from King Philip II of Spain. On the conferment of the decoration from the prestigious Philippine organization, King Juan Carlos said that he hoped to make it an opportunity to build a wonderful future of harmony between Spain and the Philippines. His words elicited resounding applause from the close to a thousand people in attendance.

When I presented the king with the certificate accompanying the award, he shook my hand and greeted me cordially. I had been introduced to the king in a reception room prior to the ceremony. He seemed to know who I was. In fact, several years ago, I was scheduled to travel to Spain and meet with him, but unfortunately ill health forced me to cancel my trip. I was sorry to have inconvenienced the monarch then, and I was very happy to have another chance to meet him in the Philippines.

King Juan Carlos I of Spain is a very tall man at 6 ft. 4 in. When I met the king in person, I was struck by his aura of personal strength and integrity.

I composed a poem for him entitled "Al gran Rey de la Paz, Sol de España" (Great King of Peace, Sun of Spain), praising his valiant and productive contributions to the

restoration of democracy in Spain. The truth is that since his accession to the Spanish throne, his country has enjoyed prosperity as bright as the rising sun. The forty years of the dictatorial Franco regime had heavily oppressed the Spanish people and made Spain an outcast from Europe. When I visited Spain in 1961, the capital city of Madrid seemed bleak. There were few lights in the town at night, giving a dark, cheerless impression. Behind the façade of public order and safety, I sensed a feeling of desolation.

What a sharp contrast this was to my second visit to Madrid twenty-two years later in 1983, when it was bustling and bursting with activity! On that occasion, I met with then Spanish Minister of Culture Javier Solana. He was a young man of forty. In fact, the prime minister and other cabinet ministers were young as well. Mr. Solana told me how happy he was that Spain had been rejuvenated, been reborn. The country continued to demonstrate the fastest rate of economic growth in Europe and, in 1992, its new vigor attracted world recognition when Spain hosted the Barcelona Olympics and Expo 92 in Seville.

King Juan Carlos has been the linchpin of this amazing transformation. He realized that his country was at a crossroads: it must either transform itself into a democratic, humanitarian society, or suffocate under the weight of continued oppression. He stood up alone to proclaim that unless Spain moved forward with the times, it would have no future. He knew there was no other way, and he was determined to see to it that his nation did have a future. He did not allow himself to become flustered, he didn't rush things. He made steady progress toward that goal, taking one sure step at a time, carefully, yet never losing the moment. He would not accept failure.



King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia in Rome, September 1998.

CHRIS/SAP

He became king in 1975, but by that time, after long decades under Franco's dictatorship, all aspects of Spanish life and society had grown rigid and resistant to change. Any attempt to make the transformation to democracy would only stir a violent reaction from the old regime. There was also considerable danger of civil strife. He wanted to avoid that at all costs; the wounds of the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), which set father against son, brother against brother, were still not fully healed. The young, thirty-seven-year-old king's struggle for democracy was like a delicate operation—one slip of his hand and the patient, Spain, might die.

King Juan Carlos was born in Rome (in 1938), where the Spanish royal family lived in exile at the height of the Spanish Civil War.

When he was only ten years

old, he was sent back, all alone, to Spain to live under Franco's rule. In many ways, he was little more than a hostage. In November 1948, an express train from Portugal made an unscheduled stop at a small country town several kilometers outside Madrid. This was arranged to avoid a warm reception by royalist supporters for the young prince when he arrived in Spain.

Stepping out onto the platform, the prince was greeted instead by a blast of piercing cold wind blowing down from the mountains in the north. The icy cold of that day is probably etched forever in his heart, for it was a day that marked the end of his childhood innocence—an end that came far too soon and far too cruelly. He was forced, at the young age of ten, to acquire two strategic weapons to survive: silence and caution.

Spain was still officially a

monarchy, but the real king was Franco. There was a fierce split between right and left in the country, and anything the prince might say would be used by one camp or the other for political purposes. On the other hand, his complete silence would also send a message. He was living under a microscope, his every word and deed scrutinized.

But he had one reason to be happy: he was fortunate in having a wonderful teacher, Torcuato Fernández Miranda. To this day, the king still looks up to him with everlasting gratitude.

Mr. Miranda was a very extraordinary teacher. He never brought notes or written materials with him to his classes with the prince. One day when his young student asked him about textbooks, Mr. Miranda responded, "Your Highness doesn't need them."

"Why don't I need them?" exclaimed the prince in astonishment. "You just don't, Your Highness," replied his teacher, "You must learn through listening and looking at everything around you."

Mr. Miranda also often said to him: "Sometimes situations seem the same, but below the surface they are very different. History repeats itself, but not identically. The impetus is different each time."<sup>1</sup>

The teacher made heavy demands on his student, because he knew he was educating a future king.

On another occasion, the prince asked Mr. Miranda: "But how will I get the hang of everything? Who is going to help me?"

His teacher replied: "There is no one to help you, Your Highness. Being the king will be like a flying trapeze act with no safety net below."

"No net?" asked the prince.

"None," came the reply.<sup>2</sup>

The young prince needed to cultivate intelligence and astuteness of judgment, but if he revealed these qualities, he could put his very life



CHRISS/Adam Woolf III

Fortress above a Spanish village.

in danger.

He was living in a miasma of uncertainty, never knowing, when he opened the door, whether to expect a crown on a velvet pillow or a warrant for his arrest from the Civil Guard. He learned the arts of patience and perfect self-control. Only when people insulted his father, still in exile, did he react violently. He would not permit it; he even got into fist fights with fellow students about it. The government-controlled mass media launched a smear campaign against his exiled father, trying to implant a negative image of him among the Spanish people. This strategy to discredit his father and the royal family, aimed at undermining the royalist forces in Spain, continued for decades.

No doubt largely as a result of this, when Franco died in November 1975, there was no public support for the reestablishment of the monarchy. Nor were there any hopes for the arrival of a new age. Forty years of dictatorship had left heavy shackles on the hearts of the Spanish people, and they didn't expect any changes. But they were wrong. The newly crowned King Juan Carlos had been waiting for just this opportunity, and the estab-

lishment of democracy in Spain began to take place right before their eyes. Most surprising, perhaps, was the change that came over the young royal himself. The once taciturn, undistinguished, shy crown prince was suddenly transformed into a resolute, affectionate, outgoing king, adapting to the new situation superbly.

With an extraordinary skill for preventing confrontations between opposing forces, King Juan Carlos pressed forward with his quiet revolution. He stepped lightly, as if walking on thin ice, paying careful attention to the concerns of the old regime while assembling a team of talented young people with a contemporary sense and bringing fresh air into the discourse on Spain's future. And so it was that three years after Franco's death, "fascist Spain" became a democracy with a constitutional monarchy resembling that of the United Kingdom. The world was astonished at this unbelievable accomplishment.

Then, on February 23, 1981, there was a counterreaction. In an attempted coup d'état, a faction of the military occupied the in-session parliament, taking all of its members hostage and refusing to leave. The

world held its breath. Would the democratic reforms, so long awaited, all be undone? King Juan Carlos quickly phoned the country's top military leaders one after another and gained their assurances that they would support him no matter what position he decided to take in the crisis. The king was undoubtedly driven to protect democracy even if it cost him his own life. Despite the high tension of the unfolding events, he didn't lose a moment and sprang swiftly to action.

King Juan Carlos went in front of the television camera and announced firm measures against the coup to his forty million countrymen and countrywomen, rallying their energies and support. He denounced the coup as an act of terrorism against the entire nation, and declared that such lawlessness would not be permitted. Hearing this absolutely clear proclamation of the king's intent to protect democracy, the people were able to sleep in peace, and the insurgents had no choice but to call off the coup.

The king was putting his beliefs into practice; his role, he believes, is to learn what the people are thinking quietly to themselves and then say it in a loud, public voice. In this case, he put that belief into practice by throwing himself before the forces who threatened democracy and making himself their target. His grandfather King Alfonso XIII had behaved in a similar way a half-century earlier, when he was being driven out of the country. His military supporters proposed attacking and destroying his opponents, but the king said that not a single drop of Spanish blood should be shed because of him.

Serving all the people of Spain, even at the sacrifice of one's life—that is the duty of the country's monarch. Clearly, King Juan Carlos feels that noble purpose and sense of responsibility with a strength

matched by his powerful and dignified bearing.

"The captain goes down with the ship," as the saying goes. The captain remains to the last, making sure that every crew member and passenger is safe before thinking of his or her own fate. Unfortunately, Japan's present crop of leaders, in both government and business, seem to subscribe to the opposite view. Instead of seeing to the well-being of the people, their concern is "leaders first." This reversal suggests that the people exist for the sake of leaders and not the other way around. Unfortunately, this seems to be standard operating procedure in Japan today.

I had an opportunity to greet Queen Sofia of Spain as well, before the ceremony in Manila. I found her elegance, warmth and kindness most impressive. She has worked hard to improve the lot of Spain's poor. I have heard that, whenever there is a natural or other disaster, she immediately flies to the scene in a helicopter and comforts the victims' families. Even normally cynical journalists have been moved by witnessing the speed and sincere concern with which the queen responds to the troubles of the people.

Two days after the ceremony at the Manila Hotel, I was heading for the Ninoy Aquino International Airport to depart for Hong Kong. When I entered the waiting room, I was surprised to learn that King Juan Carlos was also at the airport, on his way back to Spain. His schedule had been changed for some reason, and we found ourselves, quite by coincidence, at the same airport at the same time. Philippine Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon invited me into the area where the king was, so that I could pay my respects.

King Juan Carlos was standing, talking pleasantly with a group around him. He was dressed in a very relaxed fashion, wearing a striped blue shirt and a necktie.

When he saw me approach, he apologized for his casual appearance. I was impressed by his humility and sincerity. "Please, don't worry about it," I said, adding, "The Philippine people were so happy to welcome you, Your Majesty, a man of great character and honesty, to their country."

When I told him that, the king replied in Japanese, "Domo arigato" (thank you), accompanied by a warm smile. No doubt his power to charm everyone he meets is one of the fruits of the hard times he endured as a young man. Even republicans and communists who oppose the monarchy on principle are unsparing in their praise and affection for the king. His character has transcended all political parties and unified the nation.

The terrible suffering humanity has experienced this century has also been reflected in the history of Spain. Beginning with the Spanish Civil War, which was a precursor of World War II, Spain has seen revolutions, civil strife, fascist dictatorship, and the struggle for democracy. Finally, it had won, with a bloodless revolution and a new unity.

Fifty years have passed since the young prince stepped down onto that cold and windy train platform. It has been a long, long journey.

King Juan Carlos is the recipient of UNESCO's Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for contributions to democracy and peace, and he has been mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, but without a doubt the peaceful smiles of the Spanish people are the greatest glory and honor for this Great King of Democracy. □

1. Translated from Spanish. José Luis de Vilallonga, *El Rey: Conversaciones con D. Juan Carlos I de España*, trans. from French by Manuel de Lope (Barcelona: Plaza and Janes Editores, S.A., 1993), p. 96.

2. *Ibid.*

# SEEKING OUR TRUE ROOTS

By Ed Feasel,  
SGI-USA Youth Division Leader

The doors slammed shut and pandemonium filled the hallway. My four friends and I were surrounded by at least twenty of them. I was pushed to the ground and felt something hit my back. As I got up and looked around, I saw my friend standing there with blood covering his face. He had been hit by the same belt buckle that hit me.

All of this because of an argument over a volleyball game. Reason enough for members of two rival ethnic gangs.

This was where my life was at in junior high school. The kid who had hit us with the belt turned out not to be a kid at all. He was out of school, and one of the teachers caught him with the belt. My friend and I chose to press charges and send him to jail, thinking this would be our first step toward revenge. What seemed like a good idea at the time turned sour when the death threats came. I became consumed with fear.

This was how arguments were solved in my neighborhood. Violence determined who would win. I didn't have to look far to see where this lifestyle led. Grown-ups with broken lives and lost dreams. I knew there had to be more to life than this. That was when I became involved in the SGI, and it changed the course of my life.

The reality, however, is that far too many teenagers face even worse circumstances as they grow up. More and more we are seeing their frustration lead them to violent actions that can result in tragedies like the Columbine shooting. We, as a society, are facing a pivotal time where we can either turn away from the piercing scream for help from our youth, or we can embrace them and share with them a vision of



hope and peace for the future.

It was, in fact, my seniors in the SGI who helped me see my own potential. Even more than the other youth, it was the men and women who expressed the greatest expectations for me. I, in turn, developed dreams and goals and began pursuing them. In the pursuit of these dreams I have come to see that it wasn't only my neighborhood where violence was being used as a means to solve arguments.

In 1991, I took a one-year leave from my doctoral program in economics at U.C. Berkeley to teach economics in Czechoslovakia. The "velvet revolution" there had seen the country abandon communism and begin to incorporate Western economics. I was chosen to be part of a first group of fifteen advanced graduate students who would teach economics, politics, law and other subjects at universities. What better opportunity to learn about economics than to live in a country going through one of the greatest economic transitions in the course of history? My experience would go well beyond economics and, once again, alter the way I view the world around me.

When I arrived in Czechoslovakia, ethnic war was raging in Yugoslavia, a relatively short distance from where I was. People were killing one another

because of ethnic origins or religions.

I had thought that I would be safe in Czechoslovakia — after all, they had just been through a bloodless revolution. I soon found out, however, that this was not the case. Many Czechs and Slovaks weren't very fond of each other, and there were serious discussions about splitting into separate countries. Some threatened to split by force, if necessary.

I also found out that some Czechoslovakians were deeply angry at the Vietnamese who had come to Czechoslovakia during communist times to find work. These Vietnamese were trying to make a home in their adopted country, but they were accused of stealing jobs. Several times I witnessed unprovoked violence inflicted on these poor Vietnamese simply because they were different.

My wife and I are of Asian descent, and on a number of occasions a group of youth approached us full of anger. As soon as I spoke they realized we were Americans. They became friendly and wanted to practice their English. I couldn't help thinking about the Vietnamese who couldn't speak English like I did.

As I experienced living in fear again, I realized that violence was all around us. It wasn't only in the neighborhood I grew up in. It existed wherever people existed, and it was used at all levels of communities — in families, in neighborhoods and among nations. I felt more than ever that America, with its rich diversity, had a mission to fulfill if we were ever going to realize a world of peace, free from violence.

I returned to America with a

renewed sense of mission. I realized that, just as SGI President Ikeda states, “The task facing our planet on the verge of the twenty-first century is that of realizing the unity of diversity.”<sup>1</sup> I felt that America could provide a great example of the “unity of diversity” for the rest of the world. It was then that the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles broke out in response to the Rodney King verdict. It felt like the entire nation was going to explode. “Can’t we just get along?” Rodney King uttered these words as the city around him seemed to be going up in flames.

As we continue to search for a way to get along, at times it has seemed that we have even taken steps back. The school shootings in Columbine, which saw minority students targeted, and recent hate crimes in Texas and Chicago have shocked the nation. Individuals and nations continue to seek to resolve racial tensions and arguments through violence.

In my search for a greater understanding of how to promote peace and unity in diversity, I have learned some wonderful lessons from the writings of President Ikeda. In discussing the message of the Lotus Sutra, he says: “To try to locate the ‘roots’ of one’s identity in a particular racial or ethnic group is an illusion. It is like a mirage in the desert. Such a sense of identity, far from serving as a common ‘homeland of life’ that can be shared by all, only heightens distinctions between oneself and others, and becomes an underlying cause of conflict and strife.”<sup>2</sup> As I read these words I understood exactly my mistake in joining a gang in my youth. I also saw the same error being committed by entire groups of people and even nations that sought their identity only in their ethnic group.

Instead, President Ikeda encourages us to “Seek out the primordial ‘roots’ of humankind.... If one reaches back to these fundamental roots, all become friends and comrades.”<sup>3</sup> This notion of equality, based on our true

roots, must be the foundation for realizing a world of peace. Only when we see one another as equals can we truly respect others’ lives. This mutual respect, I believe, is a prerequisite for peace, and it can only be realized by a great transformation in each individual life.

Based on this mutual respect, we must then fully reject the use of violence as a means to resolve conflicts at all levels of society. While conflict and misunderstanding will continue to exist, we must seek alternative means to solve our arguments.

How do we do this? Each individual, each nation must seek to engage one another in dialogue aimed at furthering understanding. In his most recent peace proposal, President Ikeda states: “In the final analysis, since they usually leave scars that continue to fester, forcibly imposed ‘hard power’ solutions are not real solutions at all.... Instead of resorting to hard-power solutions, we must first clarify the nature of the problem and then employ dialogue—the essence of soft power—to remove, one by one, the obstacles to solution.”<sup>4</sup> This is the strategy that we must employ at all levels of society.

Some may think that nonviolent, or soft power, solutions are too idealistic or too passive. Great examples in history, however, prove this to be wrong. Gandhi, together with his fellow countrymen, pursued nonviolent means to secure the independence of India against British colonial rule. Martin Luther King Jr. and the champions of the civil rights movement also employed a nonviolent struggle to gain basic rights being denied to African Americans. In both cases, citizens were not passive, simply allowing injustice to persist. Rather, they stood up firmly for justice and spoke out against the injustices perpetrated against them. They understood, based on a deep respect for the dignity of life, that “victory by force is not true victory.”<sup>5</sup>

President Ikeda once mentioned that great individuals in the past, like

Gandhi, have left a path for us to follow. The problem is that too often people are arrogant and ignore this path. Gandhi realized a great revolution based on his philosophy of non-violence. Against what appeared to be insurmountable odds, he achieved a brilliant victory that stands as an example for all of us to follow.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to standing up for justice based on non-violence is our own fear. Our fear often leads us in directions of least resistance, in directions where we succumb to our “lesser self.” We must overcome this fear and pursue the higher road, the nobler course.

Gandhi’s followers overcame their fear through his teachings. Jawaharlal Nehru stated that Gandhi’s greatest gift to India was driving fear from the hearts of the Indian people. Martin Luther King Jr. similarly helped his followers overcome their fear and achieve a great victory for human rights.

A great mentor can lead us to overcome our fears and pursue the correct course. As President Ikeda states, “When one is completely dedicated to the path of mentor and disciple, he or she experiences no doubt or confusion, no uncertainty or fear.”<sup>6</sup> The youth of the SGI-USA have initiated a campaign of Victory Over Violence this summer. They will be sponsoring seminars on nonviolence and provide people with an opportunity to sign a pledge of victory over violence. The pledge is based on the belief that the victory must begin with each of us. It contains the following three points: I will treasure my life; I will treasure all life; and I will inspire hope in others. With this Victory Over Violence campaign, the SGI-USA continues its tradition of promoting peace in society through dialogue. While sponsored by the youth, the campaign is an opportunity for all individuals to stand up for a peaceful world, free from violence.

As President Ikeda states: “As a peace movement on the popular

*(Continued on p.48, bottom)*

# CROSSING THE BRIDGE TO HOPE

## SCHOOL KIDS CREATE MURAL THAT HONORS DIVERSITY AND SGI PRESIDENT'S POEM

By Martha Heavenston,  
Oakland, California

The Tenderloin is one of San Francisco's most disadvantaged neighborhoods, notorious for drug dealing and crime. The newly built Tenderloin Community School sits on the safest edge of this area, two blocks from city hall. Traditionally a transient neighborhood with few children, schools were never built because there was no need. Over the past fifteen years or so, the demographics changed dramatically as it became a leading relocation spot for Southeast Asian families escaping more than two decades of war. The families built a sense of community there and, together with families from the Middle East, Central Europe, Mexico, South and Central America, and Africa, it is estimated that more than 1,200 school-age children live in the seven blocks that make up the Tenderloin.

In 1994 I was commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission to create two sculptures for the Tenderloin Children's Center, a beautiful new recreation center. This project was spearheaded by the Bay Area Women's and Children's Center, an advocacy group working in the neighborhood, and I consulted closely with them throughout my work on the sculptures. In 1996, when their dream

of building a state-of-the-art elementary school was finally coming true after eight long years of effort, they asked me also to be part of this new project. The late internationally known architect Joe Esherick who, with Jennifer Devlin, designed the school, had a vision of wrapping the exterior of the school with tile made by students so the public could see the learning taking place inside. It was decided that I would work with the children.

Darleen Lau, the wonderful principal of Redding Elementary, which sits on the northern edge of the neighborhood and serves Tenderloin children, agreed to my setting up a studio in the hallway to work with her teachers and students while the new school was being built. The subject matter evolved in response to the classroom curriculum, which we added to and adapted visually.

There are five fifty-square-foot picture areas and a two-hundred-foot connecting border. One area, titled "Women We Admire," was done by fourth and fifth graders. They chose famous women—like Florence Nightingale, Helen Keller, Amelia Earhart and Rosa Parks—to draw and write about, as well as women close to them: aunts, grandmothers and moth-

ers. A strong theme runs through the lives of all the women, with the words that describe them forming a border between the windows: caring, tenacity, gentleness, strength, kindness and courage. As I worked on the street during the installation, it was wonderful to watch women walking by, then stopping to look and read.

Another area consists of interpretations of two children's stories, "The Tiny Seed" and "The Carrot Seed," both about tenacity and the miracle of growth, metaphors for the effort of building the school.

The "World Map" places the Tenderloin at the center of the world. Each city block in the neighborhood is represented by the flag of a home country of Tenderloin residents. The continents, illustrated with plants, animal life, planets and stars, surround the map. Around the windows are self-portraits of more than eighty children. I took a class on a walking tour of the neighborhood. We talked about what we saw—the good and the bad—and discussed how we could improve it. Their ideas are represented in the border panels under the map: building schools and parks, planting trees and flowers, recycling, keeping the neighborhood clean, and feeding the hungry.

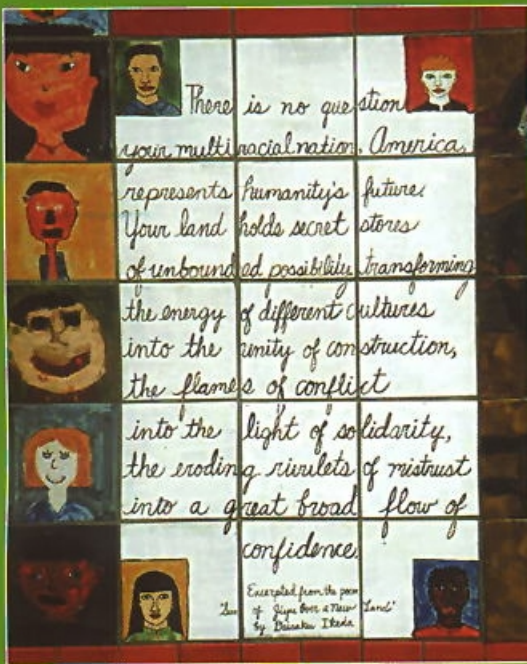
(Continued on inside back cover)

(Continued from p. 47)

level, SGI and its activities may be considered a contemporary development of Gandhi-ism. Our aim is to create a citadel of peace in the mind of each individual and in this way to educate the masses to love peace and reject violence.<sup>7</sup> □

1. Ikeda, Daisaku. "A New Humanism for the Coming Century," p. 24.
2. Ikeda, Daisaku. "Dialogue On the Lotus Sutra," *Living Buddhism*, January 1998, p. 43.
3. Ikeda, Daisaku. "The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land."
4. Ikeda, Daisaku. 1999 peace proposal: "Toward a Culture of Peace, A Cosmic

- View," *Living Buddhism*, May 1999, p. 33.
5. Ikeda, Daisaku. "A New Humanism for the Coming Century," p. 13.
6. Ikeda, Daisaku. *Addresses In the United States, June/July 1996*, p. 119.
7. Ikeda, Daisaku. *Choose Peace: A Dialogue Between Johan Galtung and Daisaku Ikeda*, p. 71.



The excerpt from SGI President Ikeda's poem "The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land" is here in this border.

Fourth- and fifth-grade students of Janet Welsh studied this excerpt word for word, and the class wrote its own poem, "Room 9," in response. This inspired the students to create the panel that faces Van Ness Avenue, one of the busiest streets in San Francisco. Along with Mr. Ikeda's poem excerpt are portraits of representative students illustrating the racial and cultural diversity of their classroom and showing themselves standing on the Golden Gate Bridge with tools of construction in their hands.

#### "Room 9"

We are many cultures,  
 Our room is America,  
 Our minds, our hearts, our spirits  
 will shape the future,  
 Unstoppable.  
 Our unique gifts,  
 elements creating, building,  
 crossing a bridge  
 to knowledge, understanding,  
 hope, respect.

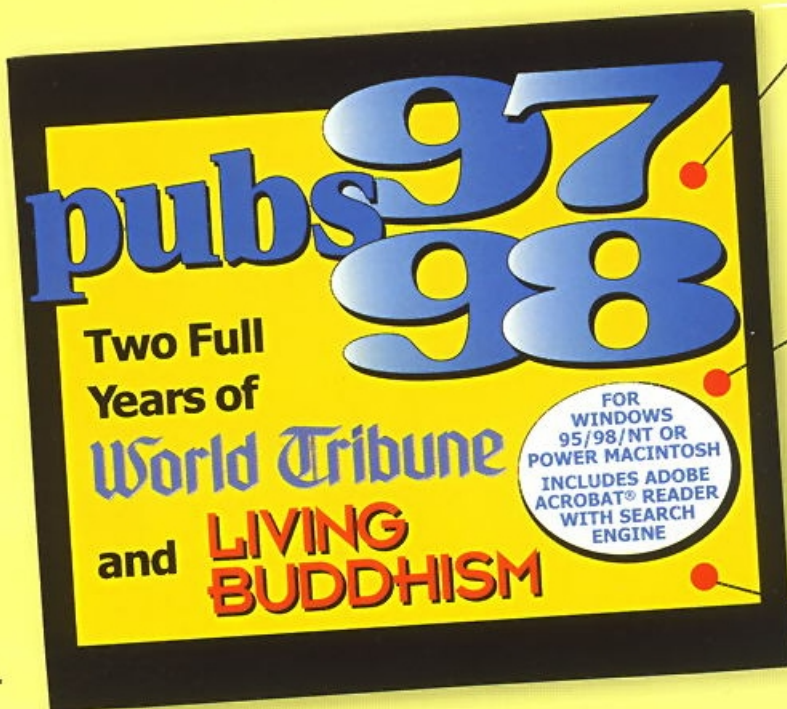
The Tenderloin Community School will open, and my work in the neighborhood will continue. The Redding Elementary students, who gave their art work to the new school, and I are halfway finished with another large-scale project that will enhance their nearly 100-year-old building. These two projects will give a strong voice to the children of the Tenderloin who, coming from many different cultures, worked side by side to create something new. The excerpt from "The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land" perfectly illustrates their efforts. □



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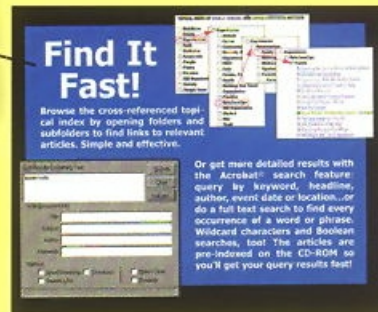
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# Living BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

AUGUST 1999

## MURAL AT TENDERLOIN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Celebrates  
Diversity

## THE COURAGE TO RESPECT ALL PEOPLE—

Bodhisattva  
Never  
Disparaging



## The Chicago Culture Center

The Chicago Culture Center, which SGI President Ikeda described as "a castle of Buddhism dedicated to culture and friendship, heralding the dawn of Chicago's new progress," officially opened with five separate ceremonies attended by more than 3,000 members from 17 states, August 17-20, 1995.

The two-story building, located in the fast-growing "renaissance community" of downtown Chicago, includes a main Gohonzon room that seats 650 people, two smaller Gohonzon rooms, several conference rooms, an executive suite, a multi-purpose room and offices. The two-and-a-half-acre grounds include a lotus pond and two large parking lots.

Since its opening, the center has been serving not only local members, but also members from neighboring states as a hub of the Central Zone.



Guy McCordley



Guy McCordley



Tom Hester