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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.

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# TIME TO TEST OURSELVES

“EXERT YOURSELF IN  
THE TWO WAYS OF  
PRACTICE AND  
STUDY. WITHOUT  
PRACTICE AND  
STUDY, THERE CAN  
BE NO BUDDHISM”

## Take a test, anyone?

It's not an offer most of us would jump at.

But later this month, many of us will be doing just that. The test will be the SGI-USA Intermediate-level Study Department exam, to be held on October 24.

The exam is an opportunity for Intermediate Study Department candidates to step up to the Advanced level. And although our study level is simply a designation—the benefits of Buddhism have nothing to do with position or rank of any kind—the effort candidates must make to prepare for the exam are very meaningful. Making efforts to study Buddhism accords exactly with Nichiren Daishonin's advice to “exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 95).

The opportunity and benefit of Buddhist study are enjoyed not only by the person learning for the first time but also by those who help them learn. This is why the Daishonin writes: “You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. . . . Teach others to the best of your ability, even if only a single sentence or phrase” (MW-1, 95). Thus the study of Buddhism must be accompanied by our efforts to share its teachings with others for their benefit and for our own.

By helping the exam candidates study and gain a deeper understanding, we deepen and hone our own grasp of Buddhist principles and our capacity to apply them. In *The New Human Revolution*, SGI President Ikeda writes of the power of teaching Buddhism to others: “Praising and encouraging the children of the Buddha who spread the Mystic Law, speaking about Buddhism, causes joy to well forth from the depths of your life and gives you strength. At such times, the strong life force of a Bodhisattva or Buddha fills your entire being” (vol. 6, p. 215).

When I was practicing as a youth division member in Japan years ago, we each were assigned to assist one individual in preparing to take the Soka Gakkai Study Department exams. Our explicit goal was to ensure that the person passed the exam. I studied with the person to whom I was assigned, praying for his growth and success, and tried hard to explain to him the basics of Buddhism. As I did, I found my own understanding getting clearer. Each time I had to explain a difficult passage, I studied it again and

again and prayed to communicate its true meaning to my study partner. I found myself growing more and more confident and deeply appreciative of this wonderful practice.

Study means deepening our understanding of Buddhism through practice and sharing this understanding with others. We study to digest and internalize the Daishonin's teachings—the highest philosophy for living.

The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, urged members to approach Buddhist study with a spirit like that of a master swordsman seeking to sharpen and hone his skill. In the traditional Japanese martial art of swordsmanship (*kendo*), rigorous and intensive practice is required to develop one's speed, agility and reflexes. In the sword battles of ages past, life or death depended on whether the combatant had fully developed those attributes through rigorous training.

Our Buddhist practice is like a form of swordsmanship to challenge and cut through the negative forces and obstacles we face in life. Our aim is of course a peaceful world and our actions are gentle and compassionate, but our resolve and strength must be like those of someone facing a strong enemy. True happiness cannot be achieved without winning against the powerful forces in life and society that cause suffering. We who are intent on real satisfaction in life, on fulfilling our highest potential through Buddhist practice, must prepare and strengthen our lives on a fundamental level. An important part of this strengthening involves gaining a deep grasp of the concepts and philosophy behind each passage of the Daishonin's writings and applying them through practice.

Journalist Gail Sheehy, in a book

about Mikhail Gorbachev, writes: "The secret of a leader lies in the tests he has faced over the whole course of his life and the *habit of action* he develops in meeting those tests."<sup>1</sup>

We face many tests in life. The tests we face on paper prepare us for the tests we face in the world and help us prepare our "habits of action" to challenge these.

In this sense, we could say that the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, Makiguchi and Toda, took the very first Gakkai study exams. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi thoroughly studied the Daishonin's writings. He was ordered by the priesthood at the government's behest to persuade members of the Soka Gakkai to accept and enshrine a Shinto talisman—to effectively subordinate Buddhism to the militarist state religion. But faced with this challenge, he acted as he knew the Daishonin would under the circumstances: He refused, and even admonished the high priest for suggesting it. Imprisoned as a result, along with his disciple, Josei Toda, Makiguchi died a martyr in prison.

Josei Toda had practiced under an excellent mentor and studied the Lotus Sutra diligently in his tiny cell. The summer heat, winter cold, lack of proper nourishment and occasional beatings did not deter him from his quest to seek the essential truth of Buddhism and life.

As a result, he came to a sublime realization, which President Ikeda recently described as "a profound faith in the infinite worth and potential of human life coupled with a strong determination to awaken people to this" (May 1999, *Living Buddhism*, p. 28).

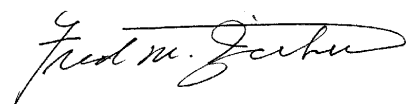
Mr. Toda fully awoke to his own identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and the real nature of life itself. Based

on this awakening, he expended every last ounce of his energy to liberate millions of people from suffering. We study to broaden our own perspective on life and discover our true nature—our true identity. And grounded on this expanded awareness, we boundlessly expand our capacity through practice—our capacity to help others as well as ourselves.

President Toda made it clear that he was able to persevere through such brutal obstacles because of his study of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Those Soka Gakkai leaders who gave up in the face of oppression during World War II, he asserted, were lacking in their study and understanding of the Daishonin's teachings.

It was for this reason that Mr. Toda began his efforts to rebuild the Gakkai after the war with a program of in-depth study. The growth and advancement of the SGI and the lives of its members have always moved ahead on the two wheels of practice and study. Missing either, we would be like a one-wheeled cart—going in circles.

In this tradition, we will hold our Intermediate Study Department exam on October 24. I hope we all take advantage of this opportunity, and side by side with those taking the exam, enthusiastically delve into the study material, which is available at our community centers.



Fred M. Zaitso  
SGI-USA General Director

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1. Gail Sheehy, "Looking for Mikhail Gorbachev" (1991). *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.



The east gate of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, India, built by King Ashoka. Stupas played a key role in the lay movement of Mahayana Buddhism.

## I. Introduction

Someone interested in Buddhism recently asked me the following question: “So where’s your temple?” “We don’t have either temples or priests. We’re a *lay* Buddhist group,” was my reply.

“Oh really? . . .”

Sensing this person’s befuddlement, I explained the circumstances surrounding the 1991 excommunication of the SGI by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. This conversation reminded me that when people hear about Buddhism, their mental associations typically go from the Buddha (imagined as a grinning man with a big belly and long earlobes) to temples and tonsured men in robes attending to rituals or absorbed in quiet contemplation.

Though the SGI members are doing better than ever since our split with the priesthood, many still ponder the question: “Do we need priests? Are we missing something because we lack a formal priesthood?” Through my experiences over the past nine years, I do not feel that I am missing anything. When I attend SGI discussion meetings

# Do We Need Priests?

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EARLY BUDDHIST ORDER

By Shin Yatomi,  
SGI-USA Vice Study Department Leader

and other activities, I feel encouraged and nourished-inspired to further develop my personal practice.

But we should not depend solely on subjective experiences and feelings to reach this conclusion. For this reason, it might be helpful for us to reexamine the relationship between the priesthood and laity and investigate the historical development of the Buddhist priesthood.

## II. The Tension and Anxiety Between Priesthood and Laity

It is not unusual to associate the concept of religion with the hierarchy of 1) a supreme power or deity, 2) priests and 3) the masses. This triad in which the saving force and the saved are connected by religious intermediaries has been a familiar concept in human history. For example, the word *hierarchy*<sup>1</sup> derives from the Latin *hierarchia*, which means the power or rule of episcopate. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the word primarily meant each of the three divisions of angels who were considered a link between God and people.

1. The etymology of the word is indicated in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

In the history of religion, tension and anxiety, rather than accord and unity, have more often permeated this triad. The priestly class wants to retain its role as intermediaries between the saving power or deity and the people. However, the priest class is keenly aware that its status completely depends upon the laity's acknowledgement of its supposed authority in this role. In a political or behavioral sense, the power of priesthood derives not from God or the Buddha, but from the very lay believers who deem the priests to be their spiritual superiors. This inherent paradox in the nature of the clergy's authority is a fundamental cause of their anxiety. Lay believers also have cause for their own tension in the triad. They are often caught between their desire to establish direct and unrestricted communion with the sacred on one hand, and the sense of security that comes from assigning responsibility for spiritual matters to the clergy on the other. Since both priesthood and laity have reasons for tension and anxiety in this triad, it is ultimately an unstable and dynamic relationship in which the status of each element is constantly evolving.

No religion is immune to the tensions and conflicts arising from this triad. (Even a religion that has rejected the role of priesthood still has to deal with the absence of priesthood.) The Protestant Reformation and the counter-Reformation of Catholicism may be one of the most well-known examples. Against the doctrines expounded by the Church, Martin Luther (1483-1546) advocated the priesthood of all believers. He wrote: "We are all consecrated priests through baptism... A priest in Christendom is nothing else but an officeholder... If we are all priests... and all have one faith, one gospel, one sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith?"<sup>2</sup> He also expounded on the sufficiency of the Bible: "Unless I am convicted by the testimony of Scripture or plain reason (for I believe neither in Pope nor councils alone, since it is agreed that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God."<sup>3</sup> In response to Protestantism, the Church at the Council of Trent in 1563 defended its basic position that the priesthood "consists in the power of consecrating and offering the Body and Blood of the Lord, and of remitting and of retaining sins."<sup>4</sup> The Church reaffirmed that the priestly orders "do not depend on the call or consent of the people, nor the secular power."<sup>5</sup> According to the Church, the powers of priests to interpret and preach the teaching of Christ as well as to forgive sins

derive from Christ himself.<sup>6</sup>

The rift between the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and the SGI similarly presents the tension and anxiety inherent in the triad of the saving influence (the Gohonzon, or Nichiren Daishonin's enlightenment), the priesthood and lay believers. Ultimately, the priesthood under the leadership of Nikken, the current high priest, was unable to withstand that tension. The solution it sought was to sever ties with one corner of the triad—the members of the SGI—and replace it with something less a source of tension. That was a laity largely of disaffected members of the SGI who were fewer in number and less apt to question the priesthood's exercise of authority over them.

Shortly after the SGI's announcement in 1993 that it would be conferring Gohonzon to its members, the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs stated: "The Soka Gakkai is a group that has been excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu, and has absolutely no relationship with Nichiren Shoshu. Therefore, no matter what actions the Soka Gakkai may take, Nichiren Shoshu has no connection with those actions whatsoever."<sup>7</sup> But with this resolute denial of any ties with their former lay believers came the rather emotional plea: "Nichiren Shoshu believers who are still members of the Soka Gakkai! At least one last time, reconsider the path you are taking! Once you have crossed the line and accepted the ultimate heresy—the counterfeit object of worship—you will have crossed over to the wrong side of the river that separates enlightenment from extremely long imprisonment in the evil paths."<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the priesthood's "one last time" was not really the last; it has continued to attempt to win back its excommunicated lay believers even until today. The priesthood's obsession with its former lay believers most eloquently illustrates its anxiety stemming from the paradox of its source of authority mentioned above. To assert its supposed spiritual superiority, the priesthood had to strike at the basis of its own priestly authority by excommunicating the majority of its lay believers.

The priests of Nichiren Shoshu are not the only ones who have experienced tension and anxiety due to the triad of spiritual interdependency. The SGI, in one sense, traded its problems with the priesthood for another challenge. Having been excommunicated, the SGI can no longer rely on the priesthood as support for a sense of orthodoxy. Today the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood stresses believers' obedience to the high priest as an absolute necessity for their enlightenment: "If one has correct faith following the

2. Martin Luther. *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. Quoted in *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*. Isabel Rivers. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge, 1994. p. 96.

3. Martin Luther. "Answer before the Emperor and the Diet of Worms." *Ibid.*, p. 96.

4. John A. Hardson. *Pocket Catholic Catechism*. New York: Image Books, 1989. p. 186.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

7. Nichiren Shoshu Temple. *Soka Gakkai Announces Issuance of Counterfeit Gohonzons: The Circumstances and Correct Doctrinal Perspective From Nichiren Shoshu*, *NST News (Special Issue)*. 1993. p. 1.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

guidance of the High Priest, then benefit will result. However, even if one possesses a traditional Gohonzon, if the person worshipping it slanders the High Priest of the conferral of the lifeblood of the Law, . . . there will be no benefit.”<sup>9</sup> According to the priesthood’s doctrine as indicated here, what is more important than believing in the Gohonzon is to follow the high priest. According to the priesthood, only the high priest, by the virtue of his assumed mystical lineage from Nichiren Daishonin, can correctly interpret the founder’s teaching and guide lay believers toward salvation. The priesthood claims: “The Nichiren Shoshu faith consists of following the lifeblood received by only a single person [i.e., the high priest].”<sup>10</sup>

The priesthood’s idea of Buddhist practice provides a sense of comfort and security to some people in that they need not struggle to find and establish a direct and intimate connection with the ultimate reality—their own Buddha nature. Their faith is validated by a third party. Simply put, their only responsibility is to defer to their local priest, through whom they commune with the high priest, who communes with the Mystic Law on their behalf. Those of us who have chosen to practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism without the priesthood, however, must accept the struggle to perceive and manifest our inherent Buddhahood as the Daishonin urges us: “Therefore, when you chant the Mystic Law and recite the Lotus Sutra, you must summon up deep conviction that Myoho-rence-kyo is your life itself.”<sup>11</sup> In this case, it is a practitioner’s responsibility to define and establish his or her relationship with the Buddha nature.

This internal challenge of ours, furthermore, is often made more difficult by the popular notion that Buddhism is the domain of monks or priests. Even in modern times, the image of an Asian man in robes, sans hair, is the image of Buddhism

to many. The idea that ordinary lay people can develop a mastery of Buddhist thought and practice seems out of synch with people’s impression of traditional Buddhism.

The history surrounding the development and evolution of the Buddhist order, however, tells us that a institutionalized priesthood is not an absolute element in Buddhist tradition. History enables us to view the role of the Buddhist priesthood as something constantly evolving and dynamic in its forms. In the following, I would like to briefly trace the history of the Buddhist priesthood and their relationship to the laity.

### III. The Early Buddhist Order

#### *Why Did Shakyamuni Become Homeless?*

To better understand the nature of the early Buddhist Order, it is important to know why Shakyamuni left the secular world to pursue a religious life. Being a monk or priest at that time in India meant to be homeless and lead the life of a wandering mendicant. It was a role fundamentally different from that of Buddhist priests in Japan today, the majority of whom are married, have families, and thus are virtually indistinguishable from the laity except for ceremonial robes and shaved heads. In Shakyamuni’s India, it was customary for those aspiring to a religious life to leave their families. Professor Hajime Nakamura describes the nature of Shakyamuni’s decision to leave home as

follows: “In a modern sense it corresponds to leaving the family and going to the city or abroad for study or to obtain certain skills.”<sup>12</sup> The option to become a monk, however, was limited to the affluent because the initiates had to leave enough resources behind to provide for their families.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Shakyamuni himself came from an affluent royal family.

There were two types of religious practitioners during Shakyamuni’s time: the *brahmanas* and the *sramanas*. The *brahmanas* were the priests of Brahmanism (the ancient form of Hinduism), considered the highest caste of Indian



**Detail of relief sculpture at the Great Stupa at Sanchi, India. During the third century BCE, Kingo Ashoka is said to have built many stupas in response to the growing popularity of stupa worship.**

9. The Nichiren Shoshu Doctrinal Research Committee. *Refuting the Soka Gakkai’s “Counterfeit Object of Worship”: 100 Questions and Answers*. West Hollywood, Calif.: Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 1996. p. 15.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

11. Nichiren. *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Vol. 1. Tokyo: NSIC, 1979. p. 4.

12. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 26.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

society, even above those of the ruling *ksatriya* class.<sup>14</sup> In his youth, a brahmana left home to study the Vedas under a teacher. After completing his study, he returned to his family to marry and raise a family. He would then officiate at various sacrificial rituals for the Hindu gods. When his sons returned from their initial studies and became old enough to assume responsibility for the household, the *brahmana* would leave home again to embark on a life of wandering.

The *sramanas* were a newer type of religious practitioner. They would enter a life of wandering and begging while young, and engage in various ascetic practices in their quest for the absolute.<sup>15</sup> But they never again returned to secular life. For both types of religious practitioner, however, a life of wandering and begging was considered the norm in their religious discipline.

When Shakyamuni set out to seek a solution for people's suffering, he chose the life style of a wandering monk, according to the social customs of his day. If he were alive today in America, we can easily assume that the form of his initial religious role would have been different. Even an enlightened person intent on spiritual reform would be unlikely to begin as a wandering monk today. Shakyamuni's choice to become a monk or priest in no way implies the absolute value of the priestly class in Buddhism; it simply indicates his adoption of the social customs of his day in achieving his aims.

### ***Against Class Discrimination***

After Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, he began to preach his teaching (the Dharma) to all people, regardless of their caste, race, sex or economic status. He first converted the five monks with whom he had initially practiced austerities.<sup>16</sup> He then converted Yasas, the son of a wealthy elder of Benares, and Yasas' parents and wife became Buddhist laymen (*upasaka*) and laywomen (*upasika*).<sup>17</sup> Through Shakyamuni's preaching, his order grew to include people from all walks of life—for example, rulers such as King Bimbisara of Magadha;<sup>18</sup> non-Aryan slave women such as Punnika;<sup>19</sup> artisans such as the blacksmith Cunda;<sup>20</sup> wealthy merchants such as Sudatta,<sup>21</sup> the sick, such as Suppabuddha, who was a leper described as “a poor, miserable, wretched

creature”<sup>22</sup>; and even criminals such as Angulimala,<sup>23</sup> who was a vicious bandit; and the list goes on.

Regarding Shakyamuni's preaching career, Professor Hajime Nakamura comments:

It was unheard of in Gotama's contemporary India to preach one's teaching to all the people. This is obvious when we compare his situation with the various philosophers of the *Upanisads*, who limited their audiences and often confined themselves to preaching to their own children, or distinguished individuals whom they deemed were qualified to receive instruction. Gotama Buddha broke this traditional restriction and doing so must have required considerable determination and courage.<sup>24</sup>

Judging from Shakyamuni's disregard of social or economic distinctions in choosing his audience, the early Buddhist order must have been a dynamic movement open to all people. The Buddhist movement at its beginning was opposed to any form of class discrimination.<sup>25</sup>

### ***The Origin of the Samgha***

The Buddhist order was called *samgha* (also spelled as *sangha*). During Shakyamuni's time, the same term described a number of political groups and trade guilds; it was also applied to religious groups.<sup>26</sup> The general notion of the *samgha* included the four groups of Buddhists: monks (*bhiksu*), nuns (*bhiksuni*), laymen (*upasaka*) and laywomen (*upasika*).<sup>27</sup> When it is used in early Buddhist texts, however, the term usually refers to the two orders of priesthood: the order of monks (*bhiksu-sangha*) and the order of nuns (*bhiksuni-sangha*).<sup>28</sup> The Buddhist Order was often called *samagra-sangha* or “harmonious order.” It was thought that members of the *samgha* should practice in harmony since they share the same goal of attaining enlightenment.<sup>29</sup>

A distinction was made between the two types of Buddhist order. The first type was called *sammukhibhuta-sangha* or the “present order,” meaning a Buddhist order that existed at a certain time and place.<sup>30</sup> During Shakyamuni's time, many orders were formed in various locations. Those orders were governed by rules called

14. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 14.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

19. Susan Murcott. *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigatha*. Berkeley, Calif: Parallax Press, 1991. pp. 174-75.

20. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 36.

21. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 91.

22. *Udana (Verses of Uplift) and Itivuttaka (As It Was Said)*. Translated by F. L. Woodward. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. pp. 57-58.

23. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 93.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

25. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964. p. 69.

26. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 62.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

*vinaya*. But a Buddhist scripture on monastic discipline records that Shakyamuni did not initially set forth priestly rules: “For the five years immediately following Sakyamuni’s Enlightenment, the *sangha* of *bhikkhu* was completely pure but after that they gradually committed errors. As a result, the Buddha established regulations as the need arose . . .”<sup>31</sup> The second type of *samgha* was more of a conceptual expression of the Buddhist order called *caturdisa-samgha* (the “universal order” or “the order of the four quarters”), which included all the Buddha’s disciples of the past, present and future and was expressed as monastic rules applicable to all the present orders.<sup>32</sup> No present order could claim the possession of monasteries and other buildings; all the properties were considered to belong to the universal order.<sup>33</sup>

All the Buddhist priests during Shakyamuni’s time led a life of wandering and begging except for three or four months of the rainy season when they took shelter in one place and engaged in intensive study and meditation.<sup>34</sup> According to the early Buddhist texts, priests were allowed to possess six items: three robes, a begging bowl, a cloth to sit upon, and a water strainer.<sup>35</sup> Their lives were austere and entirely devoted to their religious practice. It is interesting to note that soon after Shakyamuni’s death, which various scholars estimate to have been around the end of the fifth or fourth century BCE,<sup>36</sup> Buddhist priests renounced the life of wandering and started to settle down.<sup>37</sup> This transition from wandering to settlement marked the beginning of the Buddhist priests’ lives at temples and monasteries.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, it must be pointed out that Shakyamuni never had a temple or monastery if it refers to a priest’s permanent residence or *home*. He remained homeless to the end; his entire life as a religious practitioner was spent in travelling and preaching his Dharma to all people.

### The Three Treasures

The three treasures, which is also translated as the three refuges or the three gems, are the Buddha, the Dharma (i.e., his Law or teaching), and the *samgha* (the Buddhist order or community). It is an old Buddhist tradition that practitioners pay respect to those three fundamental elements of

Buddhism. *Sutta-Nipata*, one of the early Buddhist scriptures, explains that the Buddha is worthy of respect because he expounded the truth that benefits all people;<sup>39</sup> Shakyamuni’s Dharma is worthy of respect because it enables all people to attain peace and overcome death.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, the *samgha* is worthy of respect because it consists of the Buddha’s “faithful followers” who have “steadfast hearts.”<sup>41</sup>

The Buddha and his teaching are obviously important because without them there could be no Buddhism. In fact, during the earliest period of Buddhism, homage was paid only to the Buddha and the Dharma. Paying homage to all the three treasures is considered to be a later tradition.<sup>42</sup> Professor Hermann Oldenberg suggests that the idea of the three treasures began in a period after Shakyamuni’s death when the Buddhist order “stood as the sole visible exponent of the idea hitherto embodied in Buddha, as the sole possessor of delivering truth.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, it is the significance of the *samgha* that the Buddha’s faithful disciples spread his teaching, especially after his passing. Put simply, the essential role of the *samgha* lies in propagation activities. This is consistent with Shakyamuni’s emphasis to widely spread the Dharma. In one of the early texts, Shakyamuni tells his priestly disciples:

Go out and preach, monks, out of compassion for sentient beings, and out of concern for the world. Bring benefits, happiness, and caring to gods and men. No two of you should go to the same place. Preach the Dharma with reason and eloquence so that it will be good at the beginning, middle, and end.<sup>44</sup>

The *samgha* becomes worthy of respect only when its members are correctly spreading the Buddha’s teaching. Put another way, the true *samgha* is nothing other than a group of Buddhist practitioners dedicated to the propagation of Buddhism.

### Spiritual Equality and Self-reliance

Other notable characteristics of the *samgha* include its spiritual equality. It was thought that Shakyamuni’s disciples were fully capable of attaining the same enlightened state as their teacher. This idea is reflected in one of the eight analogies of the *samgha* comparing it to the ocean. In one of the early texts called *Udana*, Shakyamuni states:

31. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 80.

32. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 64.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

34. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 80. The practices of early Buddhist priests are also discussed by Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. pp. 66-68.

35. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 68.

36. The various dates estimated for Shakyamuni’s lifetime are discussed by Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 12-14.

37. Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988. p. 57.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

39. *Buddha’s Teachings Being the Sutta-Nipata or Discourse-Collection*. Translated by Lord Chalmers. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. p. 55. Verse 224.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Verses 225-26.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Verses 227-28.

42. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 88.

43. Hermann Oldenberg. *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*. Translated by William Hoey. Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. pp. 338-39.

44. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 32.

“Just as, monks, the mighty ocean is of one flavour, the flavour of salt, even so, monks, this dhamma is of one flavour, the flavour of release.”<sup>45</sup> Through the Buddha’s teaching, all people can savor exactly the same state of enlightenment as the Buddha. Just like water in the great ocean has the same salty taste everywhere, there is no distinction in the spiritual state people may attain through the Buddha’s teaching.

This spiritual equality of early Buddhism is documented elsewhere as well. For example, the spiritual state attained by the five monks who were the first Buddhist converts is depicted as being exactly identical as Shakyamuni’s enlightenment. In this regard, Professor Hajime Nakamura states: “The notion that the Buddha’s disciples could never reach the same goal that he attained since he was super-human, is a product of later imagination promulgated by the pompous theologians of subsequent eras, and a distortion of historical fact.”<sup>46</sup> Any Buddhist who declares that he has obtained a spiritual status that cannot be attained by other practitioners is making a claim that even Shakyamuni did not make and thereby promoting a non-Buddhist perspective.

Spiritual equality acknowledged in the *sangha* had some implications in terms of its organizational characteristics. Although priests’ seniority in length of practice was respected, there was no hierarchical character in the early *sangha*. Some priests had some administrative duties such as caretaker of sleeping quarters and council chambers or as distributors of food and other necessities.<sup>47</sup> But they had no greater political influence than others within the order. Professor Hermann Oldenberg points out: “Unanimity was necessary as a general rule in most of the resolutions of the Order.”<sup>48</sup> The early *sangha* was democratic in its nature and structure.

Furthermore, the *sangha* did not have a specific person or high priest who would interpret the Buddha’s teaching for the rest of the Buddhist community. In fact, the *sangha* did not claim to have any authority to institute new rules or interpret the Buddha’s teaching. Although new rules were introduced into the *sangha* after Shakyamuni’s death in response to changing circumstances, the monks made sure to attribute those changes to the Buddha himself.<sup>49</sup> This attitude of the early *sangha* indicates that in addition to the spread of Buddhism, the preservation of the Buddha’s teaching was considered an important function of the Buddhist order.



**The stupa at Sarnath, India. Shakyamuni, having attained enlightenment, came to Sarnath to preach the Dharma.**

In other words, faithfulness to the founder was an essential prerequisite for the Buddhist order. No arbitrary legislation or interpretation contradicting Shakyamuni’s teaching was tolerated within the Buddhist order. Consequently the *sangha* did not choose to have a leader who would legislate rules and interpret doctrines. The faithful observance of the Buddha’s teaching was viewed as paramount.

Although every Buddhist was thought capable of attaining the same enlightenment as Shakyamuni, the *sangha* refused to acknowledge any specific person to succeed their teacher immediately after the founder’s death. One of the early Pali texts called *Majjhima Nikaya* records the discourse between Ananda (one of Shakyamuni’s ten major disciples) and a certain Brahmin, which took place soon after Shakyamuni’s death. Parts of this dialogue reveal an important aspect of the *sangha*:

**Brahmin:** “Is there a single Almsman who in every respect and in every particular possesses all the qualities that were possessed by the reverend Gotama, the Arahat all-enlightened [the Buddha]?”

**Ananda:** “No, Brahmin. For the Lord made a Path where path there was none, traced out a Path where path there was none, and revealed a Path till then unrevealed... Today his disciples follow him in the Path which has come to them from him. ...”

**Brahmin:** “Is there any particular Almsman, Ananda, who was designated by the reverend Gotama to be at his decease your alternative refuge, and to whom, in his

45. *Udana (Verses of Uplift) and Itivuttaka (As It was Said)*. Translated by F. L. Woodward. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. p. 67.

46. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. p. 78.

47. Hermann Oldenberg. *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*. Translated by William Hoey. Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. pp. 365-66.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

49. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964. p. 112.

place, you might have recourse today?"

**Ananda:** "No."

**Brahmin:** "Is there any such Almsman chosen for this purpose by the Confraternity and designated as such by Elders and Almsmen?"

**Ananda:** "No."

**Brahmin:** "Having no such alternative refuge, how come you to be in such unison?"

**Ananda:** "We lack not an alternative refuge, Brahmin; we have one in the Doctrine. . . ."

**Brahmin:** "Is there any one particular Almsman who today you respect and revere, to whom you show honour and worship and to whom you look up with respect and reverence?"

**Ananada:** "Yes."

**Brahmin:** "In answer to my previous questions, you have already told me that Gotama designated no Almsman as an alternative to himself as your refuge at his death, and that the Confraternity has designated no one since; but now you tell me there is an Almsman whom you revere and in dependence on whom you live in respect and reverence. What can your words mean?"<sup>50</sup>

At this point, Ananda starts to explain ten various qualities that would make a person worthy of respect.<sup>51</sup> In other words, anyone who develops virtuous character and abilities should be respected. As we can see in Ananda's discourse, the *samgha* did not place anyone in a position of spiritual superiority above the rest; at the same time it encouraged honor and respect for anyone virtuous as a result of practice based on Shakyamuni's Dharma.

Originally neither the Dharma nor the *samgha* allowed for any intermediary to stand between a practitioner and his or her enlightenment. Individual practitioners are responsible for their salvation through their own efforts to practice the Buddha's teaching. After all, self-reliance is a cornerstone of Buddhism. Shakyamuni instructed Ananda on his deathbed: "Therefore, Ananda, in this world be an island to yourself, be a refuge to yourself and take refuge in no other. Make the Dharma your island, the Dharma your refuge and no other."<sup>52</sup>

### No Excommunication of Lay Believers

The Order of early Buddhism did not reject a priest

unless he committed a serious violation of the rules of monastic conduct, such as a transgression of the four great prohibitions: sexual intercourse, stealing, killing and lying.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, if priests wanted to return to their secular lives and continue to practice as lay believers, they were always free to do so. It was generally thought that no one should be bound to the priestly order or the Buddhist community as a whole by external powers.

Consequently there was no notion of excommunication of laity in early Buddhism. In this regard, Professor Hermann Oldenberg comments: "A formal excommunication of unbelieving, unworthy, or scandalously-living lay-brothers there was not, and, as a result of circumstances, there could not be."<sup>54</sup> If there were a lay believer disruptive to the Buddhist community, the members of the priestly order would simply refrain from receiving alms from such a person.<sup>55</sup> This was as far as the priestly order went in applying sanctions to lay believers for transgressions.

### What Defines a Priest?

So far we have examined the nature and characteristics of the early Buddhist Order. But it may also be helpful to examine how Shakyamuni himself defined who is a priest. First of all, Shakyamuni taught that no form of social distinction—neither class, race, gender nor wealth—should be given any consideration in the priestly order. In his well-known sermon about the eight properties of the oceans, Shakyamuni instructs his priestly disciples:

Just as, monks, whatsoever great rivers there are—namely, Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu, Mahi—these, on reaching the mighty ocean, abandon their former names and lineage, and henceforth go by the name of just "mighty ocean," even so, monks, the four castes—namely, the nobles, the brahmins, the merchants and the serfs—on going forth from home to the homeless in the dhamma-discipline proclaimed by the Wayfarer, abandon their former names and lineage and go by the name of just "recluses who are Sakya sons."<sup>56</sup>

Judging from the openness with which Shakyamuni accepted anyone into his teaching, the total disregard of social distinction or status no doubt permeated the entire community of Buddhists, including lay believers.

Blind to social distinctions or status, Shakyamuni attempted to define priests in terms of their spirituality,

50. *Further Dialogues of the Buddha: The Majjhima Nikaya*. Translated by Lord Chalmers. Vol. 2. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1988. pp. 159-60.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 160-62.

52. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1987. pp. 113-14. Another similar passage reads: "Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth. Look not refuge to any one besides yourselves." *Dialogue of the Buddha (The Digha Niyakya)*. Trans. by T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids. The 5th edition. London: Luzac and Co., 1971, p. 108.

53. Hermann Oldenberg. *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*. Translated by William Hoey. Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. p. 353.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

56. *Udana (Verses of Uplift) and Itivuttaka (As It Was Said)*. Translated by F. L. Woodward. London: Oxford University Press, 1948. p. 66.

their character and their action. This was radically different from the traditions of the priestly class of brahmins, who had to be born into that class. Shakyamuni's position regarding the definition of priesthood is clear from many passages of the early Buddhist texts. For example, in the *Dhammapada*, Shakyamuni teaches: "Not by the tonsure, a shaven head, does a man become a samana, a monk. How can a man be a samana if he forgets his religious vows, if he speaks what is not true, if he still has desire and greed?"<sup>57</sup> In *Sutta-Nipata*, Shakyamuni also teaches: "Birth neither Brahmin, nor non-Brahmin, makes; / 'tis life and conduct moulds the Brahmin true."<sup>58</sup> In light of those passages, to define who is a priest based solely on that person's position, status or appearance does not accord with the original spirit of Buddhism.

Finally it should be noted that Shakyamuni strongly urged lay believers to distinguish bad priests from good ones. In *Sutta-Nipata*, Shakyamuni explains to the blacksmith Cunda the importance of discerning the true nature of a monk based on his character and action. He classifies monks or priests into four categories: "Way-conqueror," "Way-herald," "Wayfarer," and "fraud-of-Way."<sup>59</sup> Shakyamuni describes the last category as a priest "Who, cloaked in piety, / Is forward, boaster, cheat / Of clansmen, unrestrained, / A babbler, masked in mode."<sup>60</sup> Shakyamuni then exhorts Cunda as follows: "And the shrewd householder, / Wise Ariyan listener, / Perceiveth them, knows all / As such; and seeing this / His faith wanes not: for how / Could he confound no fraud / With fraud, cleansed with unclean?"<sup>61</sup>

Here Shakyamuni encourages his lay followers to develop the wisdom and perception to observe the true nature of crooked monks so that they may protect their faith. Nothing could be further from Shakyamuni's intent than laity bound up in blind, unquestioning obedience to a priesthood.

### ***The Mistranslation of Samgha into Chinese and Japanese***

Although the scope of my discussion has been limited to early Buddhism in India, I would like to note one important detail about the translation of the term *samgha* into Chinese and then into Japanese. *Samgha* was translated into Chinese as *seng-chia*. (To be precise, this was a transliteration of the term.) *Seng*, the Chinese abbreviation

of *seng-chia*, however, came to be used to indicate an individual monk although in India *samgha* never carried this meaning. As I mentioned earlier, in India, an individual monk was referred to as *bhikkhu* or *bhiksu*. In the Buddhist texts, the usage of the term *samgha* was strictly distinguished from that of *bhikkhu* or *bhiksu*. The *samgha* was considered one of the three treasures of Buddhism, but an individual monk was never considered an object of veneration as an element of the three treasures.

I-Ching (635-713), a Chinese Buddhist scholar, after paying visits to many Buddhist sites in India, pointed out to Chinese Buddhists this misapplication of the term *samgha* to individuals.<sup>62</sup> Many scholars acknowledged the error, but they insisted on continuing to use the term to refer to an individual priest or monk. This misuse of the term was simply accepted by the Japanese when Buddhism took root in Japan, as well. The Japanese term *so*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese *seng* of *seng-chia*, came to signify an individual priest. As a result, this mistranslation significantly altered the concept of the three treasures in China and Japan. Particularly in Japan, the term was misused to promote reverence toward an individual priest. It is this misinterpretation that Nichiren Shoshu has been leaning on to dogmatically define its high priest as being part of the three treasures.<sup>63</sup> As I discussed earlier, the treasure of the *samgha* originally referred to the Buddhist Order, which, in the broadest sense, included all Buddhists, both priests and lay believers. The *samgha* was revered especially after Shakyamuni's death precisely because the Buddhist community as a whole fulfilled the important role of preserving and spreading the Buddha's teaching.

In light of those historical facts, as a translator, I personally feel the components of the three treasures would best be translated as the Buddha, the Dharma and the *Samgha* in order to maintain the original meaning and intent of the concept. (The "Law" or the "Teaching" for the Dharma, and the "Order" or "Community" for the *samgha* may be permissible if English terms are preferred for understanding.) But translating the treasure of the *Samgha* as "the treasure of the priesthood" would be, I feel, a gross diminution of the original term, and "the Treasure of the Priest"<sup>64</sup> an outright distortion.

57. *The Dhammapada: The Path of Perfection*. Translated by Juan Mascaro. London: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 73.

58. *Buddha's Teachings Being the Sutta-Nipata or Discourse-Collection*. Translated by Lord Chalmers. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, p. 155. Verse 650.

59. *Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists: Sutta-Nipata*. Translated E. M. Hare. London: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 15. Verses 86-89.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 15. Verse 89.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 16. Verse 90.

62. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964, p. 259.

63. The Nichiren Shoshu promotes the absolute obedience to the high priest, using the concept of the three treasures. For example, "The Treasure of the Priest (s) was first received by Nikko Shonin through the Bestowal of the Living Essence of the Law by the Daishonin, and after that, the Pure Law was passed down to each successive High Priest in the lineage of the Heritage, spanning the generations up until the present day. . . . In short, with perfectly sincere faith and self-imposed, strict obedience, we should hold the High Priest's instruction in deepest reverence. . . ." Quoted from *Dai-Nichiren (Special Edition): On the Soka Gakkai Problem-The Correct Way of Faith in Nichiren Shoshu*, published by the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs, pp. 13-14.

64. In Nichiren Shoshu, the treasure of the *samgha* is translated as "the Treasure of the Priest." See, for example, *Dai-Nichiren (Special Edition): On the Soka Gakkai Problem-The Correct Way of Faith in Nichiren Shoshu*, published by the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs, pp. 10-16.

## IV. The Buddhist Order in Mahayana Buddhism

### *Stupa Worship and the Rise of Mahayana Buddhism*

Shortly before his passing, Shakyamuni prohibited his monks from being involved in his funeral rite. Rather, he encouraged his priestly disciples to focus on their religious practice.<sup>65</sup> In his mind, officiating a funeral service had nothing to do with Buddhism. In Shakyamuni's India, funerals were held by brahmins or Hindu priests, and early Buddhist leaders often held in contempt the magical incantations recited by brahmins.<sup>66</sup> It is an ironic reversal of the Buddha's intent that funerals and memorial services have become the primary focus of Buddhism in Japan. The Japanese Buddhist establishment would not exist today without funerals and memorial services-rites that are virtually unrelated to the original intent of Buddhism. This is why Buddhism in Japan is often referred to as "funeral Buddhism."

Shakyamuni died in Kusinagara, and the people who lived there conducted his funeral. His cremated remains were then divided among eight tribes in central India, who constructed *stupas* (memorial mounds) to house the Buddha's remains.<sup>67</sup> Since lay believers were unable to spend their whole life in scholarship and meditation as were the monks, they soon began to gather around those *stupas* and worship them, hoping somehow to commune with the Buddha's spirit. This *stupa* worship was a simple expression of the laity's sincere devotion to the Buddha, who was symbolically represented by the *stupas*. This lay movement eventually evolved into Mahayana Buddhism.

Mahayana scriptures began appearing around the first century BCE,<sup>68</sup> but the origin of the Mahayana movement, that is, worship before the *stupa*, dates back much earlier. For example, according to one Buddhist text, King Ashoka (r.c. 268-232 BCE) opened the original eight *stupas* and removed and further divided the Buddha's relics to build many *stupas* throughout the country.<sup>69</sup> Professor Akira Hirakawa suggests that the king was simply responding to the growing popularity of *stupa* worship.<sup>70</sup>

### *Bodhisattva-samgha: The Lay Buddhist Order of Mahayana Buddhism*

The term Mahayana means "a greater vehicle." The Mahayana Buddhists called Nikaya<sup>71</sup> or Sectarian Buddhism "Hinayana" or "a smaller vehicle." It is not clear if the Mahayana Buddhists applied the term Hinayana to the whole of Nikaya Buddhism, or only to some of its branches such as the Theravada school. But it should be noted that no school of Buddhism referred to itself as Hinayana.

Mahayana Buddhism was essentially a lay movement. It encouraged its practitioners to seek their enlightenment through teaching and helping others. Because of their altruistic orientation, the Mahayana Buddhists referred to themselves as "bodhisattvas" (those who seek supreme enlightenment), their teaching as "*bodhisattvayana*" (the bodhisattva vehicle), and their lay Buddhist order as "*bodhisattva-samgha*" or "*bodhisattva-gana*" (group or community of bodhisattvas).<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Nikaya Buddhism was a teaching for monks who would devote themselves to study and meditation for their own salvation. While monks attempted to discipline themselves by following a set of rules or precepts, the Mahayana bodhisattvas sought to cultivate wisdom and faith in their own potential to become Buddhas. Those who realized that they have such potential were called bodhisattvas.<sup>73</sup> The Mahayana bodhisattvas, therefore, aspired to be equal to the Buddha while monks were content to remain as disciples of the Buddha, rather than striving to achieve the same enlightenment as the Buddha. For this reason, the Mahayana practitioners called the monastic tradition "Buddhism for disciples."<sup>74</sup> Put simply, Mahayana Buddhism appealed to ordinary people and their lives, while Nikaya Buddhism was monastic and therefore withdrawn from the everyday world.

One reason why the Mahayana Buddhists were able to develop and maintain the characteristics of a lay movement was that *stupas*, that is, the places they gathered for worship and practice, were managed by lay believers. According to the monastic rules, the property and assets of monastic orders were strictly distinguished from those of *stupas*.<sup>75</sup> If monks were to benefit from the land and assets of the *stupas*, or offerings made to the *stupas*, they would be accused of stealing-one of the four great prohi-

65. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. pp. 36-37.

66. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964. p. 585.

67. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 37.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

71. *Nikayas* are collections of Buddhist texts that are discourses attributed directly to the Buddha. The word also means a school or sect. "Nikaya Buddhism," therefore, refers to the various early Buddhist schools that were based on these canonical texts.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 8, p. 274, p. 311.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

bitions.<sup>76</sup> Since *stupas* were strictly beyond the control of the monastic orders, the doctrines of lay Mahayana Buddhism were developed, spread widely and transmitted to younger generations without monastic influences. Since the stupas were not controlled by monks, people were free to perform music and dance there in honor of the Buddha. (Any form of entertainment was strictly prohibited in the monastic orders.) People also decorated the grounds of a *stupa* with various art works carved on gates, pillars and railings.<sup>77</sup> The Mahayana movement, in this sense, was also a great cultural and artistic movement based on Buddhist ideals. As *stupa* worship grew more popular, however, the members of monastic orders became hostile toward the Mahayana movement. According to some later Buddhist texts, some monks claimed that contributions for the monastic orders produced much more benefit than those made to *stupas*.<sup>78</sup> The growing popularity of *stupa* worship also attracted the envy of the adherents of Brahmanism, who called a *stupa* “*eduka*,” which meant a structure of rubbish.<sup>79</sup>

### ***The Development of the Mahayana Priesthood and Esotericism***

Only in its later stage did Mahayana Buddhism become a religion in which a priesthood played a central role.<sup>80</sup> Since the *stupas* included land and structures, people had to manage them. The caretaker of the *stupa* gradually came to be viewed as a sort of religious specialist who was neither a lay believer nor a priest. He would tell stories of the Buddha’s life or past lives to the pilgrims who visited the *stupa* and manage lodgings for them.<sup>81</sup> But eventually a priestly order began to emerge from among those people.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, by the beginning of the Common Era, *stupas* were being built on the grounds of monasteries and temples.<sup>83</sup> Because of its continued popularity, *stupa* worship was gradually incorporated into monastic Buddhism as well. The absorption of the *stupa* worship into monastic orders, despite their initial hostility, undoubtedly had the effect of increasing their income from pilgrims’ offerings.

Since Mahayana Buddhism emphasized believers’ devotion to the Buddha, the concept of the Buddha became highly idealized and mystified over time. While the Mahayana practitioners taught the cultivation of wisdom and encouraged people to realize their own potential

of Buddhahood, they also started to emphasize the saving powers of imagined Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In one sense, the essential Buddhist ideal of self-reliance began to be obscured by people’s dependency on external deities. Many Mahayana scriptures expounded the blessings to be derived from magical incantations called *dharani*. Over the centuries, more magical elements were incorporated into Mahayana Buddhism. Furthermore, with the emergence of a priesthood from within, Mahayana Buddhism eventually leaned toward esotericism. Esoteric Buddhism emphasized rituals over doctrine. It thus became indistinguishable from Hinduism and was finally assimilated into Hinduism.<sup>84</sup> With the assimilation of esoteric Buddhism into Hinduism and the Muslim invasion of India, Buddhism in India virtually disappeared by the end of the twelfth century.<sup>85</sup> (Usually the end of Indian Buddhism is marked by the destruction of the Vikramasila Monastery by Muslim troops at the end of the twelfth century.) However, the fact that Hinduism remained strong even after the Muslim invasion suggests that the decline of Buddhism in India could be attributed more to internal causes than to a foreign enemy.

The decline of Buddhism in India is instructive precisely because it was mainly self-caused. When Shakyamuni came to be deified and other imaginary Buddhas and bodhisattvas were invented, Buddhist practitioners began to depend more on priests as intermediaries to enjoy their supposed powers of salvation. Rituals conducted by priests became more central than their own efforts to practice for themselves and others. On one hand, Mahayana Buddhism revived the original spirit of Buddhism by emphasizing compassion for others. Its practitioners, however, eventually succumbed to their yearning for a transcendent deity while ignoring the greatness of the human Shakyamuni. They sought to commune with this transcendent Buddha-deity through priests as intermediaries. The disappearance of Buddhism in India was caused in no small part by believers’ lack of self-reliant practice—as the Buddha, on his deathbed, had admonished them to develop. It was not hostile “Hinayana” monks nor invading Muslims who brought about the decline of Mahayana and eventually all of Indian Buddhism. Ironically it was Mahayana priests who sapped the vigor of the popular Buddhist movement by inserting themselves between believers and a Buddha

76. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

77. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964. p. 165.

78. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 272.

79. Sukumar Dutt. *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India: Their History and Their Contribution to Indian Culture*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988. p. 186.

80. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 270.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 273-74.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

who had turned from a living example into an inaccessible god. Ultimately, however, it was the laity who came to yearn for external saviors and invited priests to bridge the gap between them. They had completely forgotten Shakyamuni's admonition of self-reliance: "Only a man himself can be the master of himself: who else from outside could be his master?"<sup>86</sup>

## V. Conclusion

In the "Preface" of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* published in 1855, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) speaks to the future of priesthood:

There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile . . . perhaps a generation or two . . . dropping off by degree. A superior breed shall take their place . . . the gangs of kosmos and prophets en masse shall take their place. A new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest. . . . They shall arise in America and be responded to from the remainder of the earth.<sup>87</sup>

With the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman attempted to break a new ground in American literature. He challenged the traditions of the New England literary establishment with his new poetic form, subject and vision. Whitman saw himself as a poet of democracy who inspires people to seek their own communion with the universe and the divine. In this sense, he refused to be a poet who, as an intermediary, interprets the message of Mother Nature for the people. His theology was aptly expressed in such lines from "Song of Myself" as: "Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from" or "In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass."<sup>88</sup> What he stood for in his poetry echoes important Mahayana ideals such as the universality of Buddhahood. And his rejection of priests as intermediaries between people and their own inherent divinity accords with the original Buddhist ideal of self-reliance. In this sense, Whitman's remarks about priests contain an invaluable insight.

So do priests play a necessary role in Buddhism? I believe the answer depends on what we mean by the word priest. Whitman replaced one kind of priest with another, more universal kind of role that any of us can fulfill. I think we can conclude that Buddhist priests who do not fulfill their originally intended function—to protect and spread the teachings of Buddhism—are not really priests. Nor are priests who are concerned with their own status—who deify the

Buddha and insert themselves between the Buddha and the people to elevate that status—of use to anyone but themselves. On the other hand, I can find no reason to reject a priest who, in accord with the original role of the samgha, dedicates him or herself to protecting and spreading Buddhism, and to serving its believers.

As we observed in the historical development of the samgha, the form of a Buddhist movement changes according to the circumstances while the essential teaching of Buddhism should not change. What Shakyamuni thought of as priests in his day is virtually an extinct species today. Particularly in Japan, Buddhist priests marry, own homes and live in relative comfort; they accumulate wealth, and conduct funerals and memorial services as a source of income. They are not Buddhist priests in any sense of the original meaning. They simply, over the centuries, invented themselves. As the form of priesthood changes, it would be foolish to be attached to a preconceived notion of priesthood.

Rather than being preoccupied with the form of priesthood, we must look at the original spirit and functions of priesthood in Buddhism and try to fulfill those functions in a manner best suited to the time and place. What priesthood must do is protect and spread Buddhism. As I think of how best we as a community of Buddhists fulfill those functions in contemporary American society, I cannot help but think that shaved heads and robes would hamper rather than help us in our endeavor. "Protecting" Buddhism means to correct any misconception or distortion of Buddhism and proclaim its truth among practitioners or in society at large. "Spreading" Buddhism means to communicate the joy and benefit of Buddhist practice to those unaware. Both functions of the samgha require a considerable degree of commitment in terms of social engagement. I do not think that priests who would lock themselves up in a temple or monastery are suited to fulfill those functions today. (In this regard, Professor Harvey Cox discusses the worker-priest movement of Catholic priests in his essay "Priesthood in the Post-modern World." See page 16.)

Early Mahayana Buddhists proudly called themselves the "*bodhisattva-samgha*," that is, a group of ordinary people who saw their innate Buddhahood and strove to manifest it while helping others do the same. Free from the influences of monks, they inspired people's lives with art and culture rooted in the rich spirituality of Buddhism. Centuries after Shakyamuni's death, they revived the original Buddhist spirit of compassion in the lives of ordinary people. I believe that this is exactly what the SGI is doing. Like Walt Whitman, we have become our own priests. □

86. *The Dhammapadam: The Path of Perfection*. Translated by Juan Mascaro. London: Penguin Books, 1973. p. 58.

87. Walt Whitman. "Preface" from *Leaves of Grass* (1855). *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1982. pp. 24-5.

88. *Ibid.*, "Song of Myself" from *Leaves of Grass* (1855). p. 51, p. 85.

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# PRIESTHOOD

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## IN THE

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# POST-MODERN

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# WORLD

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By Dr. Harvey Cox

*Harvard theologian Harvey G. Cox is the author of The Secular City and Religion in the Secular City. He was ordained a Baptist minister in 1956. Since 1965, he has taught at Harvard University where he is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity.*

**“The priest is a human being like all the rest of us. He or she is born, lives, works, and dies as any other human being. Priests do not belong to a special caste. They are not semi-divine beings or people removed from the stress and strain of normal human living.”**

Within weeks after the ending of the Second World War in Europe, Cardinal Suhard, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Paris, hit upon a new plan to meet the religious needs of the battle-weary people of France. His idea would eventually have far wider implications for the concept of priesthood in the emerging post-modern world than he could have imagined. The Cardinal was vexed by what appeared to him to be a deep chasm between the church and the working masses. He told his friends that he often anguished over this terrible separation and that it kept intruding into his meditation and prayer. Finally, in response to a memorandum sent to him by two priests who had worked with young factory workers—Abbe Godin and Abbe Daniel—Cardinal Suhard drew up a scheme for what was to become known as the “worker-priest movement.”

The idea of this experiment was a radical one. Hundreds of young French seminarians would be trained not only as priests but also in the skills of factory work. They would be detached from ordinary parishes and sent to live and work in the vast industrial slums surrounding Paris, Marseilles, and some of the minor cities of France. There they would labor and live among the urban proletariat and seek to work out a new form of priestly ministry. The idea, as one of the priests wrote later, was “to become a worker among workers as Christ had become man among men.”

From the outset, the worker-priest experiment was highly controversial. The young priests did relate directly and compassionately to the working masses in the factories and slums. Contrary to what many had expected, they were warmly received by the workers and their families, and together they began to think



CORBIS/Chris Heller

Fresco of an Early Ecumenical Council. Professor Cox explains that: "Within the Christian tradition, the role of the priest differs markedly from church to church and from age to age. In the Roman Catholic tradition, for example, at least in recent centuries, the priest is set apart by a special ordination into sacred orders, a ceremony which is believed to confer an indelible supernatural quality on its recipient."

through a new and more relevant form of priesthood. However, there were grave worries among conservative members of the hierarchy about how the experiment was going. Some complained that the young priests would “inhale too much of the poisonous atmosphere” of the working classes. Others feared they would not have enough time for prayer or that they would become unduly involved in “merely temporal” concerns. The papacy also itself expressed its grave reservations about the experiment, and in 1954 Cardinal Lincart articulated the growing official opposition in the following words: “The current experiment cannot be continued in

its original form... The Holy Father has taken this decision for doctrinal reasons. Being a priest and being a worker are two separate functions. Two different states of life. They cannot be joined in one and the same person without derogating from the idea of the priesthood. The business of the priest is to consecrate his life to God and to the service of souls. The worker accomplishes a temporal task.” Eventually Rome decreed that all the worker-priests must be withdrawn from their work in factories and should live in normal parishes under the close supervision of their bishops. Officially the worker-priest experiment came to an end, even

though some of the priests stayed on without the sanction of the hierarchy.

The worker-priest movement in France raises a number of questions about priesthood in the post-modern world that go beyond Christianity. What is the nature of religious priesthood? Is it possible to make the priesthood more relevant to the changing conditions of industrial and information-based society? What forms of opposition do changes in the organization and expression of priesthood meet when they are attempted?

In English the word “priest” is derived from the Latin “presbyterios,” which simply means an “elder.” It suggests a person of wisdom and

experience who is asked to assume a particular responsibility in a religious community. There are other meanings which have also become attached to priesthood, mainly the idea of a mediator, that is one who intercedes between God and the people, both as the people's representative before God and as God's spokesman or channel to the people. In many religions, priesthood has an additional significance. It suggests someone who offers a sacrifice. Still, the main function of priesthood continues to be that of mediation.

The study of the history of religion and comparative religion clearly reveals that although priesthood has been a feature of nearly every religious tradition in human history, it varies greatly from time to time and place to place. Priesthood does not take the same form even in the same religious tradition over the course of time. Recent research in the history of priesthood in ancient Judaism, for example, has revealed that in the earliest period a wide variety of different persons served as priests in a wide variety of ways. As the society became more complex, hierarchical and centralized, the priesthood also became more centralized in one tribe, the Levites, and even in certain members of that tribe. Studies of the role of the priest in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity also reveal a remarkable variety in the ways priesthood has been expressed through changing times and altered circumstances. Within the Christian tradition, the role of the priest differs markedly from church to church and from age to age. In the Roman Catholic tradition, for example, at least in recent centuries, the priest is set apart by a special ordination into sacred orders, a ceremony which is believed to confer an indelible supernatural quality

on its recipient. In the Latin rite Catholic churches, celibacy is mandatory, but in the Uniate and Maronite branches it is not. In most of the Anglican tradition, both men and women are now ordained into the priesthood and all are permitted to marry. In the Eastern Orthodox traditions, priests generally are permitted to marry, unless they have taken additional vows as monks, and many priests work in other kinds of occupations in addition to serving as priests.

In most of the Protestant churches, the pattern of priesthood was set by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Martin Luther, who first studied law but became a monk after his personal religious conversion, eventually reintroduced a concept of the priesthood which dated back to the earliest days of Christianity and even to early Judaism. He taught that everyone in the church was called by God to be a priest—a mediator of God's love—to his or her fellow human being. This teaching of Luther drew both on the notion of the "nation of priests" found in ancient Judaism and also on the radical equalitarian concept of early Christianity, what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has called the "discipleship of equals." Luther was especially concerned about the temptations to corruption and misuse of power which frequently seemed to arise in a permanently separated and consecrated priestly hierarchy. He was opposed to priestly celibacy, which he thought set priests too much apart from the everyday joys and concerns of life, and he himself married a former nun.

Luther also worried about how an unduly elevated and set-apart priesthood can lead to corruption and the attempt to monopolize spiritual power. During his life, the papacy

was pressing the sale of so-called "indulgences," in part to raise money to construct St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The idea behind the indulgence was theologically questionable even on the basis of prevailing Catholic belief. The indulgences were sold to people who wanted to make sure that their departed ancestors and family members would reach heaven. Luther first attacked both the idea of the indulgences and the corrupt financial practices of the church of his time. Eventually, in his famous tract *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he insisted that priests cannot claim to be the sole mediators between God and man. He claimed on the basis of his reading of the Bible that every person had equal access to the presence of God, since the spirit of Jesus Christ was present in every person. It was at this period that Luther declared his famous principle of the "priesthood of all believers," the idea that we all mediate the divine to each other.

In the four centuries since Luther, the various protestant churches have not always practiced the idea of the priesthood of all believers with the kind of thoroughness his teaching suggests. This is understandable. In any religious organization certain functionaries have a tendency to accumulate both symbolic and organizational power and to find ways to legitimate it theologically. This suggests however that the capacity for corruption lies not in the idea of priesthood itself so much as in the inner dynamics of religious organizations and in their interaction with the societies in which they live. The solution seems to be to recognize that the more widely the responsibility of priesthood is shared, the less chance there is for corruption and the misuse of spiritual power.



CORBIS/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

"Martin Luther, who first studied law but became a monk after his personal religious conversion, eventually reintroduced a concept of the priesthood which dated back to the earliest days of Christianity and even to early Judaism. He taught that everyone in the church was called by God to be a priest—a mediator of God's love—to his or her fellow human being."

Do we have new models of priesthood in the post-modern world that might serve us better than the traditional ones? Shortly after the Second Vatican Council, which took place from 1962–1965 in Rome, the bishop of Cuernavaca in Mexico gave an especially pertinent answer to this question. Bishop Don Sergio Mendes Arceo came to his position as bishop from an earlier career as a historian of religion and culture. The Second Vatican Council had strongly empha-

sized the idea of the church as a "people of God" and had underlined the responsibility of all members, especially laity, to assume their responsibilities within the body of the church. In his cathedral in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Bishop Mendes Arceo introduced a practice which seemed to symbolize the new direction. At the Sunday Mass, he entered the crowded cathedral from the side door and stood directly in the center where the two aisles crossed, dressed in his ordi-

nary street clothes. When everyone had been able to see him in his loose trousers, open-collared shirt, and leather sandals, he smiled and nodded to the attendants around him. They approached him with the bishop's cope and mitre and with the other liturgical vestments of the Mass, placing them on the bishop in full view of the congregation. Once vested for the Mass, Bishop Mendes Arceo then proceeded in this colorful regalia to the high altar where he and his co-officiants presided over the Mass, with the bishop usually preaching the sermon. At the close of the Mass, the bishop returned to the center of the cathedral still in full view, and the attendants removed the priestly and episcopal vestments, leaving him once again in his street clothing. He then walked to the exit of the church and stood there to greet the worshippers as they filed out.

What Bishop Mendes Arceo once jovially referred to as his "ecclesial strip tease" had a serious theological purpose. It stated in a very dramatic and visible way two things about the priesthood which are important for religious people in a post-modern world where we all play multiple roles, and where sharing power rather than accumulating it is important.

1) The first is that the priest is a human being like all the rest of us. He or she is born, lives, works, and dies as any other human being. Priests do not belong to a special caste. They are not semi-divine beings or people removed from the stress and strain of normal human living.

2) The second aspect of the priesthood that Bishop Mendes Arceo's practice revealed is that the priest exercises a particular responsibility within the religious congregation. He expresses one "gift" among all the other gifts which other mem-

bers of the congregation have and also exercise. Priests have a function that goes along with other functions in a religious body in which there is a wide variety of different functions and tasks to be performed.

For two decades, Bishop Mendes Arceo of Cuernavaca was a leader not only in the liturgical reform movement within the Catholic Church, but in finding other ways to relate the church more creatively to the problems and challenges of the modern world. He strongly emphasized the political and social role of Christians in striving to make the world more just and peaceful. He was a strong advocate of human rights especially for people oppressed by the military dictatorships which caused so much

suffering in Latin America at the time. His liturgical practice and his social theology were integrated with each other and he represented them both with great dignity and intelligence.

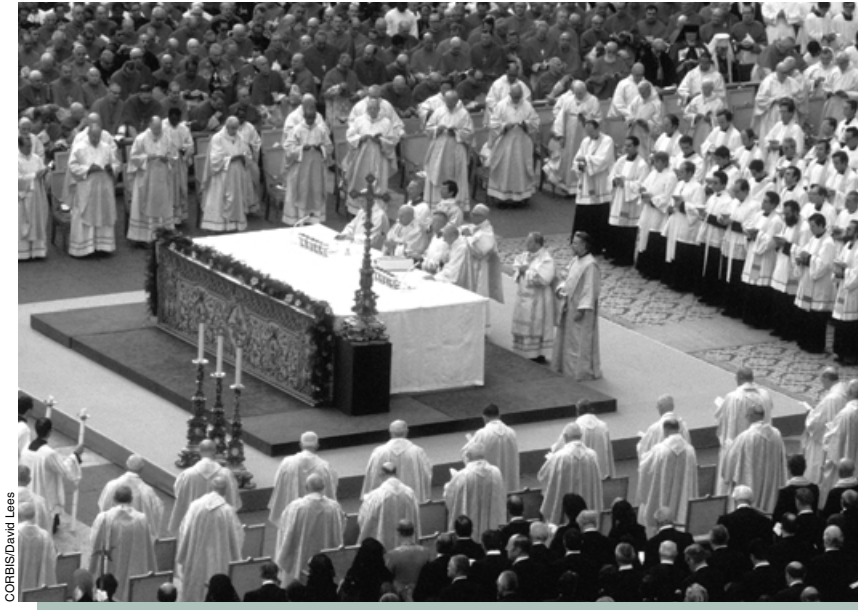
By the time of the retirement of Bishop Mendes Arceo ten years ago, a major reaction against much of what he stood for was already underway in the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. The more participatory and equalitarian practices introduced by the Second Vatican Council were questioned by the new leadership in Rome, both by Pope John Paul II and by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Also the call for a more politically and socially relevant Christianity began to be

viewed with suspicion and distrust from Rome. After Bishop Mendes Arceo's retirement, a more conservative and traditional bishop was placed in the diocese of Cuernavaca and many of the changes Mendes Arceo introduced have now been reversed.

When one thinks about Cardinal Suhard, Martin Luther, and Bishop Mendes Arceo, it becomes evident that changes in the priesthood are respective to at least two factors. First, they respond to changes and developments *within the religious tradition itself*. Over time all religious traditions evolve and develop. Otherwise they rigidify and die. There is also no such thing as a permanent and eternal form of priesthood not subject to development, alteration and evolution.



An Ecumenical Council in St. Peter's Cathedral. According to Professor Cox: "It becomes evident that changes in the priesthood are respective to at least two factors. First, they respond to changes and developments within the religious tradition itself. Over time all religious traditions evolve and develop. Otherwise they rigidify and die. There is also no such thing as a permanent and eternal form of priesthood not subject to development, alteration and evolution. Second, such changes also respond to changes in the envioning social and cultural setting within which religious movements live."



CORBIS/David Lees

Pope John Paul II celebrating Mass. Bishop Mendes Arceo in his cathedral in Cuernavaca, Mexico, dressed in the vestments for Mass in front of the congregation. "It stated in a very dramatic and visible way two things about the priesthood which are important for religious people in a post-modern world where we all play multiple roles, and where sharing power rather than accumulating it is important."

Second, such changes also respond to changes in the *enviroming social and cultural setting* within which religious movements live. The growth and spread of movements emphasizing racial justice, democracy, the equality of the sexes, and international cooperation obviously create an atmosphere to which religious groups cannot remain wholly unresponsive.

Luther did not reconceptualize the priesthood exclusively on the basis of his study of the New Testament. He was also responding to the anger and resentment of the peasants of Northern Europe about the financial extractions drawn from them by an increasingly greedy church. In addition, Luther was supported in his reformation by the princes who resented the tendency of the Roman ecclesial authorities to translate their spiritual power into a form of political imperialism. Cardinal Suhard, living in post war France, realized that the chasm between classes in industrial societies is one which must be addressed. The fact that his bold experiment with the

worker-priests was finally terminated by higher authorities in the Catholic Church should not detract from the imagination and boldness of its original concept. After the worker-priest movement was terminated in France, something very similar to it arose among Protestant ministers in Germany and among Catholic priests in Latin America. It could be argued that the entire "liberation theology" movement, which has been one of the most powerful currents in Christianity in the last four decades, owes its inception in part to the worker-priest experiment. Likewise, Bishop Mendes Arceo, although he was a scholar of scripture and religious history, was also aware of the dislocation, suffering and oppression of the third world and wanted to make both the church and the priesthood a more relevant witness to the vision of justice and peace which is central to the Christian notion of the kingdom of God.

The question of how the divine presence mediates itself to human beings and of how human beings

encounter the holy will continue to vex and challenge people as long as religions exist. Since the questions religions address are so basic to human existence, it is safe to assume that men and women will continue to be religious in one way or another as long as they are human. Within this larger picture of the religious enterprise of humankind, the function of priesthood will inevitably assume a wide variety of different expressions and forms. It is vital to recognize, however, that symbolic power is real power. It can be used both for positive and for negative purposes. Since priests are also human, and have a tendency to try to control and monopolize symbolic and spiritual power, it is safe to predict there will always be revolts against established priestly classes and that the vitality of religious traditions will continue to reformulate what priesthood means. Meanwhile, Martin Luther's historic assertion that in one sense all human beings mediate God to each other, and that all persons receive the blessing of the divine presence from other people continues to be a powerful insight. One can easily see parallels to it in various other traditions including in the Islamic Brotherhoods, the so-called New Religious Movements of Japan, and in lay Hindu organizations that seek to reconcile people of different religious backgrounds. What seems clear is that in the post-modern world with its emphasis on change and fluidity, no single form of priesthood has any particular claim to exclusive legitimacy. In one way or another we are all priests to each other and we need to be constantly searching for the most effective ways of expressing that common priesthood. □

(This article first appeared in the *The Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 5, 1995.)

# DIALOGUE

## ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

42

**The Essential Transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices Marks the Dawn of “Humanistic Buddhism”**

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

*This is their second discussion on the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter. The theme of the discussion is the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, in which all doctrines, supernatural powers and secret essentials of the Thus Come One are entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Through exploring the profound meaning of “Bodhisattvas of the Earth” and “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One” in light of the mystic principles of True Cause and True Effect, they elucidate the humanism of the Lotus Sutra.*

#### From “Reply to Takahashi Nyudo”

The persons living at the same time as Shakyamuni Buddha had already formed profound karmic ties with him in the past, and hence they were able to attain the Way. But Shakyamuni was much concerned about how to save those who would live after his passing, and so he put his eighty thousand sacred teachings<sup>1</sup> into written form. Among the sacred teachings of his lifetime, he entrusted the Hinayana sutras to the Venerable Mahakashyapa, and the Mahayana sutras, as well as the Lotus and Nirvana sutras, to Bodhisattva Monjushiri.

But the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo, the heart of the eighty thousand sacred teachings and the very eye of the Lotus Sutra, he did not entrust to Mahakashyapa

or Ananda, nor would he transfer them to the great bodhisattvas such as Monju, Fugen, Kannon, Miroku, Jizo<sup>2</sup> or Nagarjuna. These great bodhisattvas hoped that he would do so, and requested it of

him, but the Buddha would not consent. Instead, he summoned the venerable figure<sup>3</sup> Bodhisattva Jogyo [Superior Practices] forth from the depths of the earth, and in the presence of the Buddha Taho [Many Treasures] and the other Buddhas of the ten directions, the Tathagata Shakyamuni, seated in the tower adorned with seven kinds of precious gems,<sup>4</sup> entrusted the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo to Bodhisattva Jogyo. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, pp. 123–24)

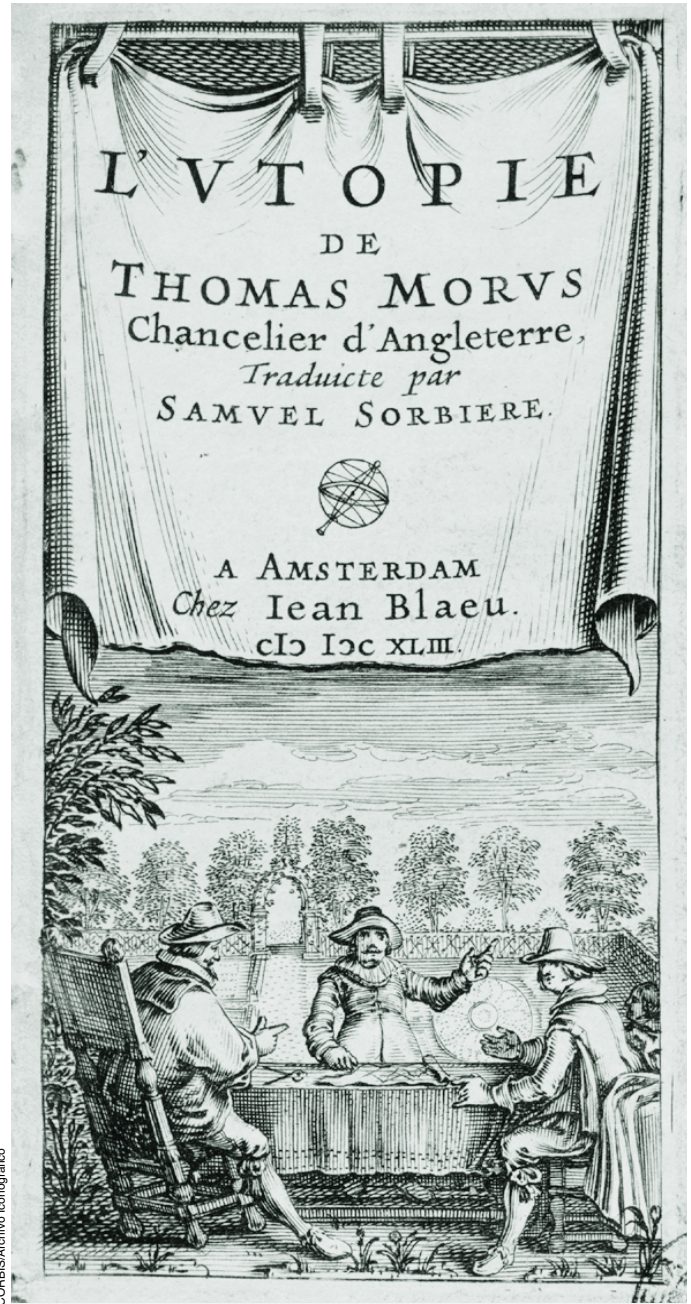
**IKEDA:** I recently heard a wonderful poem by the Uruguayan poet Eduardo Galeano:

Utopia lies at the horizon.  
 When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps.  
 If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten steps ahead.  
 No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.  
 What, then, is the purpose of utopia?  
 It is to cause us to advance.<sup>5</sup>

Luíz Carlos Rossini, a member of the city council of Campinas in Brazil, cited this poem in his greetings [at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall].

**ENDO:** That was on the occasion of his visit to Japan to present you with an honorary citizenship. I recall that it took place on June 6 [1998], the 127th anniversary of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's birth.

**SUDA:** Not only did he bring the certificate of honorary citizenship, he also had with him a special memorial plaque honoring President Makiguchi; the Carlos Gomez Medal and Campinas City Council Achievement Medal for you, President Ikeda; and a plaque of commendation for Mrs. Ikeda. In fact, he had brought so many things that the



The cover of "Utopia" by Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), written in Latin. It was the vision of an ideal society, which for SGI members, could be said to represent kosen-rufu, the establishment of a peaceful world based on Buddhism. But kosen-rufu is not the kind of surreal dream world implied by the term utopia.

joke was going around that he was like Santa Claus!

**SAITO:** His actions demonstrate the belief that, as human beings, it is our duty to honor great achievement.

**ENDO:** Such conviction is completely different from the

jealousy that is all too commonplace in Japan.

**SAITO:** I was also moved by the poem. For SGI members, “utopia” could be said to represent kosen-rufu, the establishment of a peaceful world based on Buddhist thought. Of course, kosen-rufu is not the kind of surreal dream world that is implied by the term utopia. It’s an ideal we continually challenge ourselves to advance toward. The power to inspire others to join in the struggle and enable them to move forward in their lives is an intrinsic aspect of the movement for kosen-rufu.

**SUDA:** Without the aim of kosen-rufu, we could neither practice with a selfless spirit nor attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

**IKEDA:** Kosen-rufu and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime could be compared to the two types of motion of the earth, revolution [on its axis] and rotation [around the sun]. They are intrinsically related.

I think this poem is wonderful because it explains the spirit of the Buddhism of True Cause in a way that is very easy to understand. To paraphrase the meaning in Buddhist terms, it is saying:

With our sights on the distant True Effect, we  
continually advance.  
We are consistently setting forth.  
We ceaselessly burn with hope.  
With our sights on the future,  
We are ever moving on from the beginningless  
past of *kuon ganjo*.  
Each day, each moment, we experience the eternity  
of *kuon ganjo*.

“True Effect,” in this context, indicates kosen-rufu and attaining Buddhahood. While it may be possible to think of these concepts as final destinations beyond which there is no need to proceed any further, that is unrealistic.

**SAITO:** Indeed. Someone who has attained Buddhahood would not just sit back and relax, thinking, “I’ve achieved enough already,” but would tirelessly press on.

**IKEDA:** Of course, there is no denying that someone who has accomplished his or her mission in this life will feel immense satisfaction and fulfillment—a sense of “I’ve

done it!” A Buddha is someone who even then continues working for the welfare of others.

The True Effect is an ideal, while the True Cause is reality. This brings us to the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter.

The ceremony of “transmission” that takes place in this chapter is basically the passing of the baton from the “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Effect” to the “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Cause.” This signifies a great transition from a Buddhism centering around the ideal image of the wonderful “effect of Buddhahood,” represented by the thirty-two features,<sup>6</sup> to a Buddhism focused on the “cause of Buddhahood,” or the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of all people. It is a move toward a Buddhism that exists solely in the reality of human life.

**SAITO:** The “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Effect” is Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the extremely remote past described as “numberless major world system dust particle *kalpas* ago” (Jpn *gohyaku-jintengo*).

**ENDO:** The “teacher of the mystic principle of the True Cause” is Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

**SUDA:** I think it could be said that Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment in the remote past, represents the world of Buddhahood, while Superior Practices represents the nine worlds. Just what does this transmission from the representative of the world of Buddhahood to the representative of the nine worlds signify? This has been a source of much controversy since ancient times.

### The Mystic Law Is the “Original Mentor”

Because after the Buddha has passed into  
extinction  
there will be those who can uphold this  
sutra,  
the Buddhas are all delighted  
and manifest immeasurable supernatural  
powers.  
Because they wish to entrust this sutra,  
they praise and extol the person who accepts

and upholds it,  
and though they should do so for immeasur-  
able kalpas  
they could never exhaust their praises.  
The benefits gained by such a person  
are boundless and inexhaustible,  
like the vast sky in the ten directions  
that no one can set a limit to. (LS21, 275)<sup>7</sup>

**IKEDA:** Last time, we studied the ten supernatural powers described in this chapter. Let's pick up our discussion from that point.

**ENDO:** All right. To recapitulate, the ten supernatural or mystic powers of the Buddha are:

- (1) Shakyamuni Buddha extends his long broad tongue until it reaches the Brahma heaven;
- (2) he emits countless beams of light from every pore of his body, illuminating all the worlds in the ten directions;
- (3) other Buddhas clear their throats, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (4) they snap their fingers, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (5) all the lands in the ten directions tremble in six different ways;
- (6) all beings in the worlds of the ten directions behold the Buddhas in the *saha* world and rejoice;
- (7) heavenly gods proclaim to the beings in the ten directions that they should offer obeisance and alms to revere Shakyamuni Buddha;
- (8) on hearing this proclamation, all the beings in the ten directions press their palms together and salute the Buddha;
- (9) the beings scatter over the *saha* world offerings of various treasures, which gather together like a cloud and form a jeweled canopy over the Buddhas assembled there; and
- (10) passage between all worlds in the ten directions becomes unobstructed, as though they were one Buddha land.

In short, this is describing the *saha* world itself manifesting as the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. It is also a picture of the world of kosen-rufu. This time we will look at what follows the description of the Buddha's ten supernatural powers.

First, I would like to note that Shakyamuni says something surprising here:

The supernatural powers of the Buddhas, as you have seen, are immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable. If in the process of entrusting this sutra to others I were to employ these supernatural powers for immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of *asamkhyā kalpas* to describe the benefits of the sutra, I could never finish doing so. (LS21, 274)

**SAITO:** It seems to me that, in a sense, the ten supernatural powers are explained in order to express this idea.

**IKEDA:** Shakyamuni is not simply praising the benefit of the Lotus Sutra. He is in fact praising the benefit accrued by the person who will uphold this sutra after his passing, that is to say, the benefit of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. That is the point.

**SUDA:** This is indicated in the verse section of the "Supernatural Powers" chapter where it says:

Because they wish to entrust this sutra,  
they praise and extol the person who accepts and  
upholds it,  
and though they should do so for immeasurable  
*kalpas*  
they could never exhaust their praises.  
The benefits gained by such a person  
are boundless and inexhaustible,  
like the vast sky in the ten directions  
that no one can set a limit to. (LS21, 275)

**ENDO:** Right before this, it says:

Because after the Buddha has passed into extinction  
there will be those who can uphold this sutra,  
the Buddhas are all delighted  
and manifest immeasurable supernatural powers.  
(LS21, 275)

This passage is lauding those who uphold the sutra after the Buddha's passing, meaning the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and Superior Practices in particular.

**SUDA:** Their benefit is described as "boundless." It is infinite, like the universe.

**IKEDA:** Even though the Buddhas possess such incredible powers that they can move the universe itself, they cannot



The Buddha's life is without beginning or end and is one with the entire universe.

praise enough the benefits of Superior Practices. This is extraordinary.

The sutra says, moreover, that all Buddhas manifest their “immeasurable supernatural powers” because they are delighted that Superior Practices will uphold this teaching after the Buddha’s passing. The ten supernatural powers therefore celebrate the future activities of Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

**SAITO:** From this part alone, we can see that Bodhisattva Superior Practices is a being of extreme significance.

What’s more, all of Shakyamuni’s preaching since the appearance of the Treasure Tower in “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter has been building

up toward this transmission of the Law to Superior Practices. You could say that Superior Practices holds the key to understanding the Lotus Sutra.

**ENDO:** In the prose section preceding the verse section of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter, Shakyamuni says that he could never finish illustrating the benefits of the sutra, even employing these supernatural powers; whereas in the verse section he speaks of the benefit of the person who upholds the sutra as similarly defying description. In the former instance he is talking about the “Law”; in the latter, he is talking about the “Person.”

**IKEDA:** I’m jumping ahead, but Shakyamuni is ultimately extolling the benefit of the “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One,” which embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law.

Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment in the remote past, and Bodhisattva Superior Practices are both “transient manifestations” of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One, the “fundamental Buddha” of the universe. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the Buddha whose life is without beginning or end; the universal life itself; the origin of all Buddhas throughout time and space; the entity of the eternally inherent Ten Worlds and their mutual possession.

Of the Ten Worlds, the Lotus Sutra identifies the world of Buddhahood with Shakyamuni and Many Treasures, who accompanies Shakyamuni in the Treasure Tower. And it identifies the nine worlds of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One with Bodhisattva Superior Practices and other beings. This signifies that the worlds of Buddhahood and Bodhisattva exist in the life of the same fundamental Buddha.

It is for all of these reasons that Shakyamuni is unable to fully elucidate the magnificence of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. And, since the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the “original mentor” that allows all Buddhas to attain enlightenment, this means that Shakyamuni is in fact also praising the mentor.

**SUDA:** Then it makes sense that, in spite of his supernatural powers capable of moving the universe, Shakyamuni is not able to pay tribute enough to the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. That’s because the Thus Come One of “the supernatural powers of the Thus Come One” is the “body,” and the supernatural powers are that body’s innate functions. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the ultimate source from which the body, or enlightened entity, of the Buddha arises.

**IKEDA:** What is more, since the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is one with the universe, we ourselves and all living beings are entities of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the true aspect of the lives of all beings of the Ten Worlds.

It is Nichiren Daishonin who teaches this, and who is therefore called the “lord of the teachings.” When we chant daimoku just as the Daishonin instructs, our voices resonate throughout the entire universe. Just as a soft voice can be transformed into a booming voice through the use of a good megaphone, when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-

kyo with heartfelt prayer, we can move the entire universe. As Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, says: “[If you have faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a short while] no prayer will go unanswered, no offense unexpiated, no good fortune unbestowed, and all righteousness proven.”<sup>8</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin says that it is “not difficult” for those who chant the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra to become Buddhas equal to Shakyamuni (cf. MW-1, 259). This statement is very significant. He says this because the Mystic Law is the origin of all Buddhas.

We must absolutely never give up on prayer. He declares: “Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (MW-1, 120). We need to pray “as though to produce fire from damp tinder or to obtain water from parched ground” (MW-6, 74).

**ENDO:** Yet there are those who say that even though they are praying, they see no results.

**IKEDA:** As Nichikan points out, there is an important distinction between “daimoku of faith” and “daimoku of practice.” The act of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is “daimoku of practice,” but the results of our efforts vary greatly depending on whether we truly have confidence in the benefit of the Gohonzon. Offering “daimoku of faith” is what makes the difference.

### **The Boundless Power of the Mystic Law**

**SUDA:** I heard the following experience from a member of the Kanagawa Nurses Group that I think illustrates this perfectly. Ms. H., the chief nurse of a hospital attached to a university medical school, was asked for advice on a couple, Mr. and Mrs. T., who were facing a grave and difficult situation.

In the fall of 1996, Mr. T., who was in his forties and worked for a construction company, underwent surgery for a tumor in his brain stem. However, it seems that it was not possible to remove the tumor in its entirety. Mrs. T., who had joined the Soka Gakkai as a result of her husband becoming sick, was praying for his recovery. But from around the summer of 1997, Mr. T.’s headaches and nausea worsened and he began having consistent convulsions. The doctors informed Mrs. T. that while the tumor had not metastasized or spread, he was experiencing these symp-



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Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, states: "Hundreds and thousands of leaves and branches grow from a single root. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the source of enlightenment for all Buddhas throughout time and space."

toms because water had built up in his brain, and that surgery to remove this fluid would be necessary. Mr. T. was only able to walk with a great deal of assistance, and his speech was limited to grunts and moans.

Mrs. T. told her district women's division leader that although she had been chanting daimoku for her husband's recovery for a year, she could not see any improvement in his condition. The leader then discussed her situation with Ms. H., the nurse. Ms. H. gave the following advice: "The fact that the tumor has not metastasized is the benefit of the daimoku. This is really remarkable. Mrs. T.'s questions about whether he will recover, or whether her prayers will be effective, are simply barriers that she has created in her own life. But there is no barrier, there is no

limit, to the great power of daimoku. Now is the time when she needs to offer strong prayers! It's a matter of overcoming any feelings of confusion or doubt, and offering wholehearted prayer with the strongest possible determination and focus. She needs to pray in such a way as to send a 'beam' of daimoku to the diseased area!"

**ENDO:** That's very clear guidance. The advice of the members of the nurses group, based as it is on their experience, is very compelling.

**SUDA:** Indeed. When the district leader related all this to Mrs. T, her prayers became all the more earnest. That very evening, there was a change in Mr. T.'s condition. He suddenly started producing more urine, and a continuous

stream of tears and mucus began flowing from his eyes and nose—so much so that his pillow became soaked.

This went on for three days. On the fourth day, he showed startling signs of recovery. He became able to carry on ordinary conversations with the members of his family and could walk about without any help. The doctors were surprised at this change in his condition and brought him in for more tests. They concluded that he had fully recovered and that surgery was no longer necessary.

Mr. T. made a complete recovery. On seeing this, his son, who was in the seventh grade, remarked, “Daimoku is incredible! I want to join the Soka Gakkai, too. I want to start right away.” He urged his sister, who was in elementary school, to practice Buddhism also, and the siblings joined together.

**SAITO:** That’s a wonderful experience. I am reminded of just how important it is to offer resolute prayer.

### **Victory of Mentor and Disciple—Victory of Faith**

**ENDO:** It’s true that people sometimes limit the beneficial power of daimoku without realizing it. We need to be confident that, just as Nichikan says, “no prayer will go unanswered.”

**IKEDA:** That’s right. And, in particular, the prayers of those who are exerting themselves to accomplish the propagation of the Mystic Law cannot fail to be answered. The Daishonin says, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (MW-1, 93). To be “of the same mind as Nichiren” means to cherish the same determination for kosen-rufu. When we work for kosen-rufu and we stand up with the resolve to demonstrate the victory of faith, our lives overflow with benefit beyond belief.

We receive benefit because we work for kosen-rufu, which is the wish of the Buddha. This is analogous to how someone who works for a company receives a salary.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda characterized those who chant with a laundry list of things that they want, as though it were the “duty” of the Gohonzon to supply benefit, as having “beggar’s faith.” And he urged that instead they should stand up with the determination: “I will stake my life on the struggle for kosen-rufu!”

When we muster the faith to uphold the Gohonzon and the Mystic Law with our very lives, we are protected by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout time and space. In response to our earnest efforts in faith to score a resounding victory for the SGI, an organization dedicated to the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, all the protective functions of the universe come to our aid.

What was Mr. Toda’s prayer when he was imprisoned alongside his mentor, founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi? Each day, morning and evening, he prayed: “I am young and my mentor is old. If only my mentor could be released even one day sooner, it would not matter how long I remained. May my mentor be quickly released!”<sup>9</sup>

How noble!

The wisdom of the Buddha is vast and boundless. Although President Makiguchi died in prison, Mr. Toda, his faithful disciple, survived the ordeal and went on to prove the greatness of his mentor. Now, because of his selfless struggle against nationalism, the SGI has gained immense trust in Asia and throughout the world.

**SAITO:** President Makiguchi is lauded across the globe. In Brazil, for example, schools in increasing numbers are implementing his value-creating pedagogy. And a number of municipalities have named parks and streets after him.

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi triumphed. President Toda’s prayers were victorious. Their struggle transcended life and death.

Japan, with its parochial, island-nation mentality, confined the truly great Mr. Makiguchi to a tiny cell by himself. However, due to the unyielding determination of Mr. Toda, his mentor’s greatness has broken free of such shackles and reached the far corners of the earth. This is a genuine united struggle of mentor and disciple. Buddhism comes down to the relationship of mentor and disciple. In the “Supernatural Powers” chapter, too, we have a “ceremony of mentor and disciple.”

**ENDO:** Yes. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are disciples whom Shakyamuni has instructed since the remote past. And in this chapter Shakyamuni entrusts them with the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.



Founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944). Although President Makiguchi died in prison, Mr. Toda, his faithful disciple, survived the ordeal and went on to prove the greatness of his mentor.

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**SAITO:** This is the key point. If we only look at the literal meaning of the text of the chapter, we wind up with the simple interpretation that Nichiren Daishonin, as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, spread the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni.

**SUDA:** That is, in fact, the standard interpretation.

**SAITO:** But Nichiren Daishonin says: “Myoho-renge-kyo is not the Mystic Law of Shakyamuni, because when the events in this [“Supernatural Powers”] chapter take place, the essence of the sutra has already been transmitted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices” (GZ, 770). The Daishonin is clearly stating here that the teaching he is spreading is

not that of Shakyamuni.

**ENDO:** Even so, some still interpret these words of the Daishonin to mean that he is saying that Myoho-renge-kyo is not Shakyamuni’s teaching because Bodhisattva Superior Practices inherited the teaching in the same way that a son inherits the estate of his father and insists: “Since the tenure of my father is over and I am now head of the household, everything belongs to me and no longer to my father.”

**SAITO:** How can we further clarify this?

**IKEDA:** The analogy of a family estate expresses one side of the truth. Namely, that the Latter Day of the Law is the

“age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices” and not the “age of Shakyamuni.” In the “Supernatural Powers” chapter, Shakyamuni transfers his teaching in its entirety; it’s as though he is saying, “From here on, I leave everything in your hands.”

Let’s look at the passage.

**SUDA:** Okay. Shakyamuni says:

To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra. (LS21, 274)

This is a well-known description of the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

**SAITO:** In short, it means that the Lotus Sutra reveals the life of the Thus Come One in its totality. Shakyamuni then says that he transfers this to Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China describes this transmission as summing up the entirety of the Lotus Sutra. And he explains the significance of the Lotus Sutra based on this passage. This is the doctrine of the five major principles of “name, entity, quality, function and teaching.”

*[“Name” signifies all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, or the sutra’s title, Myoho-enge-kyo. “Entity” signifies “the storehouse of all the secret essentials of the Thus Come One,” or the ultimate Law itself. “Quality” indicates “all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One,” or the causality of the enlightenment of the Thus Come One. “Function” indicates “all the freely exercised supernatural powers of the Thus Come One,” or the power to benefit all people. And “teaching” indicates that “all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra.”]*

It seems to me that T’ien-t’ai is explaining the reason that the Lotus Sutra is endowed with infinite benefit; in other words, he is elucidating that it is the ultimate source of all benefit.

**SUDA:** Put another way, it is the very “life” of the Thus Come One.

**ENDO:** And this is transferred to Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

### **Superior Practices Is a Bodhisattva-Buddha**

**IKEDA:** The question then becomes: Just what is this bodhisattva who “receives and embodies the entirety of the Thus Come One?”

Ordinarily, when we speak of a bodhisattva we mean someone who is practicing the teachings with the aim of becoming a Buddha. But this is clearly not the case with Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Although he embodies the “entirety of the Thus Come One,” he is still called a bodhisattva. Superior Practices is a “bodhisattva-Buddha.”

Let’s go back to the analogy of transmission from father to son. Assuming that father and son are connected, then if the father is a Buddha, it would be only logical that the son who inherits the family estate is also a Buddha.

**ENDO:** Certainly, a person who inherits rule over a country from a king is also a king.

**IKEDA:** At the time of their appearance, Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as follows: “The bodies of these bodhisattvas were all golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness” (LS15, 213).

**SUDA:** The thirty-two features are special characteristics of Buddhas. This therefore seems to indicate that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are Buddhas.

**SAITO:** What’s more, they are described as even more splendid in appearance than Shakyamuni. The sutra likens Shakyamuni to a young man of twenty-five with a hint of immaturity, and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as venerable seasoned elders of a hundred years (cf. LS15, 221).

**IKEDA:** Therefore, the ceremony of essential transmission in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter is fundamentally a transmission from a Buddha to a Buddha. This is a state of life that “can only be understood and shared between Buddhas” (LS2, 24).



Each day we can cause the supreme, pure, eternal life of *kuon ganjo* to well forth from our entire being. Each day we depart anew from *kuon ganjo*, the starting point of life.

Why, then, does Superior Practices appear as a bodhisattva? Well, for one thing, it is so as not to refute the principle of “one world, one Buddha.” People would be confused if two Buddhas were to appear at the same time.

**SAITO:** This is the view that Superior Practices assumes the position of a disciple who is helping Shakyamuni expound his teaching.

**ENDO:** When the Bodhisattvas of the Earth make their appearance, everyone else, including Bodhisattva Maitreya, is startled. This is what prompts Shakyamuni to begin preaching the “Life Span” chapter. In that sense, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth certainly assisted in his preaching.

**IKEDA:** But this takes on still greater significance, given that Bodhisattva Superior Practices appears unequivocally as the representative of the nine worlds. This point virtually transforms the entire history of Buddhism. It is a

recognition of the virtues (or effect) of Buddhahood existing within the practice (or cause) of a bodhisattva.

Up to this juncture, Buddhism had taught that the effect was superior and that practice, which is the cause of enlightenment, was inferior, which seems like common sense.

**ENDO:** I think we intuitively think of the world of Buddhahood as above, or better than, the nine worlds.

**IKEDA:** But with the appearance of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, it becomes evident that the cause (the nine worlds) contains the effect (the world of Buddhahood).

Why is this important? Let’s try to recall the teaching of the “Life Span” chapter. There, Shakyamuni explains that he attained Buddhahood in *gohyaku-jintengo* the extremely remote time described as numberless major world system dust particle *kalpas* ago. This implies that all Buddhas in the universe are disciples of Shakyamuni who attained

enlightenment in the remote past. Then what about before that time?

**SAITO:** Shakyamuni’s statement, “originally I practiced the bodhisattva way” (LS16, 227), indicates that prior to the time of *gohyaku-jintengo* he carried out bodhisattva practice.

**IKEDA:** From there we can infer that since he carried out the Buddhist practice, there was a Buddhist Law. There was a Law, but no Buddha, which means that there was no “Buddha who is at one with the universe and whose life is without beginning or end.”

**SUDA:** It goes without saying that if the time when the Buddha appeared could be pinpointed, he could not be called the “Buddha eternally existing over the three existences of past, present and future.”

**ENDO:** The view of Shakyamuni as having first attained enlightenment during his lifetime in India is refuted as “without origin and existing only in the present.” Such a Buddha is like “grass without roots.” But, the Shakyamuni of the “Life Span” chapter, who revealed that he attained enlightenment in the remote past, is no different from a Buddha who became enlightened at some specific point in time; the only difference is time. Strictly speaking, this view also fails on the grounds that it is “without origin and existing only in the present.” It does not present Buddhahood as originally inherent.

**SAITO:** If a Buddha’s enlightenment is not originally inherent, then the Buddha cannot be called the true Buddha who exists eternally.

**IKEDA:** While this is an important point for our present discussion, it is somewhat challenging. Those who find this a bit confusing should feel free to just skip ahead! It’s a concept that can be studied throughout one’s life. Even if we don’t fully comprehend the fine points of Buddhist theory, the main thing is that we understand the importance of chanting daimoku.

**SUDA:** I, for one, am relieved to hear you say that!

**IKEDA:** To return to the topic at hand, there are two ways of explaining the fundamental Buddha at one with the universe whose life is without beginning or end. The first involves ignoring the workings of causality. By doing so, we

can assume the existence of a Buddha whose life is without beginning or end and leave it at that. That’s because once causality is brought into the picture, the question arises regarding what happened before the effect of Buddhahood was attained.

However, if the issue of causality is simply passed over, then what we are talking about is not Buddhism. It is precisely this explanation of the workings of cause and effect that distinguishes a teaching as Buddhist, while the absence of causality marks a teaching as non-Buddhist.

In particular, the “cause of Buddhahood” and “effect of Buddhahood” are Buddhism’s main concern. It could be said that, after Shakyamuni’s passing, Mahayana Buddhism itself originated out of the people’s quest for the cause that had enabled Shakyamuni to attain Buddhahood.

**SAITO:** Yes. Having lost Shakyamuni, they must have sought to become Buddhas themselves by grasping the cause that enabled him to attain enlightenment.

**IKEDA:** To put it another way, it was an investigation into the true nature of Shakyamuni’s life, which yielded a variety of doctrines expounding an “eternal Buddha.”

**SUDA:** These would include a discussion of Shakyamuni’s eternal life as a “Buddha of the Dharma body,” in contrast to the living Shakyamuni. A number of arguments were further advanced as to the “properties of the Buddha’s life,” including the doctrine of the Buddha’s three inherently enlightened properties (of the Law, wisdom and action).

**ENDO:** Perhaps an argument could be made that the various Buddhas of Mahayana Buddhism—Vairocana<sup>10</sup> of the Keron Sutra, Amida<sup>11</sup> of the Pure Land sutras, and Dainichi<sup>12</sup> of the Dainichi Sutra—each reveal one side of the Buddha while pointing toward the fundamental Buddha whose life is without beginning or end.

**IKEDA:** But no matter how these teachings might talk about the eternal life of the Buddha, there was a great limitation. In the first place, because they described the world of the Buddha as a grand and beautiful realm, they departed from “Shakyamuni the human being.” This signifies their having moved away from the reality of human life.

Another limitation has to do with the issue of cause and effect that we are now discussing. If the “cause of Buddhahood” comes first and the “effect of Buddhahood” comes later, then it follows that the Buddha appears at some particular point in time.

In short, to explain the Buddha without beginning or end, the effect of Buddhahood (benefit) has to be recognized as being inherent in the cause of Buddhahood (practice). This is the second approach, and the only one that can suffice to explain the reality of the original Buddha being eternally present over the three existences.

**SAITO:** This seems to be the most logical conclusion.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Superior Practices is actually a Buddha who is exerting himself at the level of Buddhist practice that enables one to attain enlightenment. In other words, he is the Buddha embodying the simultaneity of cause and effect.

The original Buddha whose life is without beginning or end could not be revealed without the appearance of Superior Practices. His emergence points to the existence of the “true Buddha of *kuon ganjo*,” the Buddha enlightened from time without beginning, which far surpasses the idea of an unimaginably remote time in the past called *gohyaku-jintengo*.

**SUDA:** I am much clearer now on a number of points that were somewhat ambiguous.

This “original Buddha whose life is without beginning or end” is then the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One that we refer to as the Buddha of absolute freedom of *kuon ganjo*, or time without beginning.

### **Each Day Is *Kuon Ganjo!***

**IKEDA:** That’s correct.

**SUDA:** So it becomes clear that *kuon ganjo* in this context does not mean the remote past. It transcends the framework, indeed the very concept of time.

**IKEDA:** Yes, *kuon ganjo* is another name for life that is without beginning or end. It pertains not to the doctrine of time, but to the doctrine of life.

The truth in the depths of life, the very life of the universe that continues to function ceaselessly, is referred to by the term *kuon ganjo*. This can also be called the “Thus Come One originally endowed with the three enlightened properties.” The Daishonin says, “*Kuon* means neither created or adorned, but remaining in one’s original state” (GZ, 759). “Not created” means inherently endowed; it does not indicate a specific point in time. “Not adorned” means not possessing the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics; it refers to ordinary people just as they are. “Remaining in one’s original state” means eternally existing.

*Kuon* signifies Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; it signifies the Gohonzon. When we pray to the Gohonzon, that very instant is *kuon ganjo*; it is beginningless time. For us, each day is *kuon ganjo*. Each day we can cause the supreme, pure, eternal life of *kuon ganjo* to well forth from our entire being. Each day we depart anew from *kuon ganjo*, the starting point of life.

**SAITO:** This is what it means to live based on the mystic principle of the True Cause.

**IKEDA:** That’s why the present time is the most important. We should not dwell on the past; there is no need to do so. Those who exert themselves fully in the present moment and burn with great hope for the future are the true sages in life.

In transmitting the essence of the Lotus Sutra to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, Shakyamuni entrusts him with achieving kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law. Therefore, when we stand up in earnest and work for the propagation of the eternal Mystic Law, we experience the eternity of time without beginning in each moment.

President Toda always regarded propagation of the Mystic Law as his personal responsibility, vowing to realize it without relying on anyone else. And he prayed that youth would rise up with the same great spirit of faith.

On one occasion before a gathering of about twenty youth, he suddenly called out in a powerful voice: “I will accomplish kosen-rufu!” He then had each person there repeat these words: One after another they fervently exclaimed, “I will achieve kosen-rufu by myself!” Some spoke with weak and unsure voices. Some were taken aback. And some later abandoned their faith. President Toda’s sole wish was for young people to stand up with the same determination as

he himself cherished. This was his strict compassion. My feelings toward the members of the youth division are exactly the same.

At any rate, although the doctrine concerning Bodhisattva Superior Practices is extremely difficult, since it is the very heart and essence of the Lotus Sutra, let's pursue our investigation a little further.

**SAITO:** Okay. To confirm what we've covered so far, while the Lotus Sutra expounds the essential transmission from Shakyamuni as the Buddha enlightened since the remote past to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the Law that is thus handed down is not the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra, but the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that is contained in the sutra's depths.

**IKEDA:** That's right. But I think the expression "handed down" may tend to invite misunderstanding. Fundamentally, Bodhisattva Superior Practices is already an entity of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Since he has possessed this Law eternally, the purpose of the ceremony is merely to verify that he is qualified and charged with spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day; it provides proof of his status.

**ENDO:** Then if I may return once again to the analogy of inheritance of a family estate, it's something like a document from the parent certifying the transference of assets.

**IKEDA:** I think you could say that. The "Supernatural Powers" chapter is the letter of certification. Compared to the Mystic Law itself, it is merely a shadow. To illustrate, let us say that a child receives ten million yen from his parents. That would also be a kind of transmission. The ten million yen is the "body," and the certificate attesting that he has received it is the "shadow." The difference between body and shadow is like that between day and night. This is also stated in the Daishonin's writing, "Hyaku Rokka Sho" (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons).

*The Mystic Law which Shakyamuni received in the remote past when he was practicing the Bodhisattva Way at the level of initial aspiration [Jpn myoji-soku] is the body, whereas Superior Practices and the others are the shadow. The transmission of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra in the remote past is the same as Nichiren's present inheritance of the "Life Span" chapter. (GZ, 865)*

This is complex. In essence Nichiren Daishonin says that since the remote past, he—as a common mortal at the stage of one initially taking faith—has been upholding the true Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, that is, the "body," or the essential teaching. From that standpoint, the ceremony involving Superior Practices and the other bodhisattvas is the "shadow," or the theoretical teaching. The sutra is a prophesy; it is documentary proof authorizing the Daishonin to carry out widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One reflected on the canvas of the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra manifests both as Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past (the world of Buddhahood) and as Bodhisattva Superior Practices (the nine worlds). We must never forget that the Mystic Law is the "body," and Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the "shadow."

### **There Are No Buddhas Apart from Human Beings**

**ENDO:** So the ceremony of transmission boils down to a passing of the eternal Law from the world of Buddhahood to the nine worlds. But what is its significance?

**IKEDA:** It indicates that the common mortal is a Buddha.

**SAITO:** Last time, you emphasized this point citing a passage from "The True Entity of Life."

*The passage reads: "The common mortal is the entity of the three properties, or the true Buddha. The Buddha is the function of the three properties, or a provisional Buddha" (MW-1, 90).*

**IKEDA:** I would like to talk more about that later on, but for now, in the context of our present discussion, the point I wish to stress is that while we might speak of the Buddha as a "perfected being" possessing the thirty-two features, this is an ideal image that recedes the closer you get, as in the poem about a utopia that I cited earlier.

Although we might make assumptions about what a "perfect Buddha" is, in actuality this is nothing more than a target. In other words, there is no such thing as a Buddha living apart from the nine worlds of the ordinary person; an idealized Buddha possessing the thirty-two features simply does not exist. In reality, the Buddha can be found only in the life and activities of a bodhisattva. There is no Buddha other than the bodhisattva-Buddha.



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"There is no Buddha existing apart from the people. A Buddha set above the people is a fake, an expedient means. Therefore, the correct way is to live with dignity as a human being and to continue along the supreme path in life; to do so is to be a Buddha."

The effect resides within the cause. That is to say, the simultaneity of cause and effect is the true aspect of attaining Buddhahood. This is the reality of the original Buddha's enlightenment; therefore, apart from this there is no attainment of Buddhahood. The Daishonin says, "Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the single phrase, Myoho-enge-kyo. If we believe in that phrase, we shall naturally be granted the same benefits as he was" (MW-1, 64).

**SAITO:** What, then, is the reason for the description of "perfect Buddhas" possessing the thirty-two features? Is it simply to prompt people to practice, much as utopian ideals cause people to seek to advance humanity?

**IKEDA:** It is to motivate people to persevere in Buddhist practice. Descriptions of Buddhas who are endowed with wonderful and grand attributes generate within people a

yearning to know such beings, which subsequently inspires them to strive to attain Buddhahood themselves. Such images are meant to awaken within people the desire to advance and seek self-improvement.

To say that the Buddha does not exist only means that ordinary people cannot see the Buddha with their own eyes. The world of Buddhahood is undeniably inherent in our lives; it just is not manifested anywhere other than in the nine worlds.

As the Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan says, "The bliss body of the Buddha, which is created by causes, represents the provisional result obtained in a dream, while the uncreated, eternally endowed three enlightened bodies represent the eternal true Buddha."<sup>13</sup>

**SUDA:** "Created" means that it is not inherent; it is something achieved which had not existed previously. The "bliss

body of the Buddha” is a property of the Buddha achieved as the result of Buddhist practice. With the exception of the Buddha inherently endowed with three enlightened properties, all Buddhas adorned with idealized features and characteristics are provisional Buddhas who symbolize the effects of Buddhist practice; they are but illusions.

**ENDO:** An actual Buddha is inherently endowed with the three enlightened properties; it is an eternally existing condition of life, not something attained as a result of countless aeons of practice.

**SAITO:** I have read this passage many times, but now I have an entirely fresh sense of its meaning.

**IKEDA:** Majestic Buddhas are but illusions that have nothing to do with reality. The only actual Buddhas are ordinary people who each moment bring forth the eternal life force of time without beginning. There is no Buddha existing apart from the people. A Buddha set above the people is a fake, an expedient means. Therefore, the correct way is to live with dignity as a human being and to continue along the supreme path in life; to do so is to be a Buddha.

This is what the Lotus Sutra teaches. The transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter signifies such a transformation toward a Buddhism focused on the human being. As the Daishonin indicates when he says, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren . . . ,” we, who are endeavoring to spread the Mystic Law and thereby bring happiness to all humanity, are the Buddhas of the modern age. There are no others.

For this reason, those who use SGI members for personal gain will without fail experience retribution for acting against the Law of the Buddha. On the other hand, to work for the welfare of SGI members and strive to see them become ultimately happy is to cause wonderful benefit to bloom in one’s life.

(To be continued)

1. Eighty thousand sacred teachings: The entire body of teachings expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime. The figure eighty thousand is not intended to be literal but simply indicates a large number.
2. Jizo: “Earth Repository.” A bodhisattva entrusted by Shakyamuni

Buddha with the task of saving living beings during the period from Shakyamuni’s death until the advent of Bodhisattva Miroku, 5,670 million years later, as the next Buddha. In Japan, Jizo became the object of a popular cult and was often thought to protect children.

3. The “Emerging From the Earth” (fifteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as more venerable in appearance than Shakyamuni Buddha himself. When Shakyamuni declares that these bodhisattvas are his original disciples, Bodhisattva Miroku expresses doubt, saying that it’s as though a young man of twenty-five were to point to venerable men of a hundred and say, “These are my sons!”
4. This refers to the Treasure Tower of Taho Buddha. According to “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Taho Buddha appeared at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra seated in a magnificent jeweled *stupa* that emerged from beneath the earth and then rose into the air where it hung, suspended. Shakyamuni seated himself in the tower beside Taho at the latter’s invitation. The “seven kinds of precious gems” adorning the tower are gold, silver, lapis lazuli, giant clam shell, coral, pearl and carnelian.
5. Translated from Spanish. Eduardo Galeano, “Ventana sobre la utopia” (Window on Utopia), *Las palabras andantes* (Walking Words) (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1993).
6. Thirty-two features: Remarkable physical characteristics said to be possessed by Buddhas symbolizing their superiority over ordinary people.
7. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
8. “Kanjin no Honzon Sho Mondan” (Commentary on “The True Object of Worship”).
9. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 419.
10. Vairochana: A Buddha who appears in the Kegon, Bommo and Dainichi sutras. The Shingon sect equates this Buddha with its central deity, Mahavairochana.
11. Amida: Skt. Amitayus or Amitabh, Infinite Life. The Buddha of the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the western region of the universe.
12. Dainichi: Skt. Mahavairochana. A Buddha mentioned in the Dainichi and Kongocho sutras, worshipped by adherents of esoteric Buddhism.
13. *Shugo Kokkai Sho*, one of the most important works of the Japanese Tendai school. This passage is cited in the *Gosho Zenshu* on pages 382, 560, and 783.

# How Pets Improve Our Quality of Life



*Dr. Lee Zasloff received her Ph.D. from Temple University in Psychological Studies in Education in January, 1992. From 1979 to 1991, she worked as a psychologist in the Philadelphia community mental health system. From 1988 to 1991, she was a lecturer while attending graduate school at Temple University. Since January, 1992, she has served as associate director for the Center for Animals in Society located in the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis. The mission of the Center is to study the contribution of companion animals to human health and well-being.*

## Our Conversation with Dr. Zasloff

**Living Buddhism:** Let's start with the really important issues: Are you a cat person or dog person?

**Zasloff:** I'm definitely a cat person right now because I have cats, but I love dogs too. I like all animals. Ollie is my older cat; he's 18. The younger one is Muffie—she's about 8.

**LB:** How many people keep pets in the United States?

**Zasloff:** In 1995, one study estimated that Americans had about 53 million dogs and about 60 million cats. About half of all households in this country have some kind of pet. But, of course, pets aren't limited to cats and dogs. People keep birds, hamsters, rabbits, horses and even snakes as their companions.

**LB:** Why are more Americans choosing to live with pets?

**Zasloff:** I think there are several reasons for this. Meaningful human relationships are hard to find these days. More people feel socially isolated and suffer from loneliness and depression, and at the same time they are becoming busier and experience more stress. There is more stress-related illness. People also have less and less contact with nature. Under these circumstances, pets give us comfort and peace of mind. Dogs and cats are not affected by your mood swings. They don't quarrel with you. They don't say, "I want to live with someone else, so I'm leaving." Pets are always there for us and love us unconditionally. They respond to our affection.

We anthropomorphize our pets—that is, we attribute to them feelings we experience as human beings. We feel as if they respond to our moods, we interact with them in much the same way that we interact with people.

Benefits we are discovering from having a pet include improved health and decreased feelings of loneliness and depression, so a certain amount of anthropomorphism is important for promoting this relationship. It's when we go overboard in ascribing human characteristics to their actions that there can be problems. When a pet exhibits some behavior problem—for example, a cat stops using the litter box or a dog becomes aggressive—from the animal's point of view, their behavior is perfectly logical. We just don't understand it. If we take it personally by thinking that the animal is spiting us, we will probably deal with the situation in a completely inappropriate way and fail to solve the problem. When these things happen and we're not able to solve the problem ourselves, it's important to consult someone with specialized training such as an animal behaviorist or a veterinarian who can help us solve the problem.



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More and more studies are coming out now about the effect of human-animal relationships in child development. We are seeing a positive response in everything from grades to attitudes when kids are taught to care for animals.

**LB:** We hear all these amazing stories of animals saving their owners' lives. Is that really possible?

**Zasloff:** From a scientific point view, there's a lot of speculation about how valid those stories are. Certainly when a dog wakes a person up because the house is on fire, that's a lot clearer kind of situation than someone waking up from a coma because of a pet. We just don't know. It's not outside the realm of possibility but it's very difficult to do scientific studies on these things.

**LB:** What have you learned about the advantages for children who are raised with or without pets?

**Zasloff:** One of the pioneers in the field of human-animal interactions was a child psychologist named Boris Levinson. He discovered the importance of this relationship by accident. He had a dog, Jingles, whom he kept in another room when patients were there. One day a patient, a little boy, came early with his mother. Because he wasn't expecting them yet, the dog was still loose and ran to the door. The little boy spoke to the dog, which was quite remarkable since it was the first time in a year of therapy that the boy had spoken. After that, Levinson

started using the dog in therapy situations. In fact, he wrote a book about pets and human development. He believed that children who grow up with pets develop differently from children who don't.

More and more studies are coming out now about the effect of human-animal relationships in child development. And we are seeing a positive response in everything from grades to attitudes when kids are taught to care for animals, whether they are house pets or in school zoos. A very hot topic right now is the link between animal abuse and child abuse, as well as between childhood animal abuse and future criminal behavior.

Pets have positive effects physiologically as well. In 1980, the University of Pennsylvania did a research project on people who had suffered heart attacks. The focus was not on pets, but one of the key results was that those with pets lived much longer than those without. In 1992, more specific research was conducted in Australia on some 6,000 people at high risk for heart attacks. The researchers reported that pet owners had lower blood pressure and a lower risk of heart disease. Put simply, pets are good for our mental and physical health. And it doesn't matter what kind of pet you have. What is most important is that we have a positive relationship with it. We like to say that a pet is not a pill—just because you have an animal living in your house doesn't mean you will automatically feel better or be happier. You have to develop a relationship with that pet. But having a positive relationship with animals makes you feel more relaxed and experience the benefits of interacting with nature.

**LB:** In one of the oldest Buddhist scriptures, there is a story about Shakyamuni. One day he saw a group of kids tormenting a fish. He said to them: "Are you afraid of pain? Do you dislike pain?" The kids replied, "Yes sir, we are afraid of pain, we dislike pain." Then Shakyamuni recited this bit of verse: "If [you] are afraid of pain, if pain is hateful to you, Do not an evil deed openly or in secret. If [you] shall do an evil deed or do one now, There's no escape from pain, [though you] spring up and flee".<sup>1</sup> From the very beginnings of Buddhism, Shakyamuni used our relationship with all living beings to teach us. Can you elaborate on the importance of creating this relationship with pets?

**Zasloff:** I think there are a lot of positive values that can be learned from caring for animals, and pets in particular, especially for children. We did a study in Los Angeles with inner-city kids, at-risk kids living in neigh-

If children are raised caring for pets, learning the importance of caring for living things, then they'll carry these values with them throughout their lifetime.



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borhoods full of gangs and violence. The Los Angeles SPCA teaches them to train dogs as a violence prevention tool. After the kids go through this program, they talk about learning patience from learning to train the dog; they learned to change their attitude; they learned that dogs have feelings similar to people and so to be kind. From caring for and having a relationship with an animal, they learn to treat people with the same kindness, patience and consideration.

Another experiment was done at a school for severely disturbed children in Pennsylvania. One group of students in each of several grades was put in charge of the small animals at the school zoo, while another group did rock climbing and other activities that had nothing to do with animals. The group that cared for the animals displayed less aggression toward others and improved their grades more than the other group. Again, if children are raised this way, learning the importance of caring for living things, then they'll carry these values with them throughout their lifetime.

Other studies have been done with adults in special circumstances. In one particular study, small pets like guinea pigs and birds were brought into a men's prison for the inmates to care for. The prisoners were videotaped inter-

acting with the animals. It was discovered that they smiled more, their speech was slower and they were calmer. Animals can have this effect, instilling care and respect for life.

**LB:** Can you tell us a little about your Buddhist practice?

**Zasloff:** I have been chanting since December 1971. I joined the SGI in Philadelphia. I was 22 at the time, just out of college, and in a masters program in psychology at Temple University. I was a correspondent for the World Tribune [SGI-USA's newspaper] for many years.

**LB:** Did you always have pets during that time?

**Zasloff:** I didn't. In fact, although I had pets growing up, I never had cats and I didn't especially like them. Then, in 1981, I had a friend from Germany who visited me for a year. While she was here she wanted to adopt a kitten. It was the first time in my life I had a cat, and I fell in love with it. A year later, when she went back to Germany, I got my own cats.

**LB:** Did your Buddhist practice influence your career choices over the years?

**Zasloff:** That's an interesting question, and not an easy one, because I was so unconscious for such a long time. I had a lot of personal problems, and my practice really held me together. Of course, over time, as I practiced, that began to change. Step by step, things really started to move in a direction that I could never, ever have imagined. I had worked in mental health for about 14 years, and then in 1987 went back to school for a Ph.D. program in psychological studies in education. It was during this time that I became interested in two things: the field of human-animal interactions and research in general. At that time, a friend, also a member and a veterinary surgical resident at the University of Pennsylvania, told me about some people at Penn—two of the founding pioneers in this field who were doing these studies. I met with them and started pursuing my interest in this area.

In 1990, I went to a conference in Houston on human-animal interactions and met Lynette Hart, the Director of the Center for Animals in Society here at the vet school. At the time she had no jobs to offer and was working out of a tiny little office with very little money for the center. I spent a lot of time talking with her about my dissertation on people's relationships with pets. It was published under the title "Loneliness and Pet Ownership Among

Single Women.” In this study, I found that having pets had a similar psychological effect on single women to living with other people. I was finishing my dissertation in August 1991, sitting at home typing. I took a break for lunch and my phone rang. It was Lynette Hart, calling me out of the blue two years after I had met her, asking me if I wanted to work for her at the Center for Animals in Society. I finished everything, sold my stuff, packed my cats, and in January 1992 moved from Philadelphia to Davis, California. I absolutely feel that my practice was definitely helping me move in the right direction for my life.

**LB:** What is your practice doing for you today?

**Zasloff:** I’ve had so many big breakthroughs recently. I feel like after 27 years I’m finally getting it! It’s very exciting. I think the most important benefit is caring more about other people.

**LB:** You sound as excited as a brand-new member seeing her first benefit from her Buddhist practice.

**Zasloff:** It kind of feels that way, and it really speaks to how great the Gohonzon is and how great the practice is. No matter how long we practice, the benefits we get and

So why have pets become so popular? For one thing, we have less contact with nature. Most of us live in cities surrounded by concrete. Our environment is polluted by smoke, chemicals and noise. Pets give us a connection with the natural world.



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the depths of understanding deepen and expand and grow. My two most recent benefits have to do with FNCC [SGI-USA’s Florida Nature and Culture Center]. I participated in the Study of the Lotus Sutra conference in April, and then, although I hadn’t planned on it, I ended up going to the Culture Department meeting in July. I feel like I’ve finally established a foundation of self-identity, which I never had.

**LB:** That’s surprising for someone who has a doctorate. Most people would be impressed with your credentials alone.

**Zasloff:** It’s been very hard, because people see me as having a lot of confidence and capability, but I’ve always struggled with a basic lack of confidence and self-identity. In my work I’ve always suffered from impostor’s syndrome. One day my boss said to me, “You know, the only one who doesn’t think you have anything to say is you.” Over time, I’ve learned that I don’t have to be good at everything. I don’t have to be the ultimate scientist. I don’t have to know it all. I’ve discovered what I’m really good at, I’ve carved out a niche for myself, and people know and respect what I’ve done. It never fails to amaze me that I’ve had the opportunity to do this.

**LB:** Back to our topic, how do pets influence human society as a whole?

**Zasloff:** Animals have always been part of human society for utilitarian purposes such as food, fiber and labor. The thing that distinguishes pets from other animals is that pets are kept solely for the relationship we have with them. So why have pets become so popular in our society? For one thing, as I mentioned earlier, we have less contact with nature. Most of us live in cities surrounded by concrete. Our environment is polluted by smoke, chemicals and noise. Pets give us a connection with the natural world.

Also, connections with people aren’t as strong as they used to be. We no longer live in extended families. Many people marry later or remain single, so more people are living alone. Social contacts diminish as we age, but we are living longer. Pets provide many of the psychological and emotional needs that we usually seek from other people but that may not be available. They give us comfort, companionship, a feeling of being needed, they make us laugh and play and give us something to care for.

Pets are also good social facilitators, especially for older or more solitary people. Let’s say you take a walk by your-

self through the park. Probably nobody's going to stop and talk to you. But with a dog, it's very likely that someone will talk to you, or at the very least smile. Animals are good ice-breakers. This is an important aspect of animal-assisted therapy. Animals are a good focus of conversation; they help people interact. An older person, especially in a nursing home or hospital, may not have a lot of social contacts, but with a pet other people will talk to them. This is also true for the disabled. We did a study a number of years ago with people in wheelchairs; if that person has a dog, people will interact with them more—they'll talk with them, look at them, smile at them. And this is true for disabled children, too. They will have more social interactions if they have a service dog.

**LB:** So what does it take to be a good, responsible pet owner? Spay and neuter?

**Zasloff:** It begins before that. When people are first thinking about getting a pet, they need to research what kind of animal would best fit their lifestyle. We have a tendency to select animals by their appearance. For example, puppies are cute and cuddly, but not for long. Puppies can be a lot of trouble if we don't have the time required to care for and train them properly. And we need to know the characteristics of a particular breed. Or say a person has always had a dog but suddenly is living in an apartment and can't have one, so they get a cat. Well, cats aren't dogs. Cats don't behave like dogs.

In the same vein, we have a double-edged view of cats. We want them sitting in our laps or sleeping in our beds, responding to us and interacting with us, but we also view them as little wild animals and open the door to let them roam outside. Most of them don't have collars, and if they get lost and end up in a shelter there's no way to return them to their owners. Nationwide, only two percent of lost cats that end up in shelters are returned to their owners. Two percent! Pets have become so popular, and yet, as much as we love our pets, the animal shelters are filled to capacity with unwanted animals. As a society we have this mentality that pets are expendable.

It's extremely important to take getting a pet seriously, to find out what we might be in for. This is a lifetime responsibility. Pets are part of the family. We should care for them the way we care for other members of our family. A lot of people in animal protection prefer to call themselves guardian or caretaker or steward, terms other than owner. We're dealing with a life that can suffer and experience pain, that depends on humans for its well-



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When people are first thinking about getting a pet, they need to research what kind of animal would best fit their lifestyle. We have a tendency to select animals by their appearance. For example, puppies are cute and cuddly, but not for long.

being. I think we need to appreciate the many contributions animals make to the quality of our lives. Those of us who have pets are especially aware of this because of the many ways that they contribute to our physical and emotional health and well-being. But we also need to be aware of, and appreciate, the less obvious contributions, such as providing us with food, clothing, and the many life-saving and life-sustaining advances in medical science.

**LB:** In Nichiren Daishonin's writing, "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," he states: "The old fox never forgets the hillock where he was born, the white turtle repaid the kindness he had received from Mao Pao. If even the lowly creatures know enough to do this, then how much more should human beings!" (MW-4, 171). The story of Mao Pao is that one day he was walking along the Yangtze River and saw a fisherman catch a turtle and prepare to kill it. Moved to pity, he gave the fisherman his clothes in exchange for the turtle and thus saved its life. Mao Pao

raised this turtle, and when it became big he released it back into the Yangtze River. Years later, as a general of the Chin Dynasty, he was retreating across the river. Many soldiers were drowning because of their heavy armor, but the white turtle he had saved appeared and carried Mao Pao on his back to safety on the opposite shore. The Daishonin is teaching respect for all life by citing the relationship between a person and an animal. What can we gain from creating relationships with pets?

**Zasloff:** I think one of the problems in our society today is that we lack empathy for others. In fact, research has shown that one of the important factors in aggressive behavior among both children and adults is a lack of empathy—the ability to sense another’s feelings. One of the basic objectives of humane educational programs for children is to help them develop empathy so they learn to care for living things. Many adults who have engaged in violent crimes abused animals as children. I think that learning to care for and appreciate animals is important for gaining appreciation and respect for all living things.

As far as what we can learn from our pets, one of the reasons they are so important to us is that they give us unconditional love. Pets are always there, they always love us and we depend on this constancy of their affection. We might get some aspect of this from the few people closest to us, but not all the time. That’s one of the things we can learn, the importance of unconditional love especially for children and attributes like loyalty, things that never change in our animals. I think this is something we can learn from animals and to appreciate about them. As human beings it’s really hard to have that kind of unwavering love and loyalty for other people. It’s something we need to develop.

**LB:** Why does it seem that many animals gather near the altar when their owners are chanting to the Gohonzon?

**Zasloff:** I think it’s because of the sound. That would be an interesting study, to survey members to find out what their animals do when they’re chanting. It seems that it may have a soothing effect.

**LB:** Is there a danger of becoming overly attached to pets to the exclusion of human contact?

**Zasloff:** This was a question that came up when I was in Japan this past February. I think that there are some human mental health problems that may appear with regard to animals. Many of us have seen stories or heard about people

called “animal collectors” or “animal hoarders.” These are typically older females who keep large numbers of animals in their homes. In extreme cases, they are living in filthy conditions, and the animals are not well cared for. But this problem isn’t caused by the animals. Unfortunately, while it usually gets dealt with in the legal system, it’s really a human problem that requires professional intervention. Of course, there are also people who live with just one pet and don’t interact with anyone else. I don’t think that people decide not to have contact with other people. Rather, I think that these may be people who are isolated anyway, or who have lost contact for any number of reasons.

**LB:** How can we translate what we learn from our interaction with pets into our relationships with humans?

**Zasloff:** I think that living with animals can help us learn to have a bigger, more compassionate heart by taking care of another living creature who depends completely on us and brings so much joy and pleasure to our life. But people who don’t have pets can also learn to appreciate animals, through such activities as observing wildlife, going to the zoo, or even watching special programs about animals on television.

There’s a great quote from Albert Schweitzer that says, “Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace.” Schweitzer believed that we should never thoughtlessly harm another living being, whether human or animal. Recently, *Living Buddhism* published what Yoichi Kawada wrote about the Earth Charter from the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. Essentially, he said that to protect the ecosystem, we have to act with mercy and non-violence in relation to all living beings in our environment and that, even though it might be necessary to kill animals at times, we shouldn’t do so without good reason. In a recent issue of *Living Buddhism* there was a wonderful article by David Chappell about the importance of the Lotus Sutra in the 21st century and what it teaches about our relationship to nature. He mentioned that when a group of American Indians visited the U.N. to see how different countries were represented, they wanted to know who would represent the animals and the birds. I was so moved by this. If we can learn to have that kind of spirit to care for all life, I think that we will be really living the Buddhist ideal of compassion for all life. □

1. *Udana: Verses of Uplift and Itivuttaka: As It Was Said*. Translated by F.L. Woodward. London: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 61.

# POTTERS FOR PEACE: Throwing Clay in Central America

*When Lynette Yetter volunteered to share her clay-working skills with potters in Central America, she didn't know she would be saving lives.*



How did I end up in Nicaragua, bouncing along a narrow dirt road in a crowded, battered blue pick-up, dodging potholes, with the dry season's hot dusty breath blowing over my bare arms and face? The Toyota truck I shared with my fellow potters and Ron Rivera, passed lumbering, wooden-wheeled ox

carts and rolling grasslands sprinkled with barefoot people tending to the activities of life amongst edible wild plants, medicinal herbs, handmade adobe houses, earthen beehive-shaped ovens, trees machete-pruned for firewood, fields of corn, beans, wheat and rice.

When I first started practicing the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin in 1985, my heart's desire was to win a sweepstakes so that I could live in a little house in the woods, make my art and not have to deal with society—a little like the reclusive Ted Kazinski.

Chanting, getting involved in SGI youth activities and studying the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and Daisaku Ikeda broadened my life condition until my heart's desire became to deeply involve myself with people and make life-to-life connections through art.

President Ikeda is my role model. He dedicates his life to world peace and is also a writer, photographer and poet laureate. Through his example, I became encouraged to "seek out hardship" and follow my heart's desire to create the Buddha Land here, now.

Since childhood, my heart has been drawn to the indigenous life of our ancestors and living close to the earth. That was how I got involved with Potters for Peace, a loose-knit group of altruistic people who work with mostly indigenous potters in Nicaragua. In the 1980s, the people of Nicaragua were suffering, not only due to a U.S.-sponsored war but an embargo that made medicine, toilet paper and other necessities unobtainable. The potters were the poorest of the poor. In solidarity with the craft, Potters for Peace was born, lending technical assistance, providing intercultural exchange, marketing and so forth. Once a year, Potters for Peace conducts "brigades," guided introductory cultural-exchange trips between U.S. and Nicaraguan potters.

From my experience in Central America, I learned on a deeper level that world peace comes down to each one of us. When we

*The following sections are excerpts from my journal: January–March 1999*

## WHAT IS BEAUTY?

My friend Rayne in San Francisco e-mailed me with the question, "What is considered beautiful in Nicaragua? Avon pancake make-up or a flower behind the ear?"

Well, both.

In the city, Managua, there is a lot of mascara and the whole nine yards of face paint. Among the middle class and up, that is.

The poor, in both the city and the *campo* (rural areas) don't wear make-up. But I'm constantly struck by how freshly scrubbed and pressed everyone is.

This reminds me of a previous visit when I was living with a family of potters in Loma Panda, Nicaragua. Going to town involved a half-day walk down a mountain, wading across a river, up another mountain and down the other side on dusty, rocky footpaths traversed by donkeys and scrawny horses with homemade saddles of anything from a sack of grain to a pair of wooden "V's" with a flap of home-cured leather draped over them, and of course, people—barefoot, shod in molded-plastic shoes, irregular sandals of old tires and leather strips



Potter of La Paz Centro (Peace Center), Nicaragua coiling a pot.



Members of women potters' collective, Ducaule Grande, Nicaragua.

make a change deep in our hearts, the external world reflects it like a perfect mirror. I also learned that no matter how important a project is, how altruistic, humanistic or worthy, there is never an excuse for not being kind to the people I work with.

My first journey with Potters for Peace was a two-week trip around Nicaragua in January 1994, led by Ron Rivera in his Toyota pick-up, meeting dozens and dozens of sister potters—most of the potters are women. We visited homes and workshops, communicating with the help of a translator. At the end of the two weeks, we did a joint project. During that work project, a few of the women eyed some potter's wheels so I gave them a lesson — and was invited to stay and be their teacher.

I couldn't stay, because I had teaching responsibilities in San Francisco, but I promised to return the next year.

And I did. In the meantime, based on prayerful consideration, I followed my heart and completely changed my five-year plan. Instead of trying to buy a home in Oakland, California, I sold half my possessions, put the other half in storage, quit my clay teaching job of five years, gave up my apartment in the Haight-Ashbury, and used what was to have been the down-payment for my house to travel and write.

However, before I could leave the country, I had to overcome huge family and personal obstacles. I was at my father's bedside in New Mexico when he took his last breath. Despite my grief, I had to comfort my stepmother and be a pillar of emotional support for my mom who was responsible for my grandparents, but she was losing it from a mixture of grief and as-yet-undiagnosed Alzheimer's. It was overwhelming.

I attended a Buddhist lecture that encouraged me to strengthen my prayers. The lecturer explained a Japanese folksaying that a mountain is an accumulation of particles of dust, but, he said, first Soka Gakkai President Makiguchi disagreed. "That's not how geology works! Great cataclysmic forces cause mountains!

or flapping ancient work shoes, with me in my sturdy hiking boots.

To prepare for the dusty journey, the family awoke before dawn (as usual), and heated the cast-iron, iron in the cooking fire that crackled in the adobe stove. In the smoky light of a kerosene lamp, the "going to town" clothes were carefully ironed to the satisfaction of any French maid.

There I was, rumped, tangled and frumpy, in contrast to the erect posture and wrinkle-free clothes of these poor but proud, dignified people with precisely combed hair pulled back from shining faces, clear eyes gazing directly into mine.

That is what is considered beautiful. Pride in one's self.

#### ENCOURAGEMENT IS THE KEY

Reid Harvey in Africa has definitely been a "Buddhist god," a protective, encouraging entity for me. (He is developing another version of the silver-impregnated ceramic water filter on the Ivory Coast.) A few years ago, when I first heard of the filter project, I was underwhelmed. I was looking for indigenous culture projects that appealed to my sense of romanticism. That is why, on my previous forays to Central America as a volunteer with Potters for Peace, I lived and worked with a family of indigenous potters in Nicaragua, sharing our pottery techniques and our lives.

But because of Hurricane Mitch, my interest in the water filter project grew, due to Ron Rivera's patient prodding. The more I learned about it, the more I was aware of its importance. But the knowledge came in bits and pieces, in letters from Ron via e-mail.



Clay doll with moveable limbs by Carmensa Munoz, Loma Panda, Nicaragua.

Upthrusting tectonic plates!  
Volcanoes! THAT'S how mountains are formed!"

So I chanted with the determination that a new Sierra Nevada mountain range would rise up out of my family's plains of suffering. In one month my goals were met: We found reliable, affordable live-in care for my grandparents, my stepmother was surrounded with loving support groups, and my mother started seeing a grief counselor who, she said, "saved her life."

Off I went to Antigua, Guatemala on schedule, to attend language school (Asociacion de Profesores Profesionales de Espanol) and live in Loma Panda, Nicaragua, to teach the skill of throwing on the potter's wheel to Angela, Marta, Maria, Timothea and Carmensa, my sister potters. I learned much more from these women than I could ever teach them. Though poor in possessions, they are rich in spirit, live with dignity and grace and work hard with joy.

When I returned to Nicaragua a couple of years later, the women of Loma Panda had utilized their brief training on the potter's wheel to the fullest. A new line of clay dolls with wheel-thrown bodies and moveable limbs had sprung from their imagination, inspired by photos I'd given them of Mexican pre-Columbian clay dolls. Twice as many family members were now working, producing dolls to fill orders from specialty stores in Nicaragua and around the world. Angela told me with pride, "The dolls built the workshop."

I have returned to Central America every year since, usually for two months, continued to study Spanish and do volunteer work with Potters for Peace. I write and give slide presentations about my experiences of having lived and worked with these potters of Loma Panda, in hopes that others will know them too, so that if our U.S. government decides to support a war again, we will say "No! They are our friends!"

My most recent experience was this year, from January to March 1999, when I volunteered in both Nicaragua and Guatemala. My journal of these two months is a book-length manuscript, and the experiences of the journey were so numerous and intense that I can only give a synopsis here.

One of Potters for Peace's ongoing projects has been developing a ceramic water filter impregnated with colloidal silver. The leading cause of death for children in Third-World countries is diarrhea caused by contaminated drinking water. This simple filter saves lives, is easy to make and provides another source of revenue for artisans.

The turning point for me was an e-mail from Reid Harvey in Africa. He opened by saying that he was jealous that I was here in Guatemala, doing what he had wanted to do. He then went on to explain why—an outpouring of his passionate desire that people not suffer any more because they don't have clean water to drink.

I chanted to be able to fulfill this mission well, because I didn't feel anywhere near as passionate as Reid did. In fact, I had been struggling with my tendency to be passive, to give in, thinking, "Ron says it's hard and may not be possible, it's okay if it doesn't work out."

By chanting, I changed that mode of thinking to: "This IS going to work out. The people of the world are going to have access to these filters and cholera will be a disease of the past."

Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "The voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708), or in this case, the e-mail did the Buddha's work.

President Ikeda explains that "Sincere words of encouragement have the power to give people hope and courage to go on living." (*For Today and Tomorrow*, Daisaku Ikeda, December 19th).

Reid's words of encouragement ignited my inspiration, sense of purpose and determination so that I could accomplish all that I did, playing a part in opening a new stage of happiness, health and peace.

#### IT'S ALL HOW YOU LOOK AT IT

How quickly the world can change; our perception seems to create the reality.



Francis Cano practicing making a water filter receptacle in San Juan de Oriente, Nicaragua.

My assignment was to do what was considered next to impossible. I had to research the history of the water filter and related projects in various countries and figure out what to do differently so the filters would continue to be made and used after a funded project ended. Based on the new insight I would gain, I was to redesign the water filter project and write a grant proposal to fund it.

I did it.

I interviewed the Guatemalan inventor of the filter, Fernando Mazariegos, and Dominique Wilson, the director of AFA Guatemala, (Association of the Families of the Americas), who conducted a year-long comprehensive field study on the effectiveness of the filter with more than 600 Guatemalan families. The study proved that the filter halved the incidence of diarrhea in children under five. I researched the thick archives of Potters for Peace in Managua, Nicaragua, and read grant proposals, final reports, lab-test findings, articles, correspondence—everything about the project, which spanned fifteen years and four countries, in English and Spanish. I researched United Nations archives in Managua, bleary-eyed, pulling out every document relating to technology and water in Third-World countries. I hired and supervised eight people — even though I was an unpaid volunteer. I trained women of San Juan de Oriente’s pottery community to throw the five-gallon vessels necessary to hold the filtered water, then supervised the design and construction of a production workshop for the filter. I hired Spanish teachers to transcribe the taped interviews. I also hired an archaeologist, Carlos Ericastilla, and the former project coordinator, Dora Chew, to work together

Life-condition. It’s been said that we are in the Buddha land, or hell, or anywhere in between, depending on where our head is at.

Life bursting out of the soil and the gentle faces of the people. Riots of green, flowers, humongous trees. A great throbbing of awareness in the volcanoes, thalo blue sky, white and grey clouds bounding about in joyous profusion—the steady activity of industrious people who take the time to smile and laugh. An interconnectedness of nature and people, bare feet on hard packed dirt floor; a toddler contentedly plays with her collection of bug carcasses next to the homemade potter’s wheel where her 52 year-old grandmother, Juanita Cano, rests her foot on the split log nailed to the frame as her other foot pushes the wooden fly-wheel around, the wheel bearings hum as she centers the fifteen pounds of earth dug from near her house. Juanita’s face is creased with lines of gentleness wrought from years of confronting and overcoming the harshness of life lived.

With a high life-condition, I enjoy it. I even enjoy the billowing black omnipresent diesel exhaust from the sagging pick-up creeping up the hill ahead, as an embellishment on the canvas of active life.

But, with a low life-condition, like today, the Buddha land disappears and is replaced by a cacophony of muffler-less buses on suicide missions; claustrophobic crowds of desperate strangers who cloister around your car at every light, waving lottery tickets in your face, smearing your windshield with grimy cloths then demanding money; cardboard displays of sunglasses waved a foot from your head; woven baskets filled with

on follow-up interviews with fifty families who had participated in the year-long study (which had ended over four years before), then supervised the interview report. From all that work, I saw the direction we needed to go and wrote a grant proposal to the Canadian Friends Service Committee. Despite little experience writing grants, I was determined that I could do it, based on daimoku and hard work.

We received the funding.

Many times I wanted to give up and easily could have done so. Ron, the Potters for Peace coordinator, seemed not to believe my task could be accomplished. Ron told me it would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain interviews with Fernando Mazariegos and Dominique Wilson. But with prayer inspired by President Ikeda's poem "The Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land," I chanted daimoku to break the hard shell of the lesser self and deepen my awareness of our true common roots of humanity, where all are friends and comrades. I not only obtained the interviews but also was received with open arms, and Dominique said she wants to work in clay with me when I return. When she mentioned that her uncle was the president of Guatemala, I decided to become the kind of world citizen with the life-condition to comfortably converse heart-to-heart with heads of state and be an exemplary representative of the SGI. I am striving to live President Ikeda's guidance, to live as if I am the president of the Soka Gakkai, as he encourages each of us to do.

As a result of these intense two months using my Buddhist practice to help others, I want to continue expanding my life to create a path that balances venting my creative juices (for my personal happiness as well as to inspire others) with conducting more international cultural exchanges on a one-on-one level—creating those bonds of friendship that will truly make us a global village. We are the heart and soul of society. My prayer is that we will all continue growing together, courageously ignoring the limiting boxes our lesser selves sometimes try to place on our spirits. I hope we will continue seeking to know and follow our paths, found in the deepest recesses of our hearts, and with courage, wisdom and compassion, dance our own unique, joyous dance of life. □

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**For more on Potters for Peace:**

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Website: [www.cc.cc.ca.us/pfp/index.htm](http://www.cc.cc.ca.us/pfp/index.htm)

fly-specked sugar and coconut thrust toward you... all accompanied by raw-throated cries of "compra compra compra (buy, buy, buy)."

In the lower life-condition, my mind is filled with complaints; I'm tired, hungry, in unfamiliar places; I'm being beeped at by a train of taxis, pickups and Toyotas that appear out of nowhere, like a laser from an unseen enemy aimed straight at me. All I see is the dusty faded pink, blue, yellow of the plastic shopping bags lining the roadside, smelling the acrid-black smoke of the piles of burning trash amidst the roadside landfill of garbage that flutters from passing bus windows, cars, pedestrians, and gathers in the ditches like colored dandruff that just won't go away, no matter what you do.

Gone is the joy, the forward momentum of growing plants and vibrant people.

But in a moment, an inner shift of perspective, I smile as I politely refuse each white-line vendor, gazing into eyes that are a mirror of my own. I see each of the beautiful souls. A brown face smiles back. A driver with kindly eyes slows down and waves me in. A breeze seems to pick up and color comes back into the gray world.

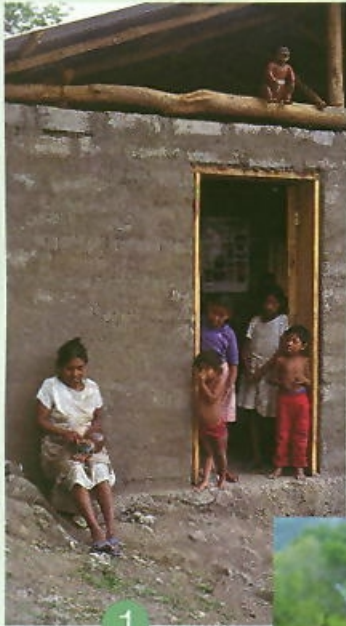
And the fleabites around my ankles hardly itch at all.

### Tucked in for the night.

The Masaya Volcano has been billowing out white columns of earth breath that hang over the verdant, lumpy landscape like a diaphanous canopy over a fluffy comforter of banana trees, palms and philodendrons. □



# Throwing Clay in Central America



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9



8

1 • Maria Munoz and children in front of new workshop, Loma Panda, Nicaragua.

2 • Potter of La Paz Centro prepares clay.

3 • "Patchwork Pot" by Lynette Yetter.

4 • Martha Munoz, Loma Panda, Nicaragua (with mask).

5 • Migdalia and Eva Munoz, Loma Panda, Nicaragua (making masks).

6 • Timothea Munoz, Loma Panda, Nicaragua (with doll).

7 • Pottery of Luisa Cano, San Juan de Oriente, Nicaragua.

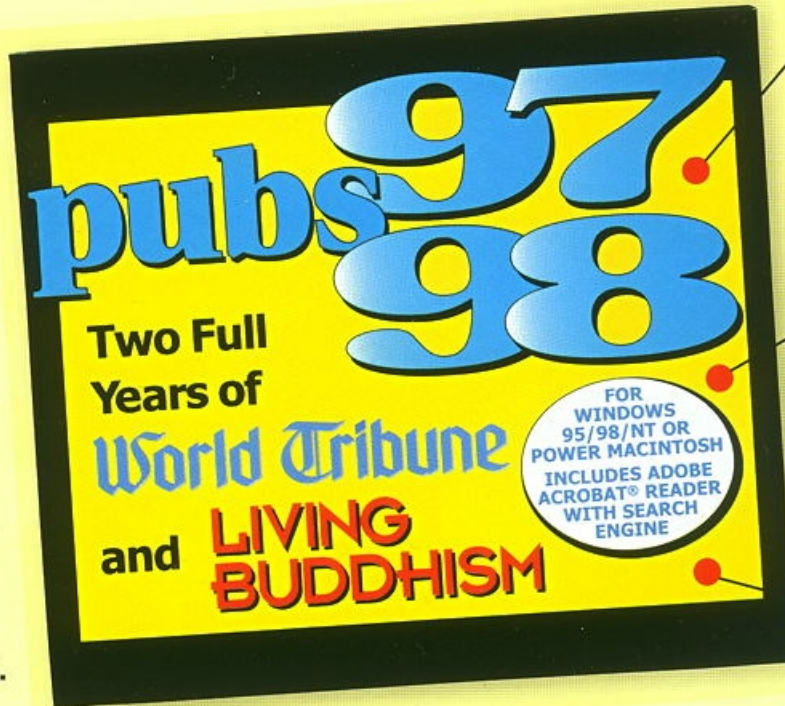
8 • Ron Rivera and Moeses Matute press-molding a clay water filter element.

9 • SGI youth performing at a meeting in Leon, Nicaragua.

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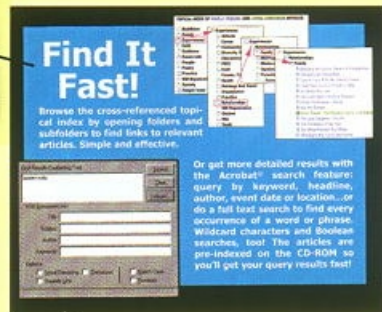
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# Living

## BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

OCTOBER 1999

### **POTTERS FOR PEACE**

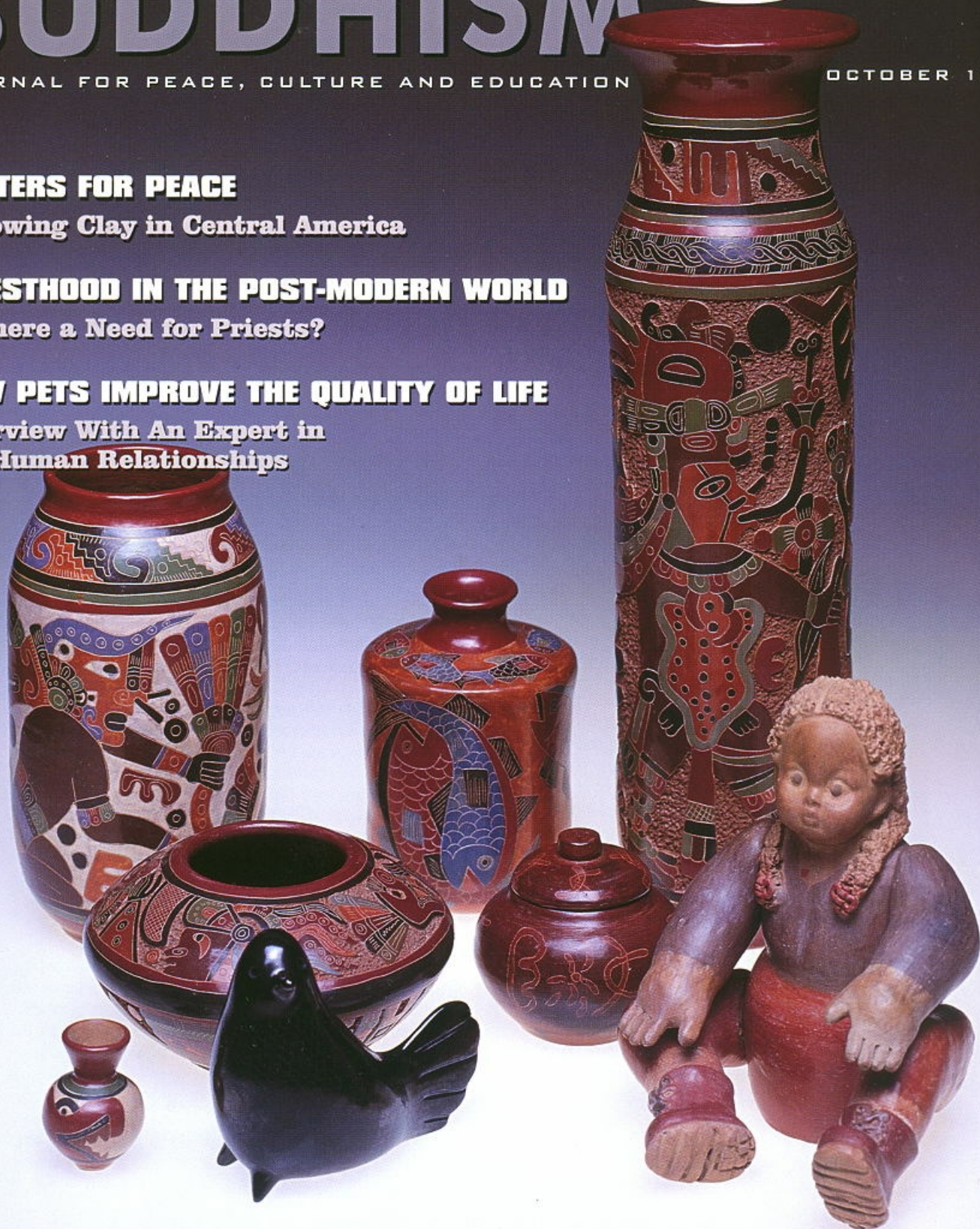
**Throwing Clay in Central America**

### **PRIESTHOOD IN THE POST-MODERN WORLD**

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**Interview With An Expert in  
Pet-Human Relationships**





The new mosaic at the Los Angeles Friendship Center by Eiji Miamoto.

## What is the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?

Living Buddhism is the study journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the inseparable link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life.

Through their Buddhist faith and practice, our members aim to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to create value, to live without fear, to take responsibility for their circumstances, to care for their families and to live with compassion for others.

### What we believe...

Our core philosophy is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation.

### The Buddhist tradition...

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlighten-

ment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated in the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

In the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the truth hidden in the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren Buddhism, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law—*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. By putting their lives in rhythm with this Law, individuals can unlock their hidden potential—the Buddha nature—and achieve creative harmony with the environment. Nichiren Buddhism is a vehicle of individual empowerment—that is, individuals have within themselves, the power to transform the inevitable sufferings of life into happiness and to be a positive influence in the community.

### The SGI Heritage...

The SGI organization has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Here he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings. The name Soka Gakkai (value-creation society) was first used by Makiguchi in 1930 when he founded the lay organization. During World War II, Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda were imprisoned for their opposition to the war. Makiguchi died in prison within eighteen months at the age of 73. After the war, Toda rebuilt the organization and achieved remarkable growth until his death in 1958. On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to its present membership of 12 million in a 128 countries.

Based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda has founded the Soka School System which includes universities in Japan and the United States. He is also the founder of the Toda Peace Institute, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Fuji Art Museum, and more. He is the author of numerous books that have been translated into many languages and has received world-wide recognition for his peace efforts.