

# living BUDDHISM

November • 1999 Vol. 3 • No. 11

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

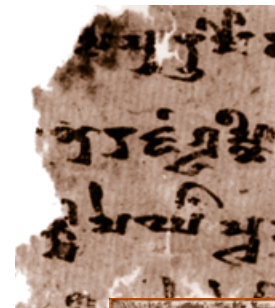
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# GLOSSARY

## Bodhisattvas of the Earth

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

## Buddha

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

## daimoku

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

## Gohonzon

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

## gongyo

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

## karma

Sanskrit word meaning *action*. The life tendency or destiny each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

## kosen-rufu

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

## Lotus Sutra

The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment

and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members' daily Buddhist practice.

## Nam-myoho-rengo-kyo

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

## Nichiren Daishonin (1222-82)

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

## Shakyamuni

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

## Soka Gakkai International (SGI)

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

# Leaders Who Inspire Harmony and Trust

As I meet members around the country, I sometimes hear reports of leaders who are causing concern and discomfort among their fellow members. The leader might have a habit of making decisions without consulting the other leaders responsible or without considering the situation of those affected. Or he might frequently dismiss any differing opinion. In one case I heard of, the leader did not invite to planning meetings other leaders who tended not to always agree with him.

As general director, I feel it is my responsibility to work with all the leaders to ensure that our organization exists to serve and support the membership in their practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism, and to enable everyone to see the real results of growth and benefit in their lives. I am determined that, in this way, the SGI-USA will become the kind of organization SGI President Ikeda envisions, a gathering of people dedicated to their personal growth, to the happiness of others and to the betterment and peace of society—a family of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. And I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the efforts of our members and leaders who have been working hard to make this so. However, I feel it is also important for SGI-USA leaders to periodically reconfirm the spirit with which we serve our fellow members.

Whenever President Ikeda warns of the dangers of arrogance or authoritarianism, the authoritarian and the arrogant are usually the last to think it applies to them. Because of this human tendency, it is important to take each passage of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, each speech or guidance from President Ikeda, as if it were directed at ourselves—personally and individually. We may not be able to control how others apply Buddhism to their actions, but we each can certainly develop our own ability to do so if we try.

Buddhism is a practice of self-improvement. It exists so that we can make ourselves grow to be more human

and humane. When we see someone doing something wrong or unjust, this, too, presents a chance for us personally to develop our strength, wisdom and compassion. If we simply think “I'm OK, and they are not,” and take no action, we forgo the opportunity not only to contribute to a solution, but to develop ourselves. On the other extreme, if we misunderstand the principle of oneness of life and the environment and passively assume that any injustice by others is caused by something wrong or amiss within us, we will never come up with the initiative to help transform the situation. When we see problems, if we act responsibly toward them—if we challenge ourselves to deal with them effectively—we will grow and eventually cause a positive change.

What does it mean to deal with a problem effectively? When the problem involves human relations in the realm of our Buddhist activities, I think it means to seek dialogue based on a strong commitment for *kosen-rufu* and a strong prayer for the growth and happiness of all involved, including ourselves.

In his recent message to the youth of Los Angeles, President Ikeda encouraged us to create an “ideal world of harmony” and “a grand human network of trust.”

Harmony and trust are key elements in disseminating Buddhism and creating peace and human prosperity. This is as Nichiren Daishonin states in “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life”:

“All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim” (MW-1, 23).

To create such an atmosphere of harmonious unity, conversation is crucial. President Ikeda has said that “Happiness is to be found close by. In a world where indifference and inhumanity prevail, let us use our discussion meetings as the pivot for creating oases of peace and harmony in our homes and in our local communi-

ties and then extending them to encompass every sphere of society." Open, warm-hearted and honest discussion, based on the shared goal of kosen-rufu, will be the cause for harmony and unity in any aspect of our activities.

Nichiren Daishonin constantly carried on conversations with his followers, both face to face and extensively in writing. In these exchanges there was not the slightest pretension or aloofness on his part. He was totally open, inviting people into his life and showing deep concern for each aspect of another's life. To one disciple, he wrote from the mountains of Minobu:

"Should any calamity befall us, you should immediately come to visit me here, where you will be welcomed wholeheartedly. Should the worst happen, then let us starve together among these mountains. I would imagine your daughter, Oto, has become a fine and intelligent young girl. I will write you again" (MW-3, 202).

The Daishonin took the sufferings and struggles of others as if they were his own. Leadership in our organization means that one has volunteered to accept a responsibility—to pray and work for the happiness of the members. It is not a position of status or personal power. In addition, just because someone is a leader in our movement this does not mean that he or she has completed the process of human revolution. We are all "works in progress" moving toward an ideal vision of reality, which our present reality may not yet resemble.

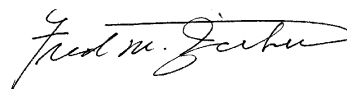
We should not lose that vital vision, something that President Ikeda has been constantly sharing with us. We should also realize that those who have leadership functions in our organization are human. They, too, are fellow members whose sufferings we can concern ourselves with and whose happiness and health we can pray for. It is the nature of bodhisattvas, without regard to status or position, to seek to share one another's joys and sufferings and pray for everyone's mutual growth and victory. I believe that this is the meaning of the phrase "transcending all differences among themselves."

***"We must learn to pull forth from the depths of our beings that awesome spiritual strength that is greater even than the power of nuclear weapons." With such strength, we can win over any injustice, fill in for the weaknesses of those with whom we live and work, and enrich our organization, families and communities with real harmony and trust.***

Unfortunately, we may still at times encounter leaders in the SGI-USA who refuse to listen, who resist meaningful dialogue or who cling to their personal views and prejudices. But we should never allow such individuals to prevent us from moving ahead in our own human revolution or to obstruct the progress of kosen-rufu. When President Ikeda was a new member, his mentor, Josei Toda, asked him one day how he liked the Soka Gakkai. "I don't like it," was his resounding answer. He did not like the attitude of many of the leaders, who were high-handed and autocratic, yet refused to take responsibility themselves. "In that case," President Toda told him, "why don't you go ahead and make the Gakkai into the kind of organization you can really like? Build the Gakkai through your own hard work and effort."

Since that day, President Ikeda has been expending every ounce of his energy doing just that. He completely transformed the organization, infusing activities for peace, culture and education, and building the membership to some ten million people. And so doing, he has always tried to embrace and encourage even those of his seniors whose attitude and leadership style he did not like, so that they, too, might come to fully enjoy the benefit of dedicating their lives to kosen-rufu.

In his message to the recent Grand Youth Culture Festival in Los Angeles, President Ikeda also said that "we must learn to pull forth from the depths of our beings that awesome spiritual strength that is greater even than the power of nuclear weapons." With such strength, we can win over any injustice, fill in for the weaknesses of those with whom we live and work, and enrich our organization, families and communities with real harmony and trust.



Fred M. Zaitzu  
SGI-USA General Director

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# BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (7)

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To Open,  
Show,  
Awaken,  
and  
Induce to  
Enter

When Thomas Edison was a child, he was extremely inquisitive. He perhaps spent much time pondering such questions as “What makes the wind blow?” But in school, he was having trouble with the basics—English and math. Suffering from a hearing deficiency, and bored with the rote learning conducted in class, others labeled him a misfit. After attending school on and off for five years or so, he dropped out.

His mother, believing in her son’s potential, tutored him at home in subjects that seemed to spark his interest. Young Edison became a voracious reader, and taking nature as his instructor, he learned through a process of repeated trial and error. This style of learning contributed at least in part to his great success as a master inventor in later years.

If, like his school, his mother had labeled him slow or deficient, our world today might be decades behind in terms of technological advancement. It is clear that whether or not children can learn in a way that opens and cultivates their innate potential will dramatically effect their growth and future.

If people become aware of the hopes and expectations of teachers and loved ones toward their growth and success, come to share those hopes themselves, and actually live up to those hopes, this contributes tremendously to their level of confidence. On the other hand, if led to believe they are inferior or deficient, people will lose confidence, and their emotional and intellectual growth will stall. In this sense, low expectations become a self-fulfilling prophecy. While this applies in particular to children, it is true of adults as well.

The “Expedient Means” Chapter of the Lotus Sutra teaches the principle of “opening, showing, awakening, and inducing to enter.” This comes from the passage that reads:

“The Buddhas, the World Honored Ones, wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings, to allow them to attain purity. That is why they appear in the world. They wish to show the Buddha wisdom to living beings, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to cause living beings to awaken to the Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world. They wish to induce living beings to enter the path of Buddha wisdom, and therefore they appear in the world.” (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 31).



Thomas Edison

Thus, the purpose of a Buddha’s appearance in this world—any Buddha’s *raison d’être*, so to speak—is to “open” or cultivate the Buddha wisdom within the lives of all people, to “show” them the Buddha wisdom, to “awaken” them to it, and to lead them to “enter” that condition of life called Buddhahood.

Though the Buddha is called “World-Honored One,” Buddhas never consider themselves exclusively worthy of respect. The aim of all Buddhas is to help all people, whatever their background, achieve the same level of enlightenment as the Buddhas themselves enjoy, thereby securing their happiness. According to the sutra, this is the sole purpose of a Buddha’s existence. The principle of “opening, showing, awakening, and inducing to enter” the Buddha wisdom is a declaration of this purpose.

Prior to this declaration in the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni’s disciples never imagined themselves capable of becoming Buddhas. Like children in school who assume they can never compete with the best student in class, they viewed Shakyamuni as exceptional—an unexcelled prodigy of the spiritual realm. But with the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, it became clear that the Buddha’s true purpose was to enable his disciples to excel to the same degree—to attain the same state of life he had attained.

In reality, Shakyamuni Buddha spent his life actively sharing and spreading his teachings, converting one person after another. From the time he set out from his parents’ home to embark on a religious life, he never resided long in one place. The Buddha was the ultimate educator, endlessly on the move, reaching out to open and nurture the condition of enlightenment within people’s lives. In fact, he believed more strongly and

completely than anyone else in the capacity of ordinary people to become Buddhas. His example should serve as a model for all teachers.

Edison’s great success as an inventor may be traced to his mother’s strong belief in his rich potential and her efforts to help him open and broadly cultivate that potential. The true purpose of education and of Buddhism is to help human beings cultivate their innate unique qualities, individuality and creativity.

“To open” means to cause to manifest what is inherent but hidden in the individual. No matter how many priceless treasures we may have locked in a vault, unless we can open the vault and put those treasures to use, they have no value. Ultimately, they go to waste.

Nichiren Daishonin stated that “to ‘open’ is another name for faith. If one chants the Mystic Law with faith, one will directly open the Buddha wisdom” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 716).

The Daishonin assures us that the way to open the wonderful “treasure storehouse” of Buddhahood within is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with faith in our own enlightened potential. In this way, we come to “show” actual proof of our innate enlightenment, thus “awakening” others to the benefit of Buddhist faith and practice and inducing them to “enter” a most fulfilling way of life.

Actually, we can view these four points as steps in an educational process. It is the method by which a Buddha, as the ultimate educator, teaches the people, his students, how to become Buddhas.

In our case, to help us open the door to our Buddha wisdom, Nichiren Daishonin “showed” us this wisdom by revealing the Gohonzon and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. By practicing as he taught, we “awaken” our own enlightened nature. This awakening then moves us to “enter” the way of life of a Bodhisattva of the Earth—a way of life dedicated to helping others “open,” “show,” “awaken to” and “enter” their own Buddha wisdom. To the degree we strive to do this, we embody the oneness of teacher and student, the oneness of mentor and disciple. That is, the purpose of our lives becomes one with that of the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. And when this happens, our contribution to peace and human happiness will be no less revolutionary and important than Thomas Edison’s contribution to technology. □

By Jeff Kriger, Managing Editor, based on the book *Yasashii Kyogoku* (Easy Study) published by the Seikyo Press, Tokyo.

# “Gift of the Unlined Robe”



*The excerpt from Nichiren Daishonin’s “Gift of an Unlined Robe,” at right, and the commentary that follows it, are from SGI President Ikeda’s book Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 17. This is the second of two parts. The first part appeared in our September issue.*

## Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the letter “Gift of an Unlined Robe” in August 1275 at Mount Minobu when he was 53. The letter’s title was probably added later because the Daishonin explains the blessings one receives from making offerings to a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. Little is known about the recipient’s identity. Since the Daishonin writes, “even though we have not yet met” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p.1515), it is clear that the recipient had never directly encountered the Daishonin at the time of this letter. Also, in

**T**he fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, “hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 164). The fifth volume explains that the Lotus Sutra “will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe” (LS14, 207). It may be that the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai never read these passages with his life. That’s because the Lotus Sutra was universally believed and accepted by the people of his day. Nor in all likelihood was the Great Teacher Dengyo capable of living these words, because the conditions of the time in which he lived did not match those described by the passage “[since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world,] how much more will this be so after his passing” (LS10, 164).

If Nichiren had not appeared in the country of Japan, these golden words of the Buddha would have been in vain. The testimony of Many Treasures (Taho) Buddha would not have amounted to anything. And the words of all Buddhas of the ten directions would have become lies. In the more than 2,220 years since the Buddha passed away, never before in India, China or Japan has there been someone to whom the words of the sutra, “It will face much hostility in the world and be difficult to believe,” have applied. If Nichiren had not appeared, the Buddha’s words would have withered.

Under these circumstances, I maintain my life with snow for food, as did Su Wu<sup>1</sup> when he was imprisoned. And I pass my time clad in a straw raincoat like Li Ling.<sup>2</sup> At times when there are no fruits or berries available in the trees of these mountains where I reside, I may go two or three days without eating. And once when my deerskin garment was torn, I went unclad for three or four months.

You have for some reason taken pity on such a person and, even though we have not yet met, sent a robe with which I might clothe myself. For this I am infinitely grateful.

When I put on this robe and recite the Lotus Sutra before the Buddha, while the robe is only one, it clothes 69,384 Buddhas.

the postscript of the letter, the Daishonin writes, "You should always meet with the wife of Toshiro [Shijo Kingo] and read this letter together" (GZ, p. 1515). "Gift of an Unlined Robe" was most likely addressed to a woman and her husband who were on friendly terms with Shijo Kingo's family in Kamakura, the seat of the shogunate government. (For further information, see Sept. *Living Buddhism* p. 6).

**This is because there are 69,384 characters in the Lotus Sutra. And each character is a golden Buddha.**

**Therefore, these Buddhas will surely visit the two of you, husband and wife, who presented me with this robe and protect you as their followers.**

**In this life, your sincere offering becomes a prayer for the fulfillment of your every desire and a treasure. At the time of your deaths it will become the moon, the sun, a path, a bridge, a father, a mother, an ox or a horse, a litter, a cart, a lotus flower, and a mountain, and will usher you into the pure land of Eagle Peak. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. Nichiren**

**The eighth month of the first year of Kenji (1275)**

**You should always meet with the wife of Toshiro and read this letter together. (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1514–15)**

"Buddhism exists because I exist" — this is the Daishonin's immense conviction. The Buddha's words, in a sense, became true precisely because the Daishonin single-handedly underwent great persecution.

To prove the proposition "Buddhism is true," the Daishonin deliberately drew out negative forces and challenged them. Without such a great struggle, even the most outstanding scripture would, in the end, be no more than a book. Even the most profound sutra would be merely words. The sutra's words only become Buddhism, only become a genuine religion, when they are put to the test in life.

This year, once again, we have commemorated April 2 [the anniversary of the passing of the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda]. My mentor, President Toda, whom I will remember for all eternity, dedicated his entire life to proving the truth of Nichiren Daishonin's words. Through his life, in the real world, he began to make a reality of kosen-rufu, which had for 700 years been only theory.

The Daishonin says, "If Nichiren had not appeared, the Buddha's words would have withered." The spirit to not allow the words of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, to have been in vain is the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai. This was the spirit of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and of Josei Toda. And this is the spirit of a disciple.

President Makiguchi deeply lamented the state of the priesthood. Solely concerned with defending its own interests, it had bowed before the military authorities and become mired in slander. "Isn't this the time when

we should remonstrate with the state?" he cried. "What are you afraid of?" And he went on to become a martyr for the Daishonin's teachings. President Toda once reminisced about his mentor, saying:

The last time I saw President Makiguchi alive was in 1943. It was on the second floor of the Metropolitan Police Station. He was about to be taken to Tokyo Prison in Sugamo, and I was to follow later. I told the department officer that I wanted to bid him farewell, and I went to where he was.

When I met him there, I just looked at his face and wept. I could not speak. The last words I said to him were, "Please take care."

Later, I was unaware that President Makiguchi had died. I shall never forget the day — January 8, 1945 — when I was summoned before the preliminary judge for the very first time and told bluntly, "Makiguchi's dead." I just stood there stunned, unable even to weep. When I returned to my cell, I cried my heart out.

I had never experienced such grief as I felt at that moment. Then and there, I resolved: "I will show the world. I will prove beyond a doubt the righteousness of my mentor! If I were to adopt a pseudonym, I'd use the 'Count of Monte Cristo' [the hero of Alexandre Dumas' novel, who was unjustly incarcerated]. With such resolve, I will achieve something great to repay him."

President Makiguchi has not received the recognition that is his due. And I am determined to dedicate the rest of my life to proving the righteousness of my mentor's actions.<sup>3</sup>

Every year when April 2 comes around, my heart is filled with exactly the same feelings toward my mentor, President Toda. Today Mr. Makiguchi's name is known throughout the world. A suburb of São Paulo, Brazil, for example, has opened a Tsunesaburo Makiguchi Highway. And the Brazilian city of Curitiba is building a Tsunesaburo Makiguchi Park and also a Josei Toda Boulevard.

How it must delight President Toda for his mentor to be so honored. It almost seems to me as though I can see his smiling face in the blue skies of spring.

• **Under these circumstances, I maintain my life with snow for food, as did Su Wu when he was imprisoned. And I pass my time clad in a straw raincoat like Li Ling. At times when there are no fruits or berries available in the trees of these mountains where I reside, I may go two or three days without eating. And once when my deerskin garment was torn, I went unclad for three or four months. You have for some reason taken pity on such a person and, even though we have not yet met, sent a robe with which I might clothe myself. For this I am infinitely grateful. (GZ, 1514–15)**

More than a year had passed since the Daishonin took up residence deep in the recesses of Mount Minobu. These were the conditions under which he was living. Su Wu and Li Ling were Chinese generals of antiquity who though they exerted themselves on behalf of the country, were captured by enemies and wound up leading highly constricted lives.

While eating snow, wearing crude garments made of straw, and living in a small hut, the Daishonin led the movement for the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law. Living with him were his disciples, and they had occasional "visits" from birds and deer.

In winter, it was extremely cold — so cold that they had trouble sleeping. They lacked sufficient food, and had neither miso nor salt in ample supply. It is said that the Daishonin gathered nuts and parsley and collected firewood to prepare food for himself and his disciples. It is also said that for clothing the Daishonin wore the skin of a deer that had died of natural causes.

By rights, the Daishonin ought to have been accorded the treatment due a teacher of the entire nation. But Japan repaid him only with persecution, so that he lived in want of even clothing and food.

Copious tears always welled up in President Toda's eyes when he read in the Goshō of the Daishonin's life

under such circumstances. He would often remark: "The original Buddha suffered so much. No matter what happens, we who are his followers have to persevere. We have to make the Daishonin's immense compassion known to the world."

Moreover, the Daishonin, while living under such conditions, continued to raise and encourage his followers, leaving them the Gohonzon and the Goshō. He thus devoted himself resolutely to establishing the path for kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law. His compassion truly knew no bounds! How fortunate we are to be his followers!

The Daishonin described his daily existence in the frankest terms. If it were cold, he would say it was cold. And if he were suffering from hunger, he would indicate it. A Buddha is not some special being. A Buddha is human through and through. President Toda often called him a "great common mortal." Buddhism is not a religion that produces so-called living Buddhas. Rather, it enables ordinary people, just as they are, to manifest the light of supreme humanity. Nichiren Daishonin, though experiencing extreme hardship himself, offered this unknown couple (to whom he addressed this Goshō) such sincere and warm encouragement. He did the same while in Izu and Sado. Though an exile, he was more concerned about the plight of others than about his own troubles.

Once when some of the Daishonin's followers visited him on Sado Island, a profoundly moving drama unfolded. They had made a long journey to inquire after the Daishonin's well being. He met their concern with his own concern about their expenses for the return trip and even went so far as to borrow money from someone to give to them. Even facing the most difficult of circumstances, the Daishonin possessed the magnanimity and broad-mindedness to be most concerned about the welfare of others. In his conduct, we find true human strength and beauty.

## **A Sincere Offering Confers Immeasurable Benefit**

• **When I put on this robe and recite the Lotus Sutra before the Buddha, while the robe is only one, it clothes 69,384 Buddhas. This is because there are 69,384 characters in the Lotus Sutra. And each character is a golden Buddha. Therefore, these Buddhas will surely visit the**

• two of you, husband and wife, who presented me  
 • with this robe and protect you as their followers.  
 • In this life, your sincere offering becomes a  
 • prayer for the fulfillment of your every desire  
 • and a treasure. At the time of your deaths it will  
 • become the moon, the sun, a path, a bridge, a  
 • father, a mother, an ox or a horse, a litter, a cart,  
 • a lotus flower, and a mountain, and will usher  
 • you into the pure land of Eagle Peak. Nam-  
 • myoho-enge-kyo, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.  
 • Nichiren  
 • The eighth month of the first year of Kenji (1275)  
 • You should always meet with the wife of Toshiro  
 • and read this letter together. (GZ, 1515)

What a welcome promise the Daishonin makes! He says that the couple who has made this offering to the Lotus Sutra's votary will be protected by 69,384 Buddhas. Such a grand spectacle defies the imagination. With such protection over the three existences, what could they possibly have to fear?

Elsewhere he says, "The heart alone is what really matters." As the story of the boy who makes an offering of a mud pie to Shakyamuni and is later reborn as King Ashoka illustrates, the heart is indeed mysterious and inscrutable.

The Mystic Law elucidates the inscrutable workings of the heart. The doctrine that a life-moment possesses three thousand realms explains the immense power of the heart. A Buddha is someone who understands, on the most profound level, the workings and the power of the heart.

As stated in the passage of the Lotus Sutra, "They will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences" (LS5, 99), the Daishonin assures the couple that they have absolutely nothing to fear in their present and future existences.

First, he says that in their present lives their offering will become a "prayer" and a "treasure." He thus indicates that, through the protective functions of all Buddhas, their sincere faith in offering a robe will become a cause for the fulfillment of all their desires and the accumulation of immense benefit.

Then, regarding the journey after death, he says that they will be protected by all Buddhas and need have no fear. Their faith in making this offering will become a "sun" and "moon" brightly illuminating their journey, as well as a "great path" and a "bridge" over which to make their way.

They will be gently led by the hand by a loving "mother" and "father." They can ride with composure on either an "ox" or a "horse," a "litter" or a "cart." And

finally, they will board the "lotus flower" for Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and arrive at the "treasure mountain" — the pure land of Eagle Peak where the Buddha dwells.

For an offering of but a single unlined robe, the Daishonin promises eternal good fortune and benefit. This is because he perceives the sincerity with which the robe is imbued.

The unlined robe the couple sent was woven through and through with their sincerity. No doubt the Daishonin could sense this in its warmth and feel. How truly noble and pure were the hearts of this couple, who believed in and devoted themselves to the Daishonin at a time when the entire country was desperately trying to persecute him.

A person who has crossed the precipice of life and death many times understands true human worth. Neither power nor fame makes someone great. The light of true human greatness shines vividly among ordinary people who live straight and true, neither seeking honor nor craving wealth. One can well imagine the joy of the couple who received this letter.

Incidentally, the person mentioned in the postscript, "the wife of Toshiro," was a friend of Shijo Kingo's family.

The Daishonin concludes by urging the couple to gather with other followers and read this letter together. In modern terms, he is telling them to hold discussion meetings. As long as we continue to study the Gosho and discuss faith with our fellow members, there is no danger of our deviating from the correct path.

In just this brief postscript, the Daishonin touches on the vital point of carrying through with faith in unity with other believers in the Mystic Law. Such detailed consideration is characteristic of the Daishonin—it is the spirit of the original Buddha.

We need to treasure each person thoroughly. This is the spirit of the Gosho and of the SGI.

The Gosho is the jewel of humankind that crystallizes with diamond-like clarity the humanism of Nichiren Daishonin. Because this is an age of spiritual malaise, it is all the more important that we study the Gosho and return to the humanism of Nichiren Daishonin.

**Footnotes**

1. Su Wu (140–60 B.C.E.): A minister of Emperor Wu of the Former Han dynasty. In 100 b.c.e., the emperor sent Su Wu to demand that a northern tribe acknowledge fealty. Their chief had Su Wu seized and imprisoned in a cave, where he was forced to survive by eating snow.

2. Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.E.): A military commander during the Former Han dynasty. During battle, he was captured by barbarians and imprisoned. Emperor Wu mistakenly believed that he had revolted against the Han dynasty, and had his family killed.

3. From Josei Toda's remarks at the eleventh memorial service for President Makiguchi (1954).



# Overcoming Pessimism with the Lotus Sutra

BY KATHLEEN OLESKY, NEWTON, MA.

*How does the Lotus Sutra address the issue of pessimism? In reciting the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters every day, we are celebrating our enlightened self and awakening to the eternal and boundless life of the Buddha that exists within us. The Lotus Sutra is therefore a very optimistic teaching.*

In my years as a psychotherapist in a mental health clinic, depression was the problem most often presented by my patients. This included feelings of hopelessness, a lack of purpose and pessimism. Depressed people are

frequently isolated, lonely and in need of caring relationships. The popularity of the best seller *Tuesdays with Morrie*,<sup>1</sup> shows that people are seeking answers to profound questions about the meaning of life. Morrie was a professor who was dying from ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease) and the book is about his dialogue with one of his students. Many issues that Morrie Schwartz discusses with his beloved student Mitch are also addressed by the Lotus Sutra. We are fortunate as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism because our practice enables us to overcome fundamental sufferings, including pessimism.

## The Optimism of the Lotus Sutra

How does the Lotus Sutra address the issue of pessimism? The verse section (*jigage*) of our recitation of the sutra, begins with the word *ji* and ends with *shin*, which together mean “self.” In other words, reciting the sutra is equal to self-praise. President Ikeda says that the verse section is the essence of the “Life Span” chapter, which is itself the soul of Buddhism. It is a call to open one’s life to the greater self of enlightenment. In reciting the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters every day, we are celebrating our enlightened self and awak-

ening to the eternal and boundless life of the Buddha that exists within us. The Lotus Sutra is, therefore, a very optimistic teaching.

I heard that President Ikeda once met a young woman working in a restaurant who was depressed over not getting along with her co-workers. He encouraged her by saying she was not getting along with others because she needed to learn how to praise herself. Her dissatisfaction with others originated in dissatisfaction with herself. Through our practice we learn to praise ourselves—our greater self or Buddha nature. If we depend on others for praise, then when they criticize us, our sense of self is shaken. In this highly competitive society, it's very easy to become pessimistic so we have to learn how to praise ourselves, to become optimistic.

Many people spend years in psychotherapy dealing with how they were criticized or demoralized by their parents. This is called working through the transference, the effects of childhood relationships. It is very hard to learn to praise ourselves, but easy to be swayed by external praise or criticism. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we begin to praise ourselves.

We uphold the Gohonzon, which means we uphold the Mystic Law that is the essence of our lives. This means that we ourselves are entities of the Mystic Law. We embody great good fortune. We are the Treasure Tower explained in the sutra. Therefore we can never be defeated. We need never be afraid. When we are absolutely certain that we are the Treasure Tower, that we embody the Buddha, we can achieve a state of being in which life is enjoyable. The object of faith is to realize and attain this state. Those who live in the world of the SGI, of kosen-rufu, can enjoy this state of mind forever.

It is valuable to ask ourselves, as SGI President Ikeda suggests here: “Will you be an optimist or a pessimist? ... A pessimist sees the worst in everything, always seeing the painful and dark side of things. If you are always viewing the world through the eyes of a pessimist, eventually your mind—your life—will be colored by pessimism. Once that happens, you cannot expect to find happiness. If you are always worrying, ‘I never have any money,’ or ‘Oh no, another meeting!’ then life itself, far from being enjoyable, is nothing but a painful austerity!”<sup>2</sup>

But if we take the optimist's view, we see our lives in a hopeful light. The quintessence of optimism is faith. If we fall sick, President Ikeda says that we can use that as an opportunity to rest and use the time to think about long range or eternal matters.

This is precisely what Morrie did when he became



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Will you be an optimist or a pessimist? A pessimist sees the worst in everything. A pessimist cannot expect to find happiness.

bedridden with ALS. Rather than bemoaning his fate, he used the time to have philosophical discussions with his student, Mitch, and the subsequent book has been a source of encouragement for countless people. Professor Martin Seligman, author of *Learned Optimism*, says it's easy to feel pessimistic and a victim of circumstances. Many people feel like victims in this society, and of course they need an outlet for their suffering.

In psychotherapy, people often seek comfort because of some kind of abuse. Through the Buddhist principle of changing poison into medicine, I believe it is easier for Buddhists to attack the source of their suffering. Our approach is, “Because I had this kind of family or this kind of problem growing up, I have an opportunity to transform my suffering into enlightenment.” When we chant, we don't have to dwell in the past, we use it as fuel to create a better life—from this moment forward.

President Ikeda uses the poet Johann Goethe as an example of a realistic optimist. He writes that Goethe



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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). Goethe was an optimist. Not the sort of optimist that does nothing, just thinking that everything will work out. He was an optimist who acted, who made real achievements.

was very cheerful and lived his life with great vigor. “One of the essentials of Goethe’s thought was cheerfulness—the way he lived his life with vivacity and vigor. I think that the secret and the wisdom of this great writer’s literature, his poetry and his life are to be found in this one point. Goethe believed that we should constantly be achieving things in our lives. He called out for us to always march cheerfully ahead without regrets, to live with energy and vigor.” Goethe was an optimist. Not the sort of optimist that does nothing, just thinking that things will work out and dreaming his time away. Instead he was an optimist who acted, who made real achievements. “Goethe was a man of action who, rather than complaining about his fate, took action. He was a man who lived with the spirit of creativity, energy and vigor.”<sup>3</sup>

Victor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*<sup>4</sup> underscores the importance of maintaining hope in the face of adversity. Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. The ability to maintain hope and find

meaning during extreme circumstances meant the difference between life and death. His experiences in Auschwitz showed him time and again that a prisoner’s sense of hope or optimism was directly related to his survival. When a prisoner lost hope, he became susceptible to physical and spiritual decline.

One prisoner, a fairly well-known composer, told Frankl of a dream he had had. He had been granted his one wish—to know when the war would be over and the prisoners liberated. A voice in his dream told him that the war would be over on March 30, 1945. The dream occurred in February 1945, and the man told Frankl about it in early March, full of hope and conviction that the day of liberation was at hand. But, as the end of March drew near, it became apparent that his dream was not going to come true. On March 29, he suddenly became ill with a high fever. On March 30, the day he had hoped for freedom, he lost consciousness and became delirious. On March 31, he was dead. Frankl said that outwardly it looked like he had died of typhus, but he feels the death was intricately connected to the man’s loss of hope. “The ultimate cause of my friend’s death was that the expected liberation did not come and he was severely disappointed. This suddenly lowered his resistance against the latent typhus infection.”<sup>5</sup>

Frankl mentions that the concentration-camp doctor observed a higher death rate between Christmas of 1944 and New Year’s 1945. This was not due to worse conditions, weather, or increased disease. The real reason was that the prisoners had lived with the hope that they would be liberated by Christmas.

## The Bodhisattva Spirit Transcends Isolation

President Ikeda writes: “When your determination changes, everything else begins to move in the direction you desire. The moment you resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in your being immediately orient themselves toward your success. On the other hand, if you think, ‘This is never going to work out,’ at that instant every cell in your being will be deflated, giving up the fight. Everything then will move in the direction of failure. I want you to understand the subtle workings of the mind. How you orient your mind, the kind of attitude you have, greatly influences both yourself and your environment.”<sup>6</sup>

Those of us who embrace the Lotus Sutra are so for-

tunate to be able to use this optimistic teaching to challenge and win in our day-to-day struggles. In “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda says that people in the modern age are suffering the “wound of social isolation.” Takanori Endo, in the same dialogue, concurs that people are becoming more and more isolated and forget what it means to encourage one another.<sup>7</sup>

But because of the bodhisattva spirit and the Mystic Law, we can restore our sense of wholeness and connectedness and overcome our sense of isolation by helping others.

In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie describes how he spends his last days listening to other people’s problems. He asks Mitch whether he understands why it is so important for him to hear other people’s problems. “Don’t I have enough pain and suffering of my own?” he asks his student. “Of course I do. But giving to other people is what makes me feel alive. Not my car or my house. Not what I look like in the mirror. When I give my time, when I can make someone smile after they were feeling sad, it’s as close to health as I ever feel. Do the kinds of things that come from the heart. When you do, you won’t be dissatisfied; you won’t be longing for somebody else’s things. On the contrary, you’ll be overwhelmed with what comes back.”<sup>8</sup>

In “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” Endo says: “In terms of psychology, we often hear that concern for others has a stimulating effect on a person’s own mental and emotional health.”<sup>9</sup>

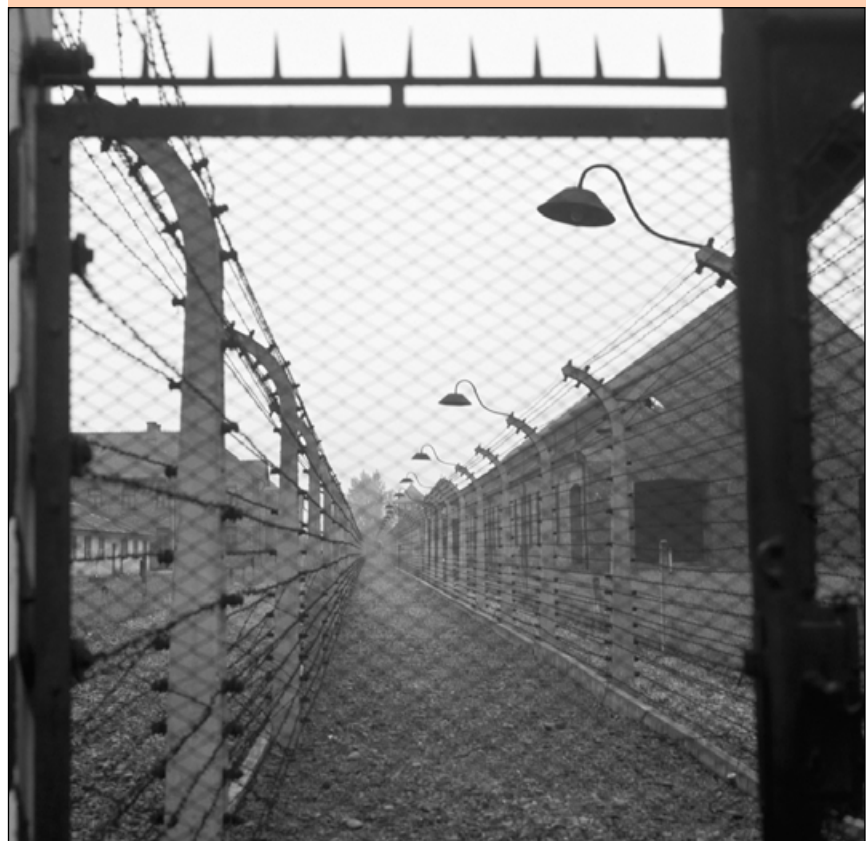
Victor Frankl writes that he was able to survive by helping others. In the camp there was a strict rule against saving those who were trying to commit suicide. However, his particular block warden wanted to prevent prisoners from becoming suicidal. He asked Frankl to give support to the prisoners in his hut, to lift their spirits during a particularly difficult time of physical deprivation. There was no electricity and the prisoners lay desolate and hungry in the dark. Frankl writes: “God knows, I was not in the mood to give psychological explanations or to

preach any sermons, to offer my comrades a kind of medical care of their souls. I was cold, hungry, irritable and tired, but I had to make the effort and use this unique opportunity. Encouragement was now more necessary than ever.”<sup>10</sup>

He began by telling the prisoners their situation was not the most terrible they could think of. Asking them to look at what totally irreplaceable losses they had suffered, he said the very fact that they were still alive gave them reason to hope. Everything they had lost—health, happiness, position in society, fortune, even family—could be restored. “After all we still had our bones intact.” He quoted Nietzsche: “That which does not kill me makes me stronger.”<sup>11</sup>

He talked about the future, that one never knows what is going to happen within the next hour. The prisoners were encouraged to reflect on their past and how the light of the past still shone on their present darkness. All the great things they had accomplished in their lives, all the great thoughts they had, still lived within them. Frankl quoted the line of a poem: “What you

The fence around the concentration camp at Auschwitz, Poland. Victor Frankl survived the World War II camp and later wrote of the importance of maintaining hope in the face of adversity. Those who held on to hope were more likely to survive.



CORBIS/DAVID LATANES



In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie Schwartz tells his student: “The way to get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community.”

have experienced, no power on earth can take from you.” Finally he urged them to find meaning in their suffering, “that life under any circumstances never ceases to have meaning.”<sup>12</sup>

Frankl writes: “The purpose of my words was to find a full meaning in that hut and that practically hopeless situation. I saw that my efforts had been successful. When the electric bulb flared up again, I saw the miserable figures of my friends limping toward me, to thank me with tears in their eyes. But I have to confess here that only too rarely had I the inner strength to make contact with my companions in suffering and that I must have missed many opportunities for doing so.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Diagnostic Statistic Manual* is used by psychiatrists and psychologists to diagnose mental illness. It contains the descriptions of more than 230 emotional diseases. Meaninglessness is not among these descriptions. However, much depression stems from a sense of lack of purpose or meaning. Carl Jung said: “About a third of my cases are not suffering from any clinically definable neurosis, but from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives.”<sup>14</sup>

The Lotus Sutra not only enables us to regain hope but to find meaning in our lives. When we awaken to our

identity as bodhisattvas, we are able to focus on our purpose. There are countless examples of people held in extreme circumstances who were able to survive by helping others. POWs in Vietnam found intricate ways to communicate with their fellow prisoners. Americans held hostage in Iran were able to continue by leaving notes or bits of food for the other captives. Parents who have lost children to disease create meaning out of their loss by raising money to fight the disease. An entire organization was created by one mother’s determination to prevent children from being killed by drunk drivers—MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers). It is the bodhisattva spirit that enables us to use crisis as an opportunity. The best example of this is Nichiren Daishonin, who wrote “I cannot hold back the tears when I view the persecutions befalling me now” (MW-1, 94). His persecution and extreme exile on Sado Island held the ultimate meaning for him and the future of Buddhism; it was proof of his identity as the true Buddha.

Morrie Schwartz also discovered meaning in his life. He tells Mitch: “The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.”<sup>15</sup>

President Ikeda says that when we encourage another person, we find our own spirits refreshed. This is the basis of our SGI activities. When we encourage others, we refresh our own spirits. When we set out on a home visit or to a meeting—even when we may not feel like going—we always return rejuvenated because we are making the effort as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

The “Expedient Means” chapter teaches that all phenomena are connected—that we have the life of the bodhisattva in common. This is the profound concept of interdependence. By practicing the bodhisattva acts of sharing, caring and seeking, we are able to accumulate fortune. We are also able to transform the three poisons. Through sharing, we remove the poison of greed. Through caring, we remove the poison of anger. Through seeking, we remove the poison of foolishness.

When we care for someone, it is hard to sustain feelings of anger. We have to transform anger into caring for others for the sake of justice. A good example of this is the temple issue. Many of us feel outraged by the injustice of Nikken and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. But if we are able to use this anger to protect our members, by having the courage to say what needs to be said, we can transform this anger into justice and com-



Buddhist practice enables us to transform the three poisons. Through sharing we remove the poison of greed, through caring we remove the poison of anger, and through seeking we remove the poison of foolishness.

passion. In order to encourage others, we have to seek the wisdom of the Buddha. By studying the Daishonin's writings or President Ikeda's guidance, and praying to grasp their principles and spirit, we overcome our own ignorance and develop wisdom to encourage others.

Therefore, by practicing the Lotus Sutra, we can break through our sense of isolation, narcissism and loneliness. When we care for others, we break through the shell of our lesser ego. In his dialogue on the sutra, President Ikeda explains: "When we help people expand their lives, our lives also expand. This is the marvel of the bodhisattva path; actions to benefit others cannot be separate from actions to benefit oneself."<sup>16</sup>

## Overcoming Fear of Death

What has made *Tuesdays With Morrie* so popular is that we see his humanism expressed in the face of his imminent death. President Ikeda refers to modern civi-

lization as the civilization that has forgotten death. Especially in the West, people want to ignore death. In fact many of our fears could stem from our ultimate fear of death. Morrie comes to terms with the fact that we are all aware that we are going to die but choose to ignore it. He encourages his student that the best way to prepare for death is to live well, to be more involved with one's own life. He says: "Do what the Buddhists do. Every day, have a little bird on your shoulder that asks, 'Is today the day? Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?'"<sup>17</sup> He goes on to say that once we learn how to die we learn how to live.

Of course we Buddhists don't have a little bird on our shoulders, but we have morning and evening prayers in which we reflect: Am I being the person I want to be? President Ikeda says: "People find contemplating their death so distasteful that they instead look for one thing after another in which to absorb themselves...they arrive at death without having prepared in the least for that moment."<sup>18</sup>



The concept of seeking the Buddha is connected to the mentor-disciple relationship and how we live while the mentor is alive. Second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda (right, with a young Daisaku Ikeda in 1958), used the concept of “now is the last moment” to exhort believers to devote themselves to creating a world based on Buddhist humanism.

He quotes Tolstoy: “Death is more certain than the morrow, than night following day, than winter following summer. Why is it then we prepare for the night and for the wintertime, but we do not prepare for death...There is only one way to prepare for death—and that is to live well.”<sup>19</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin encourages us not to become overly attached to the temporary phenomena of life. “No matter how dearly you may cherish your estate, when you die, it will only fall into the hands of others.” (MW-3, 238)

The dying Morrie who exhorts Mitch not to value the wrong things echoes these same sentiments. He explains that we are so controlled by consumerism that we are totally consumed in having a new house and new car, placing value on material goods over love or relationships with others.

We have a tendency to think of death as occurring in the far-distant future. It is natural for young people to feel this way but as people age, their tendency to avoid thinking about death actually increases. Years and years can slip by while you say to yourself, ‘I’ll start practicing

in earnest someday,’ or ‘I’ll work harder once I get through my present difficulties.’ Then, finally it dawns on you that you will have to face death without having accumulated any real fortune in your life.

In “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda says that nothing is more important in life than the issue of life and death. “Having an awareness and understanding of death actually raises our life condition. For it is when we are cognizant of the reality and inevitability of death that we begin to earnestly seek something eternal and determine to make the most valuable use of each moment of life.” He says that to ignore death is to live an animalistic existence, and that when a civilization avoids the issue of death, people fall into decadence, seeking only temporary and immediate gratification, adding: “It’s no coincidence that it has at the same time become a civilization of unbridled greed.”<sup>20</sup>

In *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Morrie exhorts Mitch to do things that come from the heart, that way his life will become more meaningful. Mitch asks Morrie how he would spend one last day of his life if he were healthy for twenty-four hours. Morrie replies that he’d get up in the morning to do his exercises, have a breakfast of sweet rolls and tea, and go for a swim. He’d have his friends come over one or two at a time to talk about their families. Mitch was disappointed in his teacher’s reply, perplexed that he could find perfection in such average things. He wanted Morrie to strive for a more exotic last day, like flying to Italy or some tropical island. Then Mitch realizes that this was precisely the point: that his teacher, in facing his own death so squarely, was able to find perfection in the ordinary, and that caring for others was the most important act he could perform.

Exactly in this vein, Buddhism encourages us to polish our lives—to do our human revolution—to harness the power of the Mystic Law and to share it with others. Embracing the Lotus Sutra means tapping the life force of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, fusing with the Gohonzon. This way our life and our death become joyful. Buddhism gives people the means to develop themselves and open their eyes to the limitless power inherent in their lives.

Death is not to be dreaded. It enables us to seek something eternal. How does the Buddha view death? Essential to this question is the parable in the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. An excellent physician causes his children to think he has died so that they will take medicine he has left behind. Because they are so upset that he has departed, they take it and become

cured, whereupon their father reappears. This parable points to the importance of having a seeking mind. President Ikeda says, “When we have access to something all the time, then no matter how lofty and sublime it may be, we tend to forget our sense of appreciation.”<sup>21</sup>

When the children hear of their father’s death, they wake up and seek the truth. This is the meaning of the phrase “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha” (LS16, 230). The Buddha’s death is an expedient means. He uses his death to make people seek the eternal life of Buddha. The Lotus Sutra says if the Buddha remains in the world for a long time, people “will fail to realize how difficult it is to encounter the Buddha and will not approach him with a respectful and reverent mind.” (LS16, 227). The person who seeks the Buddha becomes the Buddha himself.

The concept of seeking the Buddha is connected to the mentor and disciple relationship and how we live while the mentor is alive. President Toda discussed the famous phrase “now is the last moment.” He said: “Whose last moment do you suppose the line ‘Now is the last moment of his life’ (MW-1, 22) refers to? How forlorn we would feel if the Buddha ceased to exist. We should summon resolute faith and practice with the sense that we now have to part with the Buddha.”

“Now is the last moment” is an exhortation to struggle intensely for kosen-rufu with the thought that now is the last moment of the mentor’s life. It is a truly fortunate thing to work for kosen-rufu together with and supported by the mentor. Those who devote themselves in earnest while the mentor is alive correspond to the children in the parable who have not lost their senses.”<sup>22</sup>

When President Makiguchi died, Josei Toda waged a relentless struggle against the evil forces that had driven his mentor to his death. Makiguchi’s death was the expedient means that propelled the post-war kosen-rufu movement. “*Myo* corresponds to death and *ho* to life. The mentor corresponds to death and the disciple to life.”<sup>23</sup> The essence of the “Life Span” chapter is the principle of mentor and disciple.

What does this mean for us who are practicing with our mentor now? Do we take for granted that President Ikeda will be around forever or do we struggle in earnest during his lifetime? We have to be victorious in our present lifetime. Victory in this life translates into victory after death and throughout eternity. Nichiren Daishonin states: “I hope my disciples will ponder this matter, cutting short their sleep by night and curtailing their leisure by day. Do not spend this life in vain and

regret it for ten thousand years to come” (MW-5, 173). President Ikeda writes: “Use your time wisely and polish your life. When I was young, my health was so poor that I might have died at any time. Therefore, I threw myself into efforts for Buddhism with the determination to use each moment to the fullest.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, fighting for kosen-rufu together with our mentor is the best way to live well and die well.

In his dialogue, he urges us to awaken to our mission and our true self. This is what it means to read the “Life Span” chapter with one’s life. We become one with the eternal Buddha through our continuous efforts for others. He describes how President Toda, when he was ill, would prop himself up in bed to answer questions about Buddhism. President Toda would say: “No matter how bad a mood I may be in, being asked a question about the Daishonin’s teaching always cheers me up.”<sup>25</sup>

The practice of the Lotus Sutra enables us to live victoriously with hope and devotion to the happiness of others. It is the perfect teaching. By reciting the sutra every day, we can recover hope and overcome pessimism. It provides a means for us to transcend our isolation and loneliness and give meaning to our lives by caring for others. We can face death by living well—plumbing the depths of our lives. Buddhism teaches us how to live well, thus learning how to die. It is vitally important that we develop a seeking mind toward our mentor.

At the end of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Mitch asks: “Have you ever really had a teacher? One who sees you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such a teacher, you will always find your way back.”<sup>26</sup>

We have been lucky enough to find such a teacher in President Ikeda. □

## Footnotes

1. Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie* (New York: Doubleday, 1997)
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3. *Ibid.*
4. Frankl, Viktor E., *Man’s Search for Meaning: an introduction to logotherapy*. (New York: Washington Square, 1963.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 97
6. *World Tribune*, January 11, 1999 from a speech by Wendy Clark, quote by President Ikeda.
7. *Living Buddhism*, October 1998, p. 30
8. Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, p. 128
9. *Living Buddhism*, October 1998, p. 29
10. Frankl, Viktor, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, p. 104
11. *Ibid.*, p. 104
12. *Ibid.*, p. 105
13. *Ibid.*, p. 105
14. Julius Segal, *Winning Life’s Toughest Battles-Roots of Human Resilience* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986), p. 54-55
15. Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, p. 43
16. *Living Buddhism*, October 1998, p. 30.
17. Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, p. 81
18. *Living Buddhism*, November 1998, p. 8
19. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
20. *Living Buddhism*, March 1999, pp. 34-35
21. *Ibid.*, p. 38
22. *Ibid.*, p. 39
23. *Ibid.*, p. 40
24. *Living Buddhism*, November 1998, p. 11
25. *Living Buddhism*, March 1999, p. 44



# Sowing SEEDS for the Prosperity of India



Manu Gupta, India

While at college pursuing graduate studies in city planning, Manu Gupta established the Sustainable Environment and Eco Development Society (SEEDS), a volunteer group of professionals in the field of urban planning, along with two of his friends. In India at that time, environmental issues were not yet addressed in conventional city planning, and the SEEDS founders hoped to apply classroom-based knowledge directly to real-life situations.

The organization decided to focus on natural disaster management since over six percent of India's population, equivalent to about 56.5 million people, is directly affected by natural disasters annually, and data reveals that there has been a fivefold increase in the number of disasters in the last three decades. While floods are the most frequent disasters, cyclones are the most intensive, causing the greatest loss of life. Fifty-six percent of India is also susceptible to earthquakes and many parts of the country also suffer from landslides and drought.

Acknowledging that natural disasters are of concern to all humanity, the United Nations declared the decade 1990–2000 as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), and the IDNDR secretariat has been actively promoting disaster reduction as the key to sustainable development.



Manu Gupta (center) and his colleagues. Below, assisting in relief distribution in Gujarat on the western coast of India.

Together with IDNDR, SEEDS has been working directly alongside poor, vulnerable communities, equipping them with the necessary skills to face natural hazards, increase awareness of safety measures and facilitate citizens' participation in action at the local level.

Mr. Gupta comments: "While technological advances and extensive work carried out at research institutes have made it theoretically possible to mitigate the effect of disasters on communities, the benefits of such research seldom trickle down to the communities themselves. Therefore, SEEDS has introduced a program to make communities aware of the newest disaster prevention measures against earthquakes and flood threats, early response to cyclone warnings and fire safety. It is also sharing information at national and international forums in an attempt to shape disaster prevention and mitigation policy."

Initially, SEEDS had very limited

financial support for its activities, and its members regularly contributed their monthly scholarship funds, which they received in college. Since the work gave them tremendous satisfaction and joy, the founders were not interested in pursuing more lucrative jobs in the corporate sector.

Mr. Gupta looks back on the organization's struggle to establish itself with a feeling of accomplishment: "At first,

SEEDS was shunned by the scientific community because of its NGO status and because it was viewed as an advocate for the community. This only pushed us to redouble our efforts. After a few early rejections, we were able to make presentations at many scientific and technical seminars, and gradually we gained the recognition



of the scientific community.”

In a very short time, SEEDS has gained recognition, including awards and commissions, from many universities and national and international organizations.

It has also been receiving a positive response from the community. “Reducing Urban Risk, India,” an ongoing project being carried out in two communities in Delhi, has received an especially encouraging response. The program, which has helped strengthen community-based organizations and foster unity in dealing with disasters, has been quoted as a case study in many national and international forums.

Following the severe cyclone on the western coast of India in June of 1998, SEEDS assisted in relief distribution and provided an independent appraisal of the disaster to the government. Recently, during the earthquake that struck Chamoli, the SEEDS team, among the first to reach the affected area, prepared a report on relief needs.

Although SEEDS is functioning efficiently at present, Mr. Gupta says that its initial efforts lacked clear focus. He recalls, “We would take up environmental issues from a very wide perspective and often end up in deadlock.” Mr. Gupta credits his

practice of Buddhism with giving him the wisdom necessary to overcome such deadlocks and with strengthening his sense of mission to help those suffering from natural disasters.

He says, “My motivation to become a Buddhist was derived from interest in the joyful activities and sincere efforts of Bharat Soka Gakkai (BSG) members for other people’s happiness. Buddhist philosophy helped me realize the importance of my work because it attaches great value to each individual’s life and clarifies life’s wonder, dignity and infinite potential. In addition to making me more aware of the preciousness of life, Buddhism has helped me become more compassionate and sensitive. When I meet people who have suffered from disasters, I am able to empathize with them and encourage them. I no longer feel a sense of helplessness in my work because my Buddhist practice has given me immense courage and confidence in pursuing my goals.”

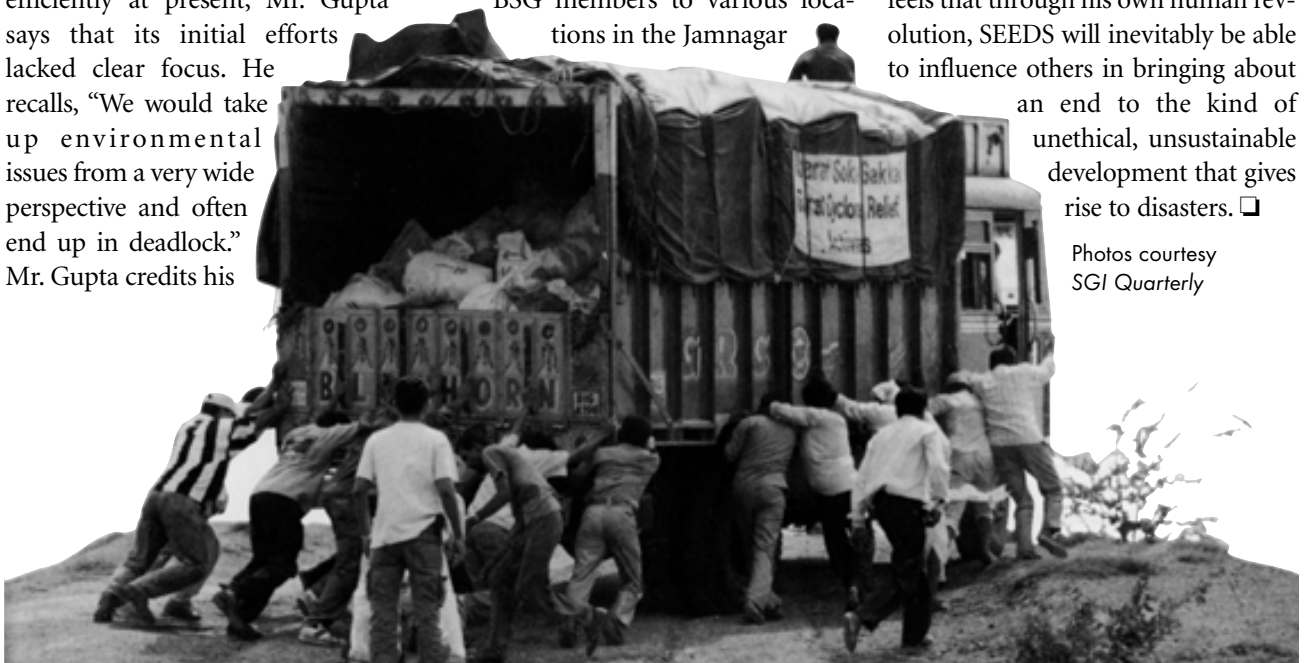
Mr. Gupta was able to assist in the distribution of donations collected by BSG members to various locations in the Jamnagar

district after this year’s earthquake in northern India. He visited the affected areas and provided advance information to the Charitable Committee of BSG about the kind of relief materials required and the areas most in need of them.

In addition to his work with SEEDS, Mr. Gupta has been serving on BSG’s Youth Peace Committee, which was established by SGI President Ikeda when he visited India in October 1997. During his visit, Mr. Ikeda met many leaders in society, aiming to help pave the way for peace in India. Striving to uphold its founder’s spirit, the Youth Peace Committee has been striving to forge bonds of friendship in society through activities promoting peace, culture and education. Last year, members of the BSG youth division donated over 5,000 textbooks, storybooks, notebooks and stationery items to underprivileged children in Delhi.

Mr. Gupta explains that in his dialogue with Arnold Toynbee, *Choose Life*, Mr. Ikeda states that “only a revolution in human ethics can bring about an end to disasters.” He strongly feels that through his own human revolution, SEEDS will inevitably be able to influence others in bringing about an end to the kind of unethical, unsustainable development that gives rise to disasters. □

Photos courtesy  
SGI Quarterly





# Seeking Greater Value



Pietro Bonanomi, Switzerland

One of the smallest but most beautiful international airports in the world is in Lugano, nestled in the Alps near the border between Italy and Switzerland. Lugano, with its warm climate, lake and breathtaking views of the Alps, is one of southern Switzerland's most beautiful resorts. The population of about 100,000 speak mainly Italian, as the area has had strong ties with Italy since the days of the Roman Empire.

Pietro Bonanomi was born and raised here. Coming from a line of carpenters and cabinetmakers, it was only natural that he should leave school early and enter a trade and design school in nearby Bellinzona. After graduating at the age of 20, he began working for a construction firm.

Since childhood, Mr. Bonanomi had always enjoyed skiing, mountain climbing and camping as well as volunteer activities in his local community. However, surrounded as he was by the beauty of the mountains and such a variety of outdoor pursuits, he was always troubled by one question: How could this sort of life in such a pastoral setting benefit society? Searching for the answer, he felt that there was a limit to what he could achieve in Lugano. The more he pondered this question, the more he felt that if he continued leading the same life-style, he would be incapable of making any real impact on society.



Pietro Bonanomi

After leaving school, Mr. Bonanomi felt that by pursuing a career in architecture he could be of value to society and bring happiness to other people while finding fulfillment, but he had no way to pursue this dream. He was 26 years old when the construction firm for which he worked placed him in charge of their concerns in southern Switzerland. He was still troubled by the feeling that there must be something more, something of greater value that he should be doing with his life. He set out in earnest to discover what this might be, and almost immediately after making this decision, he encountered the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. His uncle, a Catholic priest studying the Japanese martial art of kendo, introduced him to one of his fellow students who was a Soka Gakkai International (SGI) member.

Upon reading *Life—An Enigma, a Precious Jewel* by SGI President Ikeda, Mr. Bonanomi had the imme-

diately impression that he had found what he had been searching for—a religion that enabled one to change one's individual fate and at the same time affect the destiny of society. "This is it!" he thought. "This is the most important thing I've ever found!"

He had no doubt that the SGI practice of Buddhism would enable him to change his life. This was in 1976. Within two years he had married his wife Nicola and had embarked on a new life based on his newfound belief.

One day while he was chanting to the Gohonzon he was struck by the idea of going to a university and furthering his study of architecture. Studying would give him the opportunity to actualize his full potential, to transform himself into an individual who could contribute to society. The more he chanted about the idea, the stronger his conviction grew that this was the correct path for him to follow.

He decided to apply to the



Pietro Bonanomi and his family.

Lausanne Federal Polytechnic, which along with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology drew the finest students in the country. However, gaining admission to this prestigious institution was a daunting prospect for someone already 31 years of age who had never even completed high school.

Mr. Bonanomi realized that he faced seemingly overwhelming obstacles, including taking entrance exams with people much younger than himself. His wife Nicola provided wholehearted support when she saw the strength of his resolve. Faced with meeting university entrance requirements in eleven subjects within three years, he entered a private high school in Lugano. Every night he sat up late studying, sometimes falling asleep and waking up the next morning slumped over his textbooks.

**A**t that time there were few SGI members in Switzerland, and even fewer in Lugano. Discussion meetings were held there every weekend, however, and Mr. Bonanomi set aside time from his study schedule to attend them. Throughout these difficult times he drew encouragement from a passage in the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, “Strengthen, your faith day by day and month after month” (MW-1, 241–42). He knew that if he slackened even slightly, he could not keep moving forward.

Mr. Bonanomi’s other main concern during this time was about his brother, who suffered from severe depression, which occasionally resulted in hospitalization. After praying fervently every day for his brother’s recovery, Mr. Bonanomi was able to see a marked improvement in his brother’s condition. This experience demonstrated to Mr. Bonanomi that Buddhist

practice could concretely help one achieve one’s desires. He was encouraged to attack his studies with renewed vigor.

In 1982, after only two years of study, Mr. Bonanomi passed all eleven subjects. He and Nicola moved to Lausanne, where he continued his studies with her support. Their cramped apartment became the venue for local discussion meetings, and Mr. Bonanomi encouraged members in the area to the best of his ability.

In 1983, when SGI President Ikeda visited Zurich, Mr. Bonanomi was one of the local members working behind the scenes to support the activities associated with the visit, an experience he found deeply rewarding.

Finally, in 1987, after five years of studying in Lausanne, Mr. Bonanomi graduated from university as a chartered architect. The path he had been striving for, as a qualified architect, opened out in front of him. Then a professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, who was impressed by Mr. Bonanomi’s commitment to his studies and his passion for architecture, offered him a one-year contract as an assistant tutor. Following that, he was able to secure a position teaching architectural technology in his hometown of Lugano. He is currently a member of three major architectural partnerships.

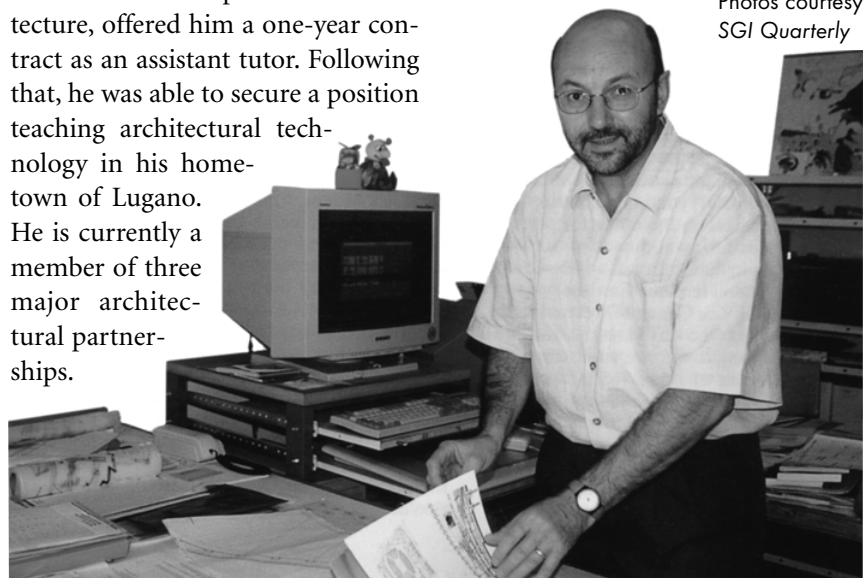


Lugano, Switzerland

Looking back on the years since he started out practicing Buddhism, Mr. Bonanomi realizes that he began as someone searching for meaning in life, developed into someone seeking to actualize his potential, and finally became someone who successfully changed not only his own life but also the world around him.

“Switzerland can be very resistant to new ideas after long centuries of peace and relative isolation,” he observes. “This can result in an outlook focused on self-protection and can lead people to be selfish.” However, Mr. Bonanomi carries in his heart a blueprint based on the Buddhist teachings for the transformation of Lugano and southern Switzerland, and his days are filled with challenge and enthusiasm. □

Photos courtesy SGI Quarterly





Stephanie Sydney

# The Significance of Contemporary Lotus Sutra Manuscript Studies

In early 1997, the *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments From the Lushun Museum Collection* was published jointly by the Lushun Museum in China and the Soka Gakkai of Japan. The book was in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries. There are seventy pages of color photographs of the sutra fragments dating from around the fifth or sixth century, making them among the oldest in existence.

The fragments were first discovered at the beginning of this century in China's Xinjiang Province. They are important in that they are closest to the time of the Chinese translator of the Lotus Sutra, Kumarajiva (344–413) and correlate with his work. They suggest that differences between Kumarajiva's Chinese translation and that of more recent Sanskrit versions are attributable to changes that arose as the Sanskrit sutra was copied and recopied and even edited. It was Kumarajiva's translation that provided the foundation for the studies of the Chinese sage, T'ien-t'ai (538–597) and was so important to Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282) in thirteenth-century Japan.

Over the years, SGI President Ikeda has received copies of several versions of the Lotus Sutra from sources in Russia, China, India and Nepal. In January 1994, in an effort to promote research on these various versions of the Lotus Sutra, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, founded by Mr. Ikeda, sent Professor Katsuhisa Yamada to Dalian, China and the Lushun Museum to assist with compilation of the book. The following is the preface to the book by President Ikeda.

by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

Since ancient times in East Asia, the Lotus Sutra has been called the king of sutras. Why, among all the many sutras, was the Lotus called “king”? No doubt it was mainly because the Lotus Sutra teaches the path to Buddhahood that is open to all people. Rather than being a cold logic that denies and expels others, it is a kingly philosophy that through compassion brings out the best in all things in the universe.

This doctrine is also referred to as the concept of the single vehicle, meaning the single Buddha vehicle or the one great vehicle that is all-encompassing and that embraces all beings equally with wisdom and compassion. Thus, the unifying spirit of the Lotus Sutra can become a wellspring that soothes the miseries of divisiveness and conflict, allays suffering, and ushers in dynamic harmony and peace. One can also understand this from the fact that music and dancing, not

blood and sacrifice, are offered to the Lotus. (*Taisho shinshu daizokuyo*, Vol. 9, p. 43). Music and dancing are symbols of vibrant life, of joy and gratitude, and of culture and peace.

Today impenetrably dark clouds of confusion blanket the world. The era of confrontation between two camps polarized by different principles has ended, but this has led to the release of energies of divisiveness and disunion stemming from hatred and violence that has long been dormant deep beneath the surface of human history. Divisive fissures created by ethnic, cultural, religious and racial prejudice have split apart, again and again, people’s awareness of themselves as belonging to humanity. We are in a situation now where these fissures reach even to the ecosystem, giving rise to catastrophes in the natural world.

From this set of circumstances have emerged the various difficulties facing the world today—regional

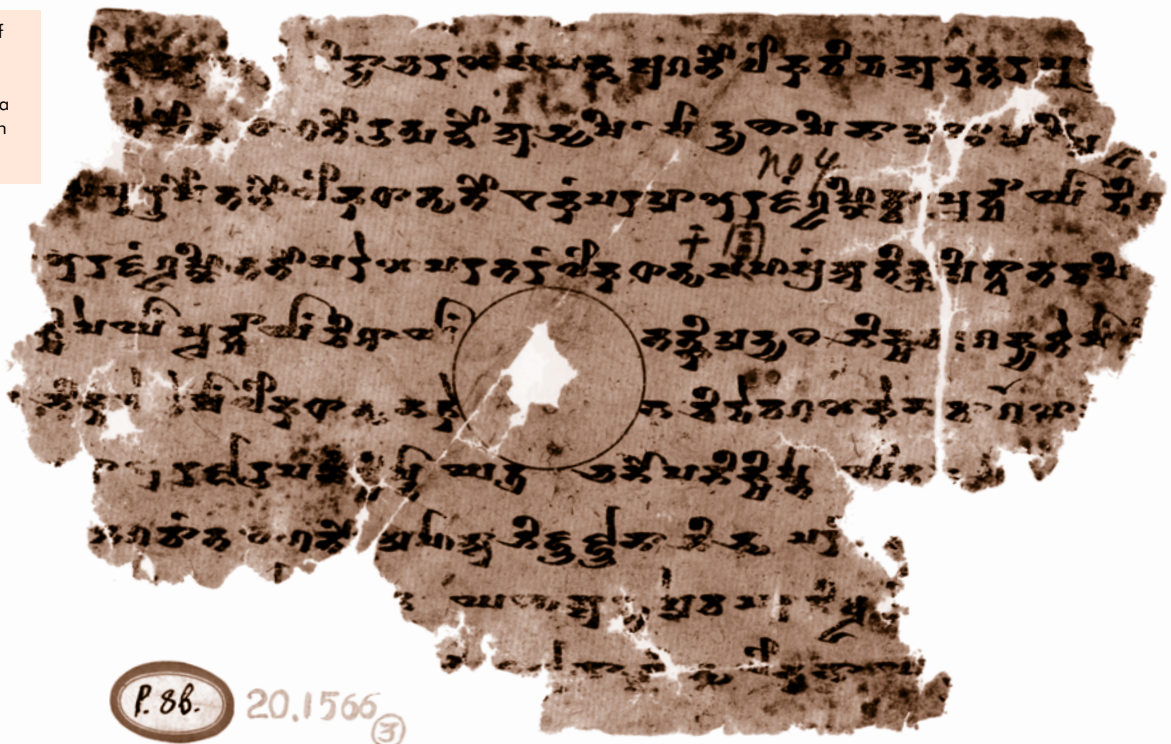
strife, economic disparity, exploding populations and starvation, as well as hard dilemmas concerning life ethics and environmental ethics. The burden of these problems now presses in upon all the people of the world, regardless of region or nation.

What is urgently needed now is a conceptual, philosophical basis that will help transcend the forces of division and hatred underlying these global problems and make possible unity through compassion.

I believe the single-vehicle teaching expounded in the Lotus Sutra is a concept that will become a ray of light piercing the spiritual darkness so that we may open the way into the new century.

Ours is an age in which people have forgotten the question. “For what purpose was I born into this world?” When they forget to ask this fundamental question concerning the things that support their own lives, human beings often fall into the trap of narrow ideologies such as nationalism.

A fragment of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra found nearly a century ago in China.





Stephanie Sydney

The pond at Giverny, outside Paris, where the French impressionist painter Claude Monet (1840-1926) lived and painted the Water Lilies paintings. Water lilies, with floating leaves, include the lotus flower. The Lotus Sutra describes the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as “unsoiled by worldly things like the lotus flower in the water.”

In the fifteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, “Emerging from the Earth,” a question is asked about where a great host of bodhisattvas has come from and what causes and conditions have brought them together; *The Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson. Fundamentally, of course, this is a question about the meaning of the emergence of the bodhisattvas from the earth, and, though out of sequence, an answer to this can be found in the second chapter, “Expedient Means.”

In this chapter the “one great reason” for the appearance of

essential mission that has borne fruit as the bodhisattva way in Mahayana Buddhism.

**N**ichiren, the great thirteenth-century Buddhist sage whose teachings we follow, called himself “*Hokekyo no gyoja*,” a votary, or practitioner, of the Lotus Sutra. This golden phrase arose from the fierce struggles in which, with his entire life, he put into practice the single-vehicle doctrine. Because of his faithful adherence to this doctrine, he was twice exiled by the military regime of his time.

The Soka Gakkai has succeeded to

Buddhas in the world is explained. Using the same words as in Shakyamuni’s declaration of his mission (*Mahavagga*, “Great Grouping” in the *Vinaya-pitaka*), the sutra says Buddhas appear for people’s happiness, for benefit, and for peace (Kern-Nanjio edition, p. 42, 11. 12-15).

The Buddhas make their advent in this world as cosmopolitans transcending racial, ethnic and national differences in order to realize happiness for people—this is the noble declaration of human beings’

the spirit of Nichiren. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, founder and first president of the Soka Gakkai, embracing the one-vehicle concept of the Lotus Sutra and in exact accord with the spirit of Nichiren, stood up against the fanatic militarist regime and died a martyr in prison during the Second World War. Josei Toda, who would later succeed Mr. Makiguchi as president of the Soka Gakkai, was also imprisoned.

Mr. Toda stood up alone on the ruined earth of a defeated Japan and vowed to rid society of misery and unhappiness. The Soka Gakkai, faithful to the legacy of its first and second presidents, is carrying out peace, cultural, and educational activities worldwide based on the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

Today, in bringing to people around the world the Lotus Sutra doctrine of happiness equally available to all beings, historical study of the Lotus Sutra is absolutely essential. The foundation of this research should be interpretive reading and comparative studies of various versions of the sutra. The study of the actual process of unfolding the single-vehicle teachings to the various peoples of Asia will enable us to acquire valuable lessons for serving humankind and to extract wisdom that may be employed in the future.

To be more specific, first, through comparative studies of the various versions of the Lotus Sutra, we can retrace the process by which it came into being and was transmitted. I would like to express my deep respect to Beijing University Professor Ji Xianlin, who has played a pioneering role in this area from the philological viewpoint, and to the other researchers in the field.



Stephanie Sydney

Second, analysis of differences in the versions of the sutra excavated or preserved in various areas can provide clues to perceiving how the Lotus Sutra changed and was altered in response to the diversity of the peoples and cultures of Asia.

Third, on the basis of the results of this study, we can analyze the relations between the histories of peoples, each with their own unique culture, and the Lotus Sutra, thus allowing us to also examine how the all-embracing doctrine of the sutra contributed to the formation of these peoples' cultures.

Fourth, extracting lessons from the history of the transmission of the Lotus Sutra can also make possible the discovery of how to nurture, in an all-inclusive way, a common consciousness of belong-

ing to humankind, while making the best of the distinctive features of the earth's varied and diverse cultural areas.

I hope the study of the Lotus Sutra, as it heads into the twenty-first century, will develop into a comprehensive study that is the crystallization of the wisdom of humankind. The basic significance of research on different versions of the Lotus Sutra can be found in the laying of the scholarly foundation for this.

The current project originates partly in the presentation to the Soka Gakkai in 1984 of a precise photo reproduction of a Sanskrit version of the Lotus Sutra in the collection of the Library of the Cultural Palace of the Nationalities in Beijing by Wang Zhen, then honorary president of the China-Japan Friendship Association.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Ji and to Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Professorial Research Fellow Jiang Zhongxin for their wide-ranging advice and cooperation regarding the study of ancient texts, and to Lushun Museum Director Liu Guangtang for his great efforts in realizing the publication of the Lushun versions of the Lotus Sutra.

Deeper friendship is desirable between Japan and China for the peace and stability not only of East Asia but also of the whole world, and, in this regard, the publication of these manuscript fragments is one splendid outcome of friendly exchange between Japan and China. And it is my sincere hope that this project will become a step in the direction of still more profound exchange and mutual understanding. □

# DIALOGUE

## ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

43

The “Supernatural Powers” Chapter Is an Overture to the Triumphal Advancement of the People

*What is the purpose of Buddhism? What was Shakyamuni’s true intention in expounding the Lotus Sutra? In this third discussion on the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapter, the participants delve further into the meaning of the transmission to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, which holds the key to understanding these questions. This ceremony of transmission symbolizes the principle that ordinary people are Buddhas, and as such represents a crucial turning point in the history of Buddhism.*

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

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** The Lotus Sutra exists to enable ordinary people — who have been oppressed, made to suffer and derided throughout history — to stand up and advance, with their heads held high. It aims to help people develop strong life force, encouraging them: “You who have suffered the most will become the happiest!” It opens the eyes and raises the chins of those who deprecate themselves as “worthless,” telling them instead, “You are most noble and respectable.”

The Lotus Sutra empowers us ordinary people to unite and advance proudly for the happiness of all. And the “Supernatural Powers” chapter is the prelude, as it were, to this triumphal march. We are now setting in motion our goal of achieving a victory of the people in the twenty-first century. We are paving the way. We are building a bridge.

While this is an extremely laborious and inconspicuous undertaking, we should be confident that our accomplishment would only increase in brilliance with the passage of time.

**TAKANORI ENDO:** This is what is meant by the “living Lotus Sutra.”

**HARUO SUDA:** The transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra from Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Superior Practices is a ceremony in which Buddhism in its entirety and the very life of the Thus Come One are transferred to Superior Practices. It amounts to a declaration that the Latter Day of the Law is not the “age of Shakyamuni” but the “age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices.”

**ENDO:** The “age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices” means an age when the truth that “ordinary people are Buddhas” is revealed. This is a new era that completely revamps Buddhism as it had existed previously; it overturns the assumption that the Buddha (conceived as a being possessing all manner of remarkable characteristics) is superior to the common mortal.

**KATSUJI SAITO:** The idea that there is no Buddha apart from ordinary people, apart from human beings, points to a profound and genuine humanism.

**IKEDA:** I heard someone make the following argument: “Fundamentally, doctors exist to serve patients. It is their effort on behalf of patients that makes them doctors. Yet, all too often, doctors arrogantly think themselves superior to their patients.

“Lawyers exist to help those facing legal troubles. Yet often lawyers become haughty, thinking themselves better than others.

“Politicians exist for the sake of citizens. They are public servants. Yet politicians tend to grow insolent, supposing themselves above their constituents, whom they exploit.

“The role of journalists should be to protect the rights of the people. Yet the mass media is sometimes at the forefront in violating those rights.

“Clergy exist for the sake of the faithful. Yet it happens that priests think of themselves as higher, asserting superiority over believers.”

**SUDA:** I think that sums things up pretty well.

**ENDO:** It’s a perverse situation.

**IKEDA:** Indeed. What is needed to right this state of affairs is a humanist “revolution.”

**SAITO:** The original meaning of the term “revolution” is to reverse or overturn.

**IKEDA:** I think we could say that Nichiren Daishonin and Shakyamuni were revolutionaries of the most radical and



COBIS/BETMANN

Augusto Pinochet addresses a political rally in May 1984. The former Chilean dictator now faces charges related to the alleged torturing and killing of his own people. SGI President Ikeda comments on the responsibility of politicians: “Politicians exist for the sake of citizens. They are public servants. Yet politicians tend to grow insolent, supposing themselves above their constituents, whom they exploit.”

fundamental kind. Shakyamuni toppled the prevalent notion that “people exist for the sake of the gods,” teaching instead that “the gods exist for the sake of the people.” At the same time, he rejected the Brahman caste, which arrogantly took advantage of people’s belief, and the caste system itself. Proclaiming that all people are equal, he proceeded to put that assertion into practice.

**ENDO:** It seems only natural, therefore, that he should have been persecuted by conservative elements.

**IKEDA:** But in later times, the adherents of Buddhism forgot Shakyamuni’s spirit, and consequently Buddhism ceased to be a humanistic teaching.

It was then that Nichiren Daishonin appeared, declaring that people don’t exist for the sake of the Buddha; rather, the Buddha exists for the sake of people.

**SAITO:** This was an earthshaking declaration.

**SUDA:** The designation of the present time as the “age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices” has truly profound meaning.

**IKEDA:** Since religion is the very foundation of society, it is a revolution in the realm of religion that will rectify all of society’s ills on a fundamental level.

In any event, whatever our station in life or in society, we need to be aware that arrogance strips us of our humanity. The more we think ourselves better than others, the less humanistic we become, and the lower our life condition falls.

**ENDO:** In other words, the “higher” we place ourselves above others, the lower we in fact become.

**SAITO:** This is the case among those with an elitist attitude. In addition to the examples mentioned earlier of lawyers, politicians, doctors and priests, we also find elitism among graduates of leading universities, the wealthy, those who work for major corporations, or even those who have leadership positions in our organization. However, these are but “adornments” that have nothing to do with our basic identity as human beings. The Lotus Sutra urges us to win in life not based on such superficial laurels, but through our humanity itself.

**SUDA:** Since even the Buddha’s august attributes are rejected by the Lotus Sutra, the same goes without saying for all other “external adornments.”

**IKEDA:** Those who think themselves above others do not toil selflessly. To avoid personal harm, they shrewdly get others to do the hard work, while taking all the credit themselves. This is cowardice, and it is despicable.

The fundamental teaching of the Lotus Sutra and of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is that ordinary people—just as they are—should live, assert themselves and strive wholeheartedly for happiness while fully expressing their humanity. To do so is to throw oneself completely into the struggle, to stand up against adversity. This is what it means to practice without begrudging one’s life. Apart from this, there is no “living Lotus Sutra.”

The social elite has not advanced the movement for *kosen-rufu*. The path has been opened up by the fully engaged efforts of ordinary people. Herein lies the true practice of the “Supernatural Powers” chapter.

## A Struggle for Human Rights Led by Ordinary People

**ENDO:** I have heard the experiences of Masayo and Kazuo Daimon, who valiantly struggled under your leadership, President Ikeda, and that of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, at the time of the so-called Yubari Coal Miners’ Union incident (in 1957) in Yubari, Hokkaido. Masayo, who presently lives in Tomakomai, Hokkaido, is over seventy. Her husband Kazuo passed away in 1995.

**IKEDA:** I am familiar with her experience. It was introduced in the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper just the other day (on June 3, 1998). To mark the fortieth anniversary of the incident (in 1997), the newspaper’s correspondents in

Sapporo were kind enough to bring together important records from the time along with the testimony of participants. I will never forget my friends in Yubari who fought at my side during that difficult period.

**ENDO:** Volume eleven of *The Human Revolution* gives a detailed description of the series of events that took place. It is a moving account of the struggle for human rights waged by nameless individuals against the devilish nature of power.

Mr. and Mrs. Daimon joined the Soka Gakkai at the urging of Masayo’s parents, who were concerned about Kazuo’s immoral ways. Though they joined the Soka Gakkai, they did so in name only, however, and did not actually begin practicing. Because of Kazuo’s spending on alcohol and their excessive debts, the couple lost their home twice.



What is the responsibility of the media? “The role of journalists should be to protect the rights of the people. Yet the mass media is sometimes at the forefront in violating those rights,” comments President Ikeda.

**SUDA:** This was no ordinary fondness for drink!

**ENDO:** They relocated from Tokyo to Osaka, but Kazuo’s business failed, and so he returned alone to his hometown of Yubari. Masayo thought hard about leaving him, but with her mother’s encouragement to give their marriage another chance for the sake of the children, she followed Kazuo to Yubari. Immediately after that, however, her mother, on whom she had depended so greatly, passed away.

**SAITO:** She must have felt terribly lonely.

**ENDO:** Dazed by this turn of events, she stood by the bridge in Yubari one day gazing blankly out into space. As she did so, she heard an unfamiliar voice. “There is



CORBIS/Ed Young

Business of caring? “Fundamentally, doctors exist to serve patients. It is their effort on behalf of patients that makes them doctors. Yet, all too often, doctors arrogantly think of themselves as superior to their patients,” states President Ikeda.

someone who is very concerned about you,” a woman said. Following at the woman’s behest, she found that it was President Toda who wanted to see her.

From the window of the inn where he was staying, President Toda, who had come to Yubari on a guidance tour of the area, had seen Masayo looking so dejected and downcast that he was concerned she might be about to throw herself into the water. And so he asked someone to call her over.

**IKEDA:** President Toda was truly perceptive.

**ENDO:** That was in August 1955.

Hearing President Toda’s warm guidance enabled Masayo to turn over a new leaf, and she and her husband began energetically participating daily in activities for kosen-rufu. When Masayo asked President Toda why her mother had died even though she was practicing, he strictly reprimanded her: “You’re a fool! I have never seen anyone as negligent of her responsibility toward her parents as you. Have you practiced earnestly enough to be able to say such a thing? Your mother was using her death as an expedient means to teach you, her daughter, about faith.”

**SAITO:** President Toda put all of his energy into encouraging and revitalizing each person faced with hardship. This is the struggle carried out by Mr. Toda and by you, President Ikeda. It is this compassion that has given so many people the strength to stand up—knowing that there is someone who truly cares about their happiness.

**SUDA:** Wasn’t the crux of the Yubari Coal Miners’ Union incident the contempt, jealousy and fear directed at the solidarity of ordinary people by the union leadership?

**SAITO:** These feelings became particularly acute when, in the Upper House election of July 1956, the candidate supported by the Soka Gakkai received many times more votes from Yubari than had been projected. It seems that this gave the union leaders quite a start.

**ENDO:** And they used their powerful influence to threaten Soka Gakkai members who belonged to the union, trying to get them to renounce their faith. This was an outrageous violation of their rights as citizens; rights guaranteed them by the country’s constitution.

**SUDA:** At both its national convention and at the local convention in Hokkaido, the Yubari Coal Miners’ Union announced with great fanfare its policy to “staunchly oppose the Soka Gakkai.”

**IKEDA:** Union leaders said things like: “Since disasters and illnesses such as silicosis are quite common in coal mines, and because the workers are uneducated, it is not surprising that a religion of this kind should find a ready reception among our membership.” In other words, they were saying that sick and unintelligent people join the Soka Gakkai. What an arrogant and disparaging attitude toward the people!

**SAITO:** They threatened Soka Gakkai members with expulsion unless they obeyed the rules of the union. And to be excluded from the union in those days meant losing one’s job.

**SUDA:** If our members tried to borrow money from their credit union, they would be told flat out, “We will make the loan if you quit the Soka Gakkai.” The union also used cable broadcasting, leaflets and other means to attack the Soka Gakkai, issuing messages that said things like, “Beware of phony religions!”

**IKEDA:** There were many such examples of insidious harassment and coercion.

**ENDO:** Enduring everything, the Soka Gakkai members of Yubari fought on, united in spirit with you, President Ikeda.

At one union meeting, Kazuo Daimon boldly confronted the leadership, stating: “If there are any Soka Gakkai members who have damaged the union or any of its activities, I would like to hear an explanation of the facts!” There were of course no such examples.

The leaders of the union grew unsteady and their true colors were revealed.



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Liberty leads the people in a painting by Eugene Delacroix depicting the French Revolution. The original meaning of the term “revolution” is to reverse or overturn. Nichiren Daishonin was a revolutionary in the sense that he sought to awaken people to their essential dignity and free them from the shackles of religious authority. His revolution represents a non-violent, spiritual revolution.

## An Organization Not Based on the People Will Perish

**SAITO:** President Ikeda, you assured the members of Yubari, saying: “This is a struggle for the people. So victory is certain.”

And, “The Union will no doubt resort to all kinds of means to harass Soka Gakkai members. We must therefore fight now to ensure that the members of Yubari are never again subjected to such abuse.”

**SUDA:** The Soka Gakkai’s historic Sapporo Convention was held on July 1 and the Yubari Convention on July 2, 1956. An account of one of these meetings in a local newspaper described the event as follows: “Conspicuous at the gathering was the large number of women with

young children, and junior and senior high school students. I have never before witnessed a scene like it, with each comment by speakers greeted with unanimous applause in a packed auditorium.”

**SAITO:** And this hasn’t changed!

**IKEDA:** At the time, it was probably quite unusual for women with young children to have anything to do with issues of politics or labor unions. But it was just such ordinary people who stood up to actualize politics for the happiness of all people, in contrast to the egoistic politics of the privileged. I simply could not abide the thought of these heroic members just swallowing such treatment in silence.

Which side would win; the powerful, with their tactics

of intimidation, or the people, who stood on the side of justice? The problem with the Coal Miners' Union in Yubari might have seemed like a local incident, but it was an important struggle for Buddhism and for the victory of the people.

**ENDO:** Victory was certain.

The Coal Miners' Union had requested to be allowed to observe the Gakkai's Yubari Convention. But midway through the event, the union representatives quietly slipped away.

Kikutaro Mitobe, who was then a chapter leader, gave this testimony: "Of all the guidance I have received from President Ikeda, I am most deeply impressed by something he said to me at the time of the Yubari Coal Miners' Union incident when we were riding in a car together. He told me, 'The union, which does not draw its strength from the people, is really rather pathetic. And someday it will crumble. I hope each of you will carry out a strong practice and solidify your foundation in life.' Just as he predicted, in November 1978 the Yubari Coal Miners' Union disbanded, and so its thirty-two-year history came to an end."

**IKEDA:** Of course, it was not only the union that was at fault. No one had ever taught these people a correct view of democracy and of humanity. So in a sense, they were victims.

**ENDO:** The Soka Gakkai members of Yubari who created this history all have significantly developed and cultivated their lives. Mrs. Daimon showed actual proof in her work as a calligrapher, and is still quite active. She says unequivocally of her late husband, who had once caused her so much grief, "He was my greatest friend and comrade."

I was moved to hear Kazuo's final words. While semi-conscious, he repeatedly called out, "Sensei, please wait! I'll be right there .... Quick, dear, put on your shoes." This revealed his spirit for the two of them to always continue struggling for kosen-rufu together with you, President Ikeda. I think this marked Kazuo's departure on the supreme "journey over the three existences." "Soka Gakkai activities are what I live for," he used to say.

**SUDA:** A scholar who read about the Coal Miners' Union incident in *The Human Revolution* remarked that, in the final analysis, the postwar labor movement was based on nothing more than reactionary conservatism, which could not become a force for genuine change. And it was this particular incident, he added,

that first made this apparent to the Japanese public.

Professor Koichi Murao of Ehime University also said regarding the incident: "It vividly illustrates that it was the poor and anonymous 'ordinary people' who supported Toda at the time of this persecution. It clearly reveals that the Buddha nature dwells within 'ordinary people.' One could not find a better example of Bodhisattvas of the Earth."

**IKEDA:** Anonymous and poor "ordinary people" are themselves most noble and respectable. Ordinary people who strive for kosen-rufu are themselves Buddhas. This is the "secret of the Thus Come One." It was to teach this that the Thus Come One—the Buddha—appeared.

**SAITO:** Indeed, Buddhism is itself humanism. President Ikeda, in your dialogue with the noted Hong Kong author Jin Yong (titled *Kyokujitsu no Seiki wo Motomete*, Quest for a Bright New Century), Mr. Jin explains how he came to have faith in Buddhism. His words are most impressive and profound.

## From Great Pain to Great Joy: One Person's Encounter with the Mystic Law

**IKEDA:** That's right. His remarks provide a valuable reference for considering the question, "What is Buddhism?" He says that as a result of his lifelong investigations, he came to realize that the truth is to be found within Buddhism.

**SAITO:** Yes. And Mr. Jin describes it as "an extremely painful process" that led him to dedicate himself to the teachings of the Buddha. His eldest son, an outstanding student who was studying at Columbia University in the United States, had committed suicide. Nothing could have been more devastating for Mr. Jin.

**SUDA:** How old was Mr. Jin then?

**SAITO:** Fifty-two.

**SUDA:** By that time he had already realized considerable success as an author and journalist.

**IKEDA:** He also said that he considered committing suicide himself and following his son in death.

**SAITO:** Plagued with questions about what could have driven his son to take his own life—about why he suddenly chose to throw away all that he had—Mr. Jin

spent a year investigating the issue of life and death, reading countless books on the subject. But for a long time he simply could not find any explanation of the significance of death that was truly convincing and persuasive. He says that though he repeatedly pondered the teaching of Christianity on the matter, he never really felt comfortable with it.

**IKEDA:** That is when he began studying Buddhism.

**SAITO:** He started by taking up the Agama sutras, which are a part of the so-called Hinayana teachings. For months he poured his energy into studying and pondering their meaning, even to the point of neglecting to sleep and eat properly. Then he suddenly had a revelation: “The truth was in Buddhism all along. Its teachings are true beyond any doubt.”

Mr. Jin, reading English and Chinese-language translations of Buddhist texts side by side, says that he “accepted Buddhism from the bottom of my heart with all my body and soul.”

**ENDO:** He also says, “Buddhism resolved the huge doubts that had burrowed into my heart. Thinking, ‘So that’s it! Finally I understand!’ my heart overflowed with joy. My happiness knew no bounds.”

**IKEDA:** That is wonderful.

Early Buddhist canons (to which the Agama sutras belong) repeatedly talk about “immortality.” They are filled with statements like the following: “Immersed in the state of immortality you merge [with the universe] without dying . . . you experience the joy of peace”;<sup>1</sup> “The one who reaches the foundation of immortality is the

enlightened person”;<sup>2</sup> “Better than a hundred years not seeing one’s own immortality is one single day of life if one sees one’s own immortality”;<sup>3</sup> “Enter the realm of immortality”;<sup>4</sup> and, “I will surely beat the drum of immortality.”<sup>5</sup>

As we see from such passages, Shakyamuni was

trying to teach people about a state of eternal happiness that transcends life and death. With keen and subtle insight, Mr. Jin must have sensed this essential meaning.

**SAITO:** He next studied a number of Mahayana texts including the *Vimalakirti*, *Lankavatara* and *Prajnaparamita* sutras. But he says that he found these hard to accept because they contain so much that are mysterious and fantastical.

**SUDA:** It is certainly true that Mahayana Buddhist texts display rich imagination, depicting many occurrences and miracles.

**ENDO:** They read almost like science fiction! The content may even appear absurd. I think this is one reason the Mahayana sutras have been regarded by many as not being

Shakyamuni’s teachings at all, but apocryphal works by people of later generations. And the fact that historically Mahayana Buddhism appeared several hundred years after Shakyamuni’s death (around the start of the Common Era) seems to lend support to such a view.

**IKEDA:** The question is, what is Mahayana Buddhism trying to express? In the case of the Lotus Sutra, such events as the Ceremony in the Air or the emergence of



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The alien from the movie “This Island Earth.” Many Mahayana texts, including the Lotus Sutra, contain descriptions of the supernatural and the extraordinary such as heavenly beings, demons and what may be considered extra-terrestrial beings.

the Bodhisattvas of the Earth from within the ground sound preposterous if we only read them literally.

But there are three different levels to the sutra: the words (the text itself), the teaching (the meaning that follows from the words), and the intent (the true intention behind the sutra). It is the intent or “heart” of the sutra that we need to understand.

**SAITO:** Although Mr. Jin was at first puzzled by the Lotus Sutra, he says that as a result of lengthy reflection, he finally grasped its true meaning. He says, “I understood that this ‘Mystic Law’ fundamentally encompasses everything that the Mahayana sutras are trying to teach.”

**ENDO:** That’s a remarkable insight. Certainly the sutras all have the Mystic Law as their common focus.

**IKEDA:** They are directed toward the great life that is the oneness of life and death, the Mystic Law. “Mystic” refers to death, and “Law,” to life. The term “Mystic Law” expresses the oneness of life and death. The state of immortality, or “no death,” that Shakyamuni talks about in early texts is the state of someone who is awakened to this eternal great life.

**SAITO:** That’s the world of Buddhahood.

**IKEDA:** Yes. When we dedicate ourselves to the Mystic Law, the tremendous life force of Buddhahood, which neither ages nor dies, wells forth.

**SUDA:** “Beating the drum of immortality” could be taken to mean causing the great voice of the Mystic Law to resound.

**ENDO:** Mr. Jin says: “In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha uses a variety of familiar metaphors such as a burning house, an ox cart and heavy rains to explain Buddhism to people. And there are also instances where he uses ‘expedient means’ to guide people. There are even scenes where the Buddha causes people to think that he has died. This, too, is to cause Buddhism to spread among people.

“I began thinking deeply about the meaning of ‘Mystic Law.’ In time, I ceased to feel repelled by the illusions that fill the Mahayana sutras. It took about two years for the immense pain I felt to turn into immense joy.”

**SUDA:** These are striking comments. It’s as though he undertook an odyssey through the stages of the fivefold comparison.<sup>6</sup> From Christianity he turned to Buddhism; from the Hinayana teachings he turned to the Mahayana; and then to the Lotus Sutra.

**IKEDA:** This clearly demonstrates the earnestness with

which Mr. Jin pursued his investigation of life and death. Guided by his son, he approached the Mystic Law.

The true intent that the “Supernatural Powers” chapter is trying to express is the Mystic Law; it seeks to convey the eternal and supreme life that is without beginning or end from time without beginning.

## Who Is the True Protagonist of the Lotus Sutra?

**ENDO:** Last time, we learned that the appearance of Bodhisattva Superior Practices refers to the original Buddha of *kuon ganjo* whose life is without beginning or end.

**SAITO:** To reiterate, Superior Practices is a “bodhisattva-Buddha,” a bodhisattva in his outward conduct but a Buddha in his inner state of life. His true identity is that of a Buddha exerting himself at the initial stage of Buddhist practice when the cause to attain enlightenment is made; in other words, he is a Buddha embodying the simultaneity of cause and effect. Such a figure had never before been known in the history of Buddhism.

**SUDA:** Through the appearance of this “Buddha of the simultaneity of cause and effect,” the original Buddha of time without beginning could be finally identified. That’s because as long as the discussion was premised on the notion that the cause comes first and the effect later, it was assumed that a person became a Buddha at some particular point in time; such enlightenment, therefore, could not be “without beginning or end.”

**IKEDA:** The lotus flower represents the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect. The *rengé*, or lotus flower, of Myoho-rengé-kyo symbolizes the Buddha of the simultaneity of cause and effect.

**ENDO:** This idea is pretty complicated.

**IKEDA:** It certainly is. But the important thing is to have the spirit to learn. As long as we have such a seeking mind, we will continue to advance in our human revolution.

President Toda often said, “changing is more important than understanding.” Even if we should intellectually comprehend the so-called eighty thousand teachings, unless we can use this knowledge to grow as human beings, it will not benefit us in the least. We study Buddhism to do our human revolution and strengthen our faith. It’s enough that we have the faith to continue our Buddhist study, even if only a little at a time.

**SAITO:** Superior Practices is a truly wondrous being.

His appearance overturns the prevailing understanding of Buddhism.

**IKEDA:** That's right. In fact, the question of the identity and nature of Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the main theme of the essential teaching (or second half) of the Lotus Sutra. In that sense, he is the true protagonist of the Lotus Sutra. While Shakyamuni might appear to be the protagonist, in fact Superior Practices more deeply embodies the sutra's spirit.

This is first and foremost revealed by the development of the Lotus Sutra itself. Shakyamuni calls out, "After my death, who will spread the Mystic Law in the *saha* world?" Many bodhisattvas announce their "candidacy," beseeching him to entrust them with the teaching. But Shakyamuni refuses.

**SUDA:** He flatly turns them down, saying, "Leave off, good men! There is no need for you to protect this sutra" (LS15, 212).<sup>7</sup> And he calls forth the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

**IKEDA:** The words "Leave off" are very significant. With this, he refutes all the teachings he has expounded up to that point. Nichiren Daishonin says, "With this single expression 'leave off,' Shakyamuni Buddha settled once and for all that there is no need for any bodhisattvas other than Bodhisattva Superior Practices and his followers [to spread the Mystic Law]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 840).

**ENDO:** This is a declaration that the Latter Day of the Law—the period indicated by references to the time after Shakyamuni's passing—is the "age of Bodhisattva Superior Practices." Tremendous weight attaches to the expression "Leave off."

**SAITO:** Shakyamuni then calls forth the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by Superior Practices, from below the ground. The entire assembly is thunderstruck, for these bodhisattvas are even more splendid in appearance than Shakyamuni.

On behalf of all those gathered, Bodhisattva Maitreya entreats Shakyamuni to explain where these bodhisattvas have come from and what "causes and conditions" bring them together (LS15, 216). By way of reply, Shakyamuni expounds the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (sixteenth) chapter. This is the general progression of events.

**SUDA:** Shakyamuni uses the question of the identity of Superior Practices to reveal that he has been enlightened since the remote past. And in the "Supernatural Powers"

chapter, he transfers the "life of the Thus Come One" in its entirety to Superior Practices. In this light, we can see just how central is the role played by Superior Practices.

It may be that he is on a par with Shakyamuni during the Ceremony in the Air. But after the Buddha's passing, Superior Practices becomes the undisputed "star."

**SAITO:** Isn't this to say that Shakyamuni and Superior Practices, the "eternal mentor and disciple," are the protagonists of the Lotus Sutra?

**IKEDA:** Just what does this "oneness of mentor and disciple" signify? That is the issue. It indicates the life of the original Buddha without beginning or end that is at one with the universe.

In the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Superior Practices personifies the "true cause" of the original Buddha, and Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past personifies the "true effect."

**ENDO:** So they are the same Buddha. They are both functions of the original Buddha.

**IKEDA:** That's right. Shakyamuni and Superior Practices are one Buddha, not two. They are two sides of the same Buddha.

Therefore, while we may speak of transmission, this is nothing more than a formality. To think that this transmission itself has any substance is to misunderstand the Lotus Sutra.

## What Shakyamuni Ultimately Wanted to Communicate

**SUDA:** What is the purpose of the ceremony?

**IKEDA:** Fundamentally, it is to announce that Superior Practices will appear in the Latter Day and propagate the Mystic Law of time without beginning. Because of this "announcement" or "prophesy," when the person who was to spread the true Mystic Law did appear, it would be apparent that this was the person predicted in the sutra to do so.

**ENDO:** That suggests that those who compiled the Lotus Sutra distinctly knew that someone would appear in the future who would spread the Mystic Law.

**SAITO:** That makes sense.

**ENDO:** How did they know?

**SAITO:** I think it is because they grasped the limitations of

the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra.

**ENDO:** In other words, although they themselves understood, they knew that there were things that were not made explicit in the sutra’s text.

**SUDA:** This brings us to the question of the sutra’s “implicit meaning.”

**IKEDA:** The conversation has again taken a difficult turn. But since this is an important point, let’s try to set things straight.

First of all, what was the enlightenment of the historical Shakyamuni?

**ENDO:** I believe it was that he perceived the “state of life of immortality.”

**SAITO:** He opened his eyes to the eternal life, the “eternal Law.”

**SUDA:** The Pali term for “immortality” (*amata*) originally also indicated the mystic elixir of heaven (*amrita*) that is said to bestow immortality.

**SAITO:** The Mystic Law is the true “mystic elixir of immortality.”

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin says in his writings:

*Amrita* is said to be the elixir of immortality. In the first place, *myo* is the elixir of immortality... That the behavior and actions of beings in each of the Ten Worlds are in themselves eternally-dwelling and unchanging is called *amrita*, the Mystic Law, mystic, the original Law, or concentration and insight [as taught by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai]. In the Latter Day of the Law, *amrita* is *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 831–32)

**ENDO:** This is saying that the lives of all beings in the Ten Worlds, or all phenomena of the entire universe,



Stephanie Sydney

The Great Basin National Park in Baker, Nevada. The reverence expressed in the Lotus Sutra extends to all sentient and insentient beings.

while undergoing constant change, are eternal.

**IKEDA:** Viewed through the “eye of the Lotus Sutra,” all phenomena manifest the eternal original Buddha, the universal life that is without beginning or end. That is the true aspect of all phenomena. Therefore, all beings

are themselves, just as they are, the Thus Come One. This is what is meant by, “The Thus Come One is all living beings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 770).

**SUDA:** Shakyamuni awakened to the fact that this eternal Law is itself the eternal Buddha. And he called it the Dharma or (in Pali) *Danma*, and the *Tathagata* or Thus Come One.

**SAITO:** This Dharma manifested through and pervaded his own life. He perceived it as a state of life at one with himself and called it a state of immortality. I think that in this we find the basic paradigm of the “Life Span” chapter.

**IKEDA:** That may be. Shakyamuni dedicated his entire life to communicating this realization to others. But he could not succinctly express all that he wanted to convey in words.

While expounding various teachings according to people’s suffering or their capacity, he was ultimately trying to open their eyes to this state of life, to the great life force of eternal youth and immortality. Through a lifetime of teaching, he gradually developed the people’s capacity, and in the end he taught them the Lotus Sutra.

Of course, the content of Shakyamuni’s sermon may not be identical to what is written in the twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra itself. But he certainly expounded the truth that constitutes the sutra’s core. For a Buddha who does not expound the Lotus Sutra is not a Buddha.

**SUDA:** This “core” is the real existence of the great life that is the eternal Mystic Law, which is itself the eternal Buddha.

**IKEDA:** It is the principle that this great life manifests in ordinary human beings. This is the purpose of the living Lotus Sutra. It could be said that the progression and advance seen over the entire history of Buddhism comes down to the question of how to express and open people’s eyes to this one point. From that standpoint, I think the advent of Mahayana Buddhism was inevitable.

What was Shakyamuni’s last wish for his followers when he passed away? It was: “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>8</sup> In other words, depend on no one other than yourself. With the Law as your sole foundation, rely on yourself alone. Amid the turbulent currents of the sufferings of life and death, he is saying, we should live with the Law and the self as our only support. The pursuit of this “self” and this “Law” became the task of adherents of Buddhism after Shakyamuni’s passing.

**SUDA:** In terms of the Person and the Law, the self corresponds to the Person. And the goal of our pursuit is the eternal Buddha and the eternal Law, the entity of the oneness of the Person and the Law.

**ENDO:** In other words, after Shakyamuni passed away, Buddhism became a search for the cause of enlightenment that enabled him to become a Buddha. This of course was not just a theoretical pursuit, but an all-out struggle on which people staked their very lives.

**SAITO:** It has been a search for the eternal life that could be called “Shakyamuni’s mentor.”

**IKEDA:** The pursuit of the cause of enlightenment is also summed up in the “Jataka.”

**SUDA:** This is a collection of tales describing Shakyamuni’s activities during past lives and the benefits that he accumulated.

**ENDO:** There are a number of remarkable tales, such as how as a Bodhisattva he once gave up his life to save others, or how he became a king of animals so as to lead other animals to happiness.

**IKEDA:** Many of these stories are cited in the Daishonin’s writings. They include accounts of his incarnations as King Shibi (who gave his own flesh to a hawk in order to save a dove), as the hermit Ninniku (who does not bear a grudge even when his hands and legs are cut off by King Kali), as the king of the deer (who allows himself to be eaten to save the lives of the other deer), as Prince Satta (who gives his body to feed a famished tigress), and as Sessen Doji (who throws himself into the mouth of a demon to learn half a Buddhist verse).

**SAITO:** These accounts are also well known in Japan from early collections of folklore such as the *Konjaku Monogatari* (Tales of Times Now Past).

**IKEDA:** These might seem like mere fairy tales of old. But we are in fact composing many such “bodhisattva tales” through our SGI activities, which constitute bodhisattva practice for the modern age.

Nichiren Daishonin praised the united struggles of the Ikegami brothers, saying, “Could there ever be a more wonderful story than your own?” (MW-1, 143). People of later generations will certainly talk about and relate our efforts for *kosen-rufu*. They will doubtless become “tales” that are broadly praised.

**SAITO:** The fierce struggles of the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai certainly constitute a glorious tale



CORBIS/Lindsay Hebbard

The Dhamekha Stupa in the Deer Park, India. A stupa is a burial mound or tower built for Buddhist relics. The spread of stupas after Shakyamuni's death is closely linked to the rise of Mahayana Buddhism.

that will endure throughout the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law.

**ENDO:** To be directly connected to this legacy is the greatest honor.

## The Buddha Appears in Response to the People's Longing

**SUDA:** Speaking of the "Jataka," when I visited India, I saw many stupas with carvings and reliefs depicting scenes from such tales.

**IKEDA:** Stupas, as you know, have much to do with this pursuit of the cause of enlightenment.

**ENDO:** Yes. After Shakyamuni's death, lay followers held a funeral in which they cremated his remains. It was conducted by lay people because Shakyamuni had admonished the monks and nuns that they should not have anything to do with the holding of funerals. "If you have that kind of free time, then you ought to spend it on your practice," he told them in his final words. His ashes were divided up and interred in stupas set up for that purpose.

Thereafter, a faith centering on stupas spread widely. While the details of how exactly this came about remain unclear, it has become generally accepted that the spread of stupas is closely linked to the rise of Mahayana Buddhism.

**SAITO:** What was the belief upheld by those who prayed to these stupas? While this is not substantiated, it is thought that their actions were motivated by a sense of longing for the deceased Shakyamuni.<sup>9</sup>

**IKEDA:** The "Life Span" chapter says, "Then when their minds are filled with yearning, / at last I appear and preach the Law for them" (LS16, 230). In other words, the eternal Buddha appears and expounds the Law in response to the "longing" in people's hearts.

Isn't it the case that after Shakyamuni's passing, people were seeking an "essential" or "true" Shakyamuni that transcended even his death? I think this is also evident in the emergence of teachings articulating theories about the Buddha body.

**SAITO:** Yes. As scholars such as Nagarjuna indicate, it seems that early Buddhist theorists postulated the existence of two bodies: the "living body" of the person Shakyamuni and the "Dharma body" of the Buddha. The historical Shakyamuni Buddha who died at the age of eighty is termed the "living body." By contrast, the eternal state of enlightenment that made Shakyamuni the Buddha is called the Buddha's "Dharma body."

**IKEDA:** The Dharma body is later said to possess the

two properties of the Dharma body (objective reality) and the Reward body (subjective wisdom). This further gives us the doctrine of the three enlightened properties of the Law, wisdom and action. While such theories concerning the nature of the Buddha body developed, the basic spirit to view the eternal Buddha as existing in the depths of the life of the actual person Shakyamuni remained unchanged.

**SUDA:** In like manner, I imagine that people's faith in stupas was sustained by the belief of people "single-mindedly desiring to see" (LS16, 230) an eternal Buddha transcending the corporeal Shakyamuni.

**ENDO:** There are a number of passages in the Lotus Sutra that refer to such practices. The "Expedient Means" chapter says things like:

If . . . they pile up earth to make a mortuary temple for the Buddhas, or even if little boys at play/ should collect sand to make a Buddha tower,/then persons such as these/ have all attained the Buddha way. (LS2, 39)

**SAITO:** The appearance of the Treasure Tower probably also reflects the practice of building stupas.

**ENDO:** Many Treasures Buddha who appears with the Treasure Tower is a "Buddha of the past." Shakyamuni is the "Buddha of the present." And Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the "Buddha of the Future." Together, they represent the Buddhas of past, present and future.

**IKEDA:** In any event, stupas were built as expressions of people's yearning for the eternal Buddha who transcends the three existences of past, present and future. The truth is that the life of the ordinary person is itself the Treasure Tower. Ordinary people who embrace the Mystic Law are themselves Treasure Towers; they are one with the eternal Buddha. The Daishonin writes to his follower Abutsu-bo, "Abutsu-bo is the Treasure Tower itself, and the Treasure Tower is Abutsu-bo himself" (MW-1, 30).

**SUDA:** Tracing the matter in this way, it becomes all the more clear why Mahayana Buddhism postulated the existence of various "eternal Buddhas." The Mahayana teachings are often blamed for wanting to turn the deceased founder Shakyamuni into a divine being. But even though there may be an element of truth to this charge, this is not the main point. The driving force of Mahayana Buddhism is the pursuit of the "cause of enlightenment" that enabled Shakyamuni to become a Buddha; and this turned into the pursuit of the eternal Buddha.

**IKEDA:** We should note that the eternal Buddha is another name for the "cause of enlightenment." All Buddhas are born of the "Nam-myoho-enge-kyo Thus Come One." Of course, while this is the cause of Buddhahood, it is simultaneously the effect of Buddhahood.

**SAITO:** In connection with the "two bodies" doctrine of the "living body" and the "Dharma body" that we talked about a moment ago, it is said that the living body is born of the Dharma body.

**IKEDA:** We could probably explain this as follows: All practitioners of Buddhism strove to awaken to the Dharma (i.e., the Law, eternal life or the Thus Come One). But the moment they awakened to this, they understood that the self is none other than the "child of the Thus Come One" (i.e., a bodhisattva) born of the Dharma. I know this is somewhat confusing.

**ENDO:** This development in thought seems to parallel the historic transition from Hinayana to Mahayana Buddhism. It is the change from Hinayana (or Sectarian) Buddhism, which made the pursuit of the Dharma its object, to Mahayana Buddhism, which is a movement of bodhisattvas (or children of the Buddha).

## The "Truth of the Mentor" Is Revealed in Response to the Earnest "Words of the Disciple"

**IKEDA:** To say this definitively would require more solid research. But what is certain is that Mahayana is definitely not a "non-Buddhist" doctrine that has no relation to Shakyamuni. On the contrary, it is the result of an attempt to get at Shakyamuni's true intent.

Of course, regardless of who expounded a teaching, it should be judged on the basis of its own merits. The Lotus Sutra is not great because it was expounded by Shakyamuni; rather, Shakyamuni is the Buddha because he expounded the Lotus Sutra. No matter who the person is, one who expounds the Lotus Sutra is a Buddha. To say that a particular teaching is supreme because it was taught by Shakyamuni smacks of a kind of authoritarianism or elitism.

**SUDA:** While Socrates is the protagonist of the enormous collection of dialogues left behind by his disciple Plato, the dialogues are not in fact a literal record of Socrates' conversations. However, we cannot on that basis dismiss the dialogues as "lies," or as representing a

“non-Socratic doctrine.” I think they express the true intent of the mentor as grasped by the disciple Plato.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. The Mahayana sutras were expounded by people committed to seeking Shakyamuni’s true intent who exercised remarkable ingenuity in their effort to widely communicate that intent to others.

**ENDO:** Mr. Jin says, “Finally I understood. This Mystic Law is what all the Mahayana sutras fundamentally are trying to express. The Mahayana sutras employ skillful expedient means in enhancing and explaining Buddhism so as to enable even the slow and unintelligent to understand and embrace it.”

**SAITO:** Certainly, the view that the Mahayana teachings are non-Buddhist is weak in that it accuses the compilers of the sutras of stooping to such shameful conduct as to attribute their own “arbitrary” ideas to Shakyamuni.

As indicated by the line “Thus I heard” that begins almost all sutras, it seems far more reasonable to assume that the people who set down these teachings in writing acted with the profound realization and genuine belief that they had “heard” these teachings from Shakyamuni.

**IKEDA:** In that case, when they say, “Thus I heard,” from whom did they hear the teaching? It must be none other than the eternal Buddha who is “always here, preaching the Law” (LS16, 229).

They surely heard this teaching. The expression “Thus I heard” no doubt refers to a profound religious experience.

**SUDA:** There are a number of scholars of Mahayana Buddhism who take such a position.

**IKEDA:** Naturally, it can also be conjectured that the sutras articulate and elaborate on the essence of a teaching expounded by the historical Shakyamuni that had been transmitted and distilled over time.

**ENDO:** In practicing with the spirit of “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha” (LS16, 230), it is not unusual for people to have profound religious experiences that defy all rational explanation. I imagine that such experiences certainly played a part.

**SAITO:** There might be scholars who would dispute this, but someone who flatly denies the validity of such an experience of “seeing the Buddha” cannot possibly understand the history of Buddhism, or for that matter the history of religion.

**ENDO:** That would be like someone who has no knowledge of music whatsoever attempting to write a history of the subject.

**IKEDA:** The view that Mahayana is not the Buddha’s teaching seems to be based on the major premise that there is no Buddha other than the historical person Shakyamuni. If that is true, however, then Shakyamuni’s reason for expounding his teaching becomes ambiguous. For he did so in order to awaken people to the fact that they, too, possess the “state of immortality” he did. And there absolutely are people who have reached the same enlightenment as Shakyamuni.

**SAITO:** Such people are also Buddhas—not in theory, but in actuality.

**IKEDA:** Yes.

**SUDA:** It must then follow that the people who compiled the Lotus Sutra were also Buddhas.

**IKEDA:** That is fair to say.

**ENDO:** Why, then, does the sutra take the form of a teaching expounded by (the historical person) Shakyamuni at Eagle Peak?

**IKEDA:** This may have to do with Indian folklore, but more than that, it is probably because the compilers believed that this format represented Shakyamuni’s true intent.

**SUDA:** The Mahayana movement peaked over several centuries around the start of the Common Era; that would have put it about five hundred years after the time of Shakyamuni’s death. In terms of the doctrine of the “five five-hundred-year periods,”<sup>10</sup> it would roughly correspond to the period known as the “age of meditation.”

**SAITO:** We can surmise that through the experience of meditation, practitioners of Buddhism were able to “see” the eternal Shakyamuni who is “always here, preaching the Law.”

**ENDO:** President Toda described his enlightenment in prison as an experience in which he found himself present during the “assembly at Eagle Peak, which continues in solemn state and has not yet dispersed” (GZ, p. 757).

**IKEDA:** Our discussion today has centered on Buddhist history, but I think that in order for people of the modern age to grasp the essence of the Lotus Sutra, it is necessary to consider the teachings from this standpoint.

**ENDO:** This conversation has solidified my understanding that the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, while



CORBIS/Bettmann

A mosaic of Plato and his students—virtually all we know about Socrates comes down to us through the words of his disciple Plato. Similarly, all the teachings of Shakyamuni were transmitted through his disciples of later generations.

not a statement of fact per se, nonetheless expresses the truth of life.

## The Revelation That the Buddha Is a Human Being

**IKEDA:** We're not done yet! If our readers find some parts too much to digest, it's perfectly fine to skip over

them and continue on.

The history of Buddhism could broadly be summarized as follows: So-called “early” Buddhism put its energy into upholding the precepts that the living person Shakyamuni left behind for those who had renounced secular life. Because of its basically conservative nature, this teaching tended to lose sight of Shakyamuni’s true intent—his desire to enable every-

one to become a Buddha by revealing the cause of his own enlightenment.

Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, investigated the cause of Shakyamuni's enlightenment and pursued the eternal Buddha. Put another way, it was a reformist force. It expounded the existence of many Buddhas possessing extremely long spans of life, such as Amida, Vairochana and Dainichi of the Nembutsu and Shingon schools. From the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra, these teachings all explain different aspects of the "Thus Come One inherently possessing the three enlightened properties whose life is without beginning or end" (i.e., the Nam-myoho-enge-kyo Thus Come One). But because of its exclusive pursuit of the eternal Buddha, the Mahayana teachings departed from the essential point of Shakyamuni the human being, and even from the human being.

**SUDA:** Amida is a Buddha said to dwell not in this saha world but in "another land." And Dainichi (Mahavairodana) is merely the Dharma body, possessing no physical form. Such beings are far removed from the human world. Rushana, likewise, is described as a great "Buddha of beneficence," something completely separate from ordinary people.

**IKEDA:** Both Hinayana and Mahayana have such limitations. It is the Lotus Sutra that integrates these two traditions, breaking down their limitations. That's because it reveals that the real identity of the person Shakyamuni is that of the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past. It opens a path to the Buddha, who while eternal and awe inspiring is at the same time familiar and accessible. It could be said that this constitutes returning to the essential point of Shakyamuni the human being.

**SUDA:** In an earlier discussion you explained that the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true" signifies returning to Shakyamuni the human being.

**IKEDA:** The appeal to, "return to Shakyamuni the human being," means to return to the true nature of humanity. It urges us to open our eyes to the dignity of human life.

**SAITO:** The Lotus Sutra is then a sutra that integrates Hinayana and Mahayana.

**IKEDA:** That's right. Through the principle of casting off the transient and revealing the true, all Buddhas are unified as "Buddhas instructed by Shakyamuni who

attained enlightenment in the remote past." This is the Lotus Sutra's essential teaching. This unifies all Mahayana sutras.

The theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra explains that the voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*, meaning those who uphold the Hinayana teachings, can attain Buddhahood. This is because it unifies all phenomena into a single truth called the "true aspect."

**ENDO:** Namely, the "true aspect of all phenomena."

**IKEDA:** Moreover, the unification of all phenomena of the theoretical teaching and the unification of all Buddhas of the essential teaching are complementary. They are both integrated into the Mystic Law.

**SAITO:** The Lotus Sutra is the "summit" of all Buddhist doctrine up to that point in the progress of Buddhist history. It is truly the "king of sutras."

**IKEDA:** But this progress is not complete at this point. We have yet to touch on the Buddhism that is implicit in the Lotus Sutra.

Next time let's discuss the need for an implicit teaching. It is through the implicit teaching that the epochal and fundamental turning point in the history of Buddhism—the teaching that the common mortal is a true Buddha—first becomes a reality.

*To be continued*

#### Footnotes

1. *Budda no Kotoba* (The Buddha's Words): *Sutta Nipata*, trans. Hajime Nakamura (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1994), p. 52. cf. *The Sutta-Nipata*, trans. H. Saddhatissa (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press Ltd., 1994), p. 24.
2. *Budda no Kotoba*, p. 138. cf. *The Sutta-Nipata*, p. 73.
3. *Budda no Shinri no Kotoba, Kankyo no Kotoba* (The Buddha's Words of Truth and Inspiration), trans. Hajime Nakamura (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1994), p. 26. cf. *The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, trans. Thomas Cleary (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), p. 41.
4. *Budda no Shinri no Kotoba, Kankyo no Kotoba*, p. 41. cf. *The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, p. 77.
5. *Budda no Shinri no Kotoba, Kankyo no Kotoba*, p. 224. cf. Dharmatrata, comp., *The Tibetan Dhammapada Sayings of the Buddha: A translation of the Tibetan version of the Udanavarga*, trans. Gareth Sparham (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), p. 109.
6. Fivefold comparison: Five successive levels of comparison set forth by Nichiren Daishonin in "The Opening of the Eyes" to demonstrate the superiority of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo over all other teachings. They are: (1) Buddhism is superior to non-Buddhist teachings; (2) Mahayana Buddhism is superior to Hinayana Buddhism; (3) true Mahayana is superior to provisional Mahayana; (4) the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra is superior to the theoretical teachings; and (5) the Buddhism of sowing is superior to the Buddhism of the harvest.
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. Hajime Nakamura. *Gotama Buddha*. Los Angeles Buddhist Books International, 1977. Pp. 113–14.
9. This makes a reference to the passage in the "Life Span" chapter: "In their minds they will harbor a longing and will thirst to gaze upon the Buddha, and then they will work to plant good roots" (LS16, 227).
10. Five five-hundred-year periods: Five consecutive periods following Shakyamuni's death during which Buddhism is said to spread, prosper and eventually decline. The five periods are: (1) the age enlightenment, in which many people are sure to attain enlightenment through practicing the Buddha's teachings; (2) the age of meditation, when meditation is widely practiced; (3) the age of reading, reciting and listening, in which studying and reciting the sutras and receiving lectures on them are the central practice; (4) the age of building temples and stupas, when many temples and stupas are built, but the spirit of seeking the Buddhist teachings declines; and (5) the age of conflict, when strife occurs among the various rival schools and Shakyamuni's Buddhism perishes.



# *Recollections of My Meetings with Leading World Figures*

By SGI President Ikeda

## *MRS. ELSIE TU CHAMPION OF THE COMMON PEOPLE*

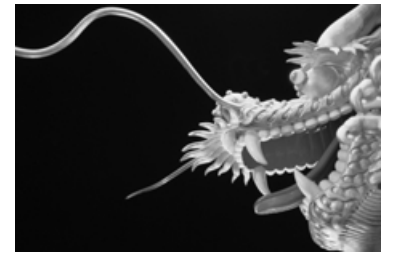
*“I couldn’t believe that such an elegant and refined woman was the famous heroine-councilor who had stood up to Hong Kong’s criminal gangs and corrupt police force.”*

There is a “bodhisattva” living in Hong Kong. And she is an eighty-five-year-old English-woman. “I’ve lived in Hong Kong nearly fifty years,” she says, “and I have never thought of leaving. My only thought all along has been to be of service to the Chinese people living here.” Her simple, unpretentious way of talking reveals her character. She has the tenacity of a person who has decided to live out the remainder of her life in a foreign land.

We first met at the Urban Council Public Library in Hong Kong in January 1974. Mrs. Tu was then an Urban Councilor and, as the council’s representative, she expressed great joy at the Soka Gakkai’s gift of 4,500

books to the library. She was dignified and warm; behind her glasses, her blue eyes shone with kindness. I couldn’t believe that such an elegant and refined woman was the famous heroine-councilor who had stood up to Hong Kong’s criminal gangs and corrupt police force.

Anyone would be astonished at what she has accomplished. Bribery and corruption used to be rampant in Hong Kong. Open-air stalls, for example, were not allowed to operate unless they paid off the mob, and a portion of their “protection money” was then funneled to the police. With the help of a friend, Mrs. Tu photographed a gangster receiving payment as the police stood by watching, and had it published in the papers.



The people of Hong Kong enthusiastically applauded her actions. But her friends were shocked at how she had risked her life. They cautioned her, and told her that if she had not been a foreigner, she would already be dead.

Mrs. Tu did not get off completely unscathed, for her enemies hatched a plot to ruin her reputation. In the 1960s, during a period of unrest in Hong Kong, she was accused of having instigated antigovernment demonstrations. In fact, just the opposite was the case: she had tried to persuade a group of young people to cool down.

Some in Hong Kong call her a “strange foreigner” because she cares more for the Chinese than they do themselves.

Mrs. Tu was born in a coal-mining town in northern England in 1913. Her father was a tramcar conductor, and he earned just enough for the family to get by. They lived near the poor part of town, but her father was abundantly rich in spirit. He once told his daughter that it had been a stroke of luck that she had been born in a relatively affluent place like England, and that she could enjoy a life free of starvation and receive an education. She should be grateful for her good fortune, he stressed, and he told her that she should do something to help the poor and suffering in other lands. She should never look down upon the poor, he said; respect everyone equally. He urged her to be the ally of those in need, and to think of a way to serve them.



CORBIS/Bettmann



**H**er father had become an orphan at 11, at which time he was forced to quit school and start working. But Mrs. Tu says that he knew better than any scholar what was important in life.

Her strong desire to help others led her to a fervid practice of Christianity in college. After graduating from college, Mrs. Tu became an elementary and middle school teacher. When she was 35, she went to mainland China as a missionary with her first husband. A year or two after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, she moved to Hong Kong. Gradually she began to redirect her efforts from missionary work to education and social service.

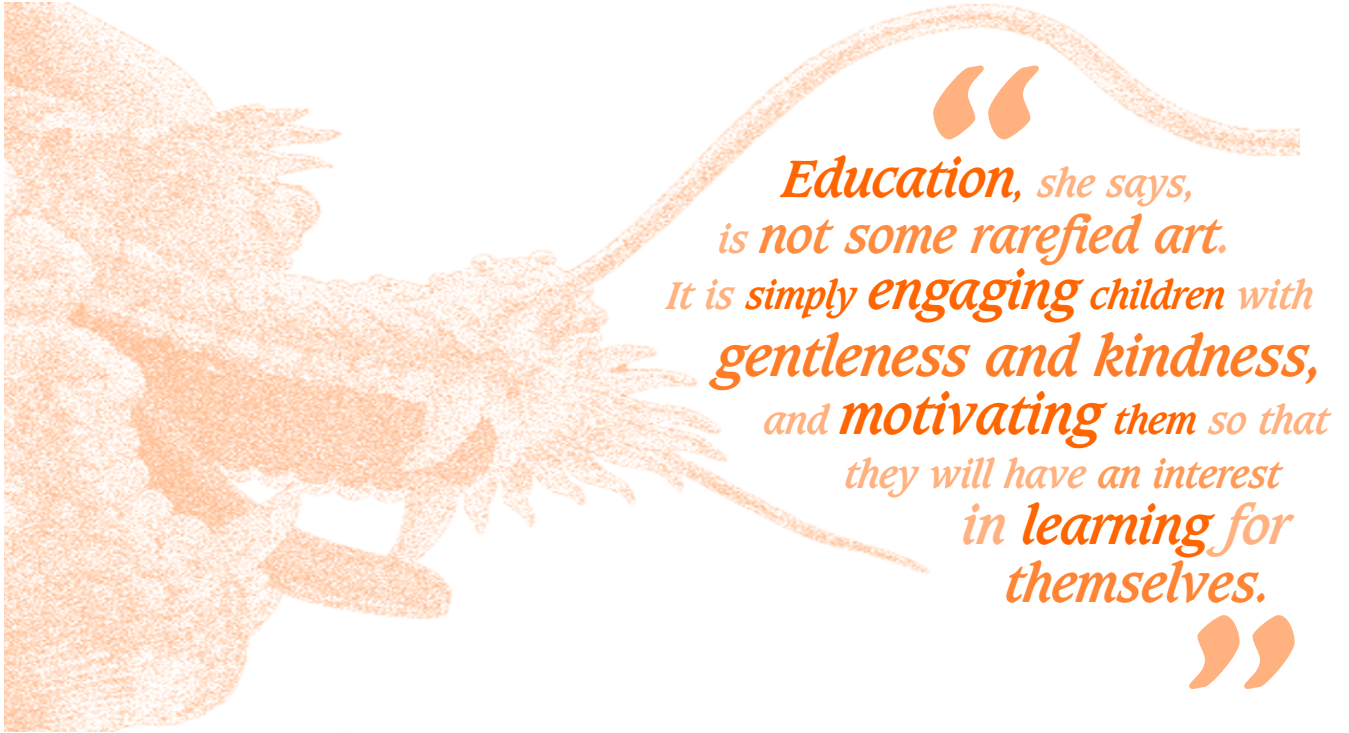
The first thing she did upon arriving in Hong Kong was to set up a tent among the wooden huts in the slums, where she began to teach some thirty children. It hardly qualified as a school. She used her earnings from teaching at other schools to take care of her students in the tent school—which today is the famous Mu Kuang English School, with 1,400 students. Though Mrs. Tu is the school's supervisor, she continues to teach. Education, she says, is not some rarefied art. It is simply engaging children with gentleness and kindness, and

motivating them so that they will have an interest in learning for themselves.

She doesn't believe in telling children what not to do; it only makes them want to do it, she has found—including smoking and using drugs. The important thing is to have a positive attitude when talking to children to give them hope and motivation. What she worries about most is whether children today have that sense of hope. She is deeply concerned about the decline in adults' sense of morality and the influence of the consumer culture, which is why she has such great hopes for the SGI's activities.

I invited her to Japan in the autumn of that year we first met (in 1974). I recall fondly our discussions about her concern for young people. She visited Soka University and the Soka Junior and Senior High Schools during her stay.

She is a humble woman, so she did not speak of her hardships, but it is easy to imagine the difficulties she must have had to surmount over the years as an advocate for the people. Day after day she walked the crowded back alleys of Hong Kong's slums, listening to what the poor had to tell her. She wanted nothing for



*“Education, she says, is not some rarefied art. It is simply engaging children with gentleness and kindness, and motivating them so that they will have an interest in learning for themselves.”*

herself, she feared nothing; her only desire was to see smiles on these people’s faces.

“Mr. Ikeda,” she told me in December 1983, when she kindly came to attend the Hong Kong SGI Culture Festival, “the busier I am, the healthier I seem to be.” I told her I knew what she meant, and it was no doubt because her actions were based on her strong sense of mission. “That’s probably true,” she replied. “When you don’t have anything to do, that’s when you fall ill. It’s good to be busy as long as you are of use to others.” she said with a smile.

When she cut the ribbon with me at the opening of the World Boys and Girls Art Exhibition in Hong Kong some seven years later, in February 1991, her eyes were just as bright and sparkling as ever. She showed no signs of aging. Viewing the pure-hearted and wonderfully expressive pictures of the children, she remarked to me that only adults go to war. There is no war in the hearts of children. The pictures made her ask herself, what legacy we could leave this new generation of children.

Mrs. Tu’s father was exposed to poison gas during World War I. Since childhood, her belief in peace has

been strong. She has no children of her own, but says that all her pupils are her children. And those children are spread all over Hong Kong—all over the globe. One day a young man gave her his seat on the subway and said, “Mrs. Tu, I was one of your pupils.” Those are the happiest moments of all, she says.

Children notice everything. The people notice everything. It may seem easy to fool the people, but in the long run, it is impossible to deceive those living honest, decent lives. Those are the very people who praise Mrs. Tu as “Hong Kong’s conscience” and “the mother of Hong Kong civil rights.”

Mrs. Tu herself says that she would far rather be known as a person who helped others than as a great or important person. And what a wonderful life she has led, too—a half-century of such service!

Her life is a perfect example of the lesson she has taught her students for years: “If you wish to find happiness, do good. Life is a one-way street with no turning back. Therefore, if there is something you can do for others, step forward and volunteer. If you put off that opportunity, you are letting your own chance for happiness slip away from you.” □

# *Youth Culture Festival Begins New Century*

Sept. 25 was the “first day of the 21st century,” as Jomo Thorne, SGI-USA junior high school division leader, put it. The 1st SGI-USA Youth Grand Culture Festival, held Sept. 25 at the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena, Calif., was the youth division members’ kickoff toward the new era.

The 700 youth performers took on all of human history. The show started with the past: humanity’s violent struggle against itself, depicted through reenactments of everything from the American Revolution to Nelson Mandela’s liberation in South Africa. There was the present: the youth of today taking a stand against the violent world they are growing up in—a world in which guns have even sneaked their way into the classroom. And

there was the future: Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the next generation of youth division members, emerging from the earth and expressing through music and dance their determination to take responsibility for our future.

A video presentation on three large screens above the stage also introduced SGI President Ikeda’s worldwide travels for peace, which segued into greetings of SGI youth from around the world and across the country. The festival closed with an original song, “Rise,” penned by SGI-USA members Wayne Green and Brian Potter, which summed up the youth’s resolve: “From the Earth / to the skies / to the stars / we will rise / our time is now.”

— JEFF FARR

## **Excerpt From SGI President’s Message**

**I**t is my conviction that we must make the 21st century a Century of Life. Humankind must focus its attention on the ultimate frontier, that of life itself. We must learn to pull forth from the depths of our beings that awesome spiritual strength that is greater even than the power of nuclear weapons.

It is you, my friends, who have taken the lead in this endeavor as the youthful leaders of a new renaissance who embrace, explore and put into practice a philosophy rooted in life itself.

Buddhism teaches that if you wish to know the effects that will be manifest in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present. In this sense, there is no doubt that each and every one of you is a person of profound and precious mission who will grow and develop extraordinary leadership.

Please know that I respect, trust and believe in you from the bottom of my heart.

No matter what kinds of troubles may assail you, no matter how long the days of frustration, you must not fear, and you must not give up. You have embraced the great, fundamental principle that governs the workings of the universe itself. Your way forward cannot and will not be blocked.

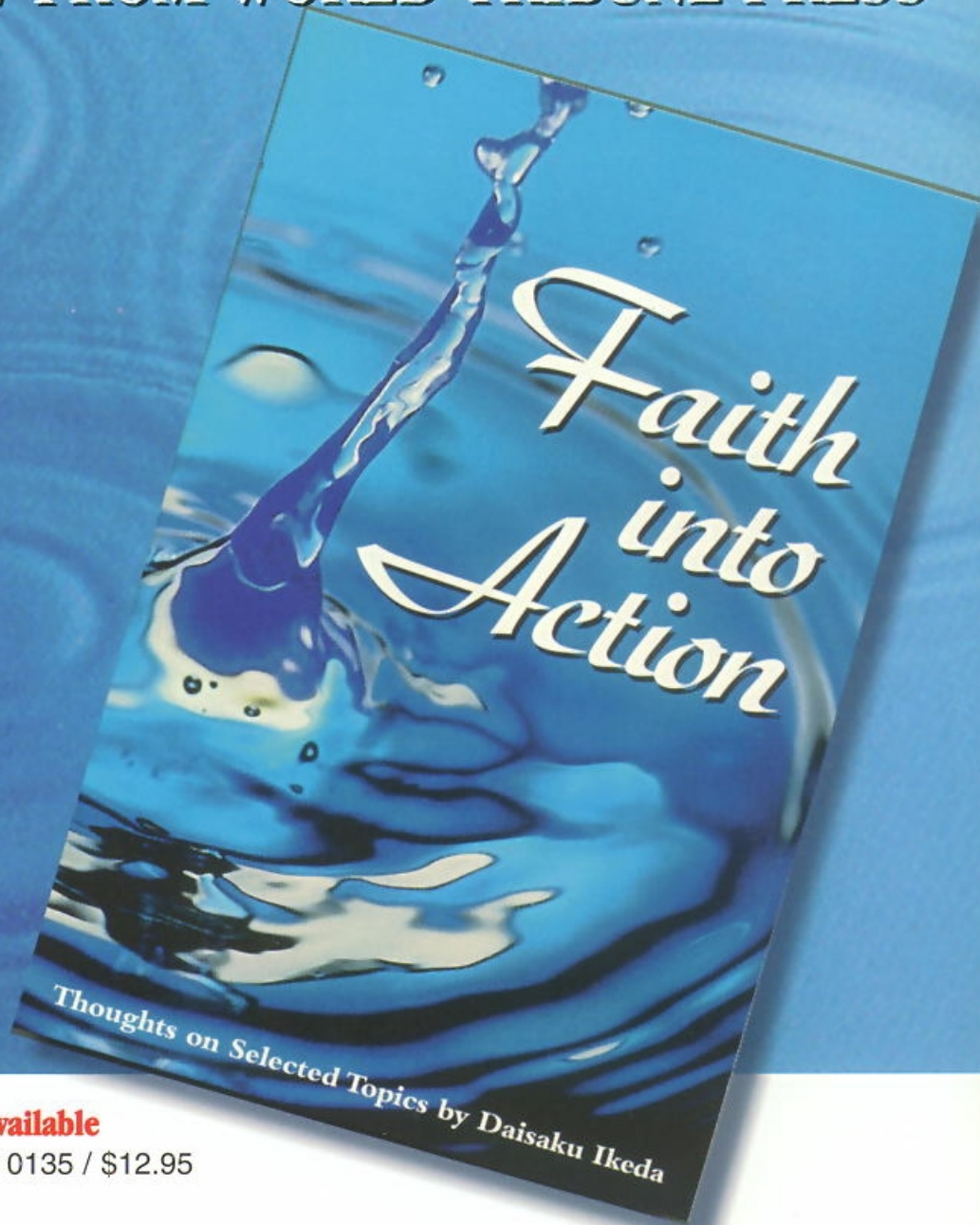
Photos by: Gregory Nakasuji, Robbie Evans, Lisa Hollis, Stephanie Sydney, Jean Pritchard, Martin Cohen, Don Hodgson, Ron Campise, Audrey Dempsey, Jan Sibert and Kenny Jackson.

# A Vibrant Dance of Successors Expressing Our Pledge for the 21st Century



Aging  
Appreciation  
Cheerfulness  
Family  
Love & Relationships  
Raising Children  
Success  
Victory  
Youthful Spirit  
Gongyo & Daimoku  
Mission  
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Prayer  
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Mentor & Disciple  
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# living BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION NOVEMBER 1999

## OVERCOMING PESSIMISM WITH THE LOTUS SUTRA

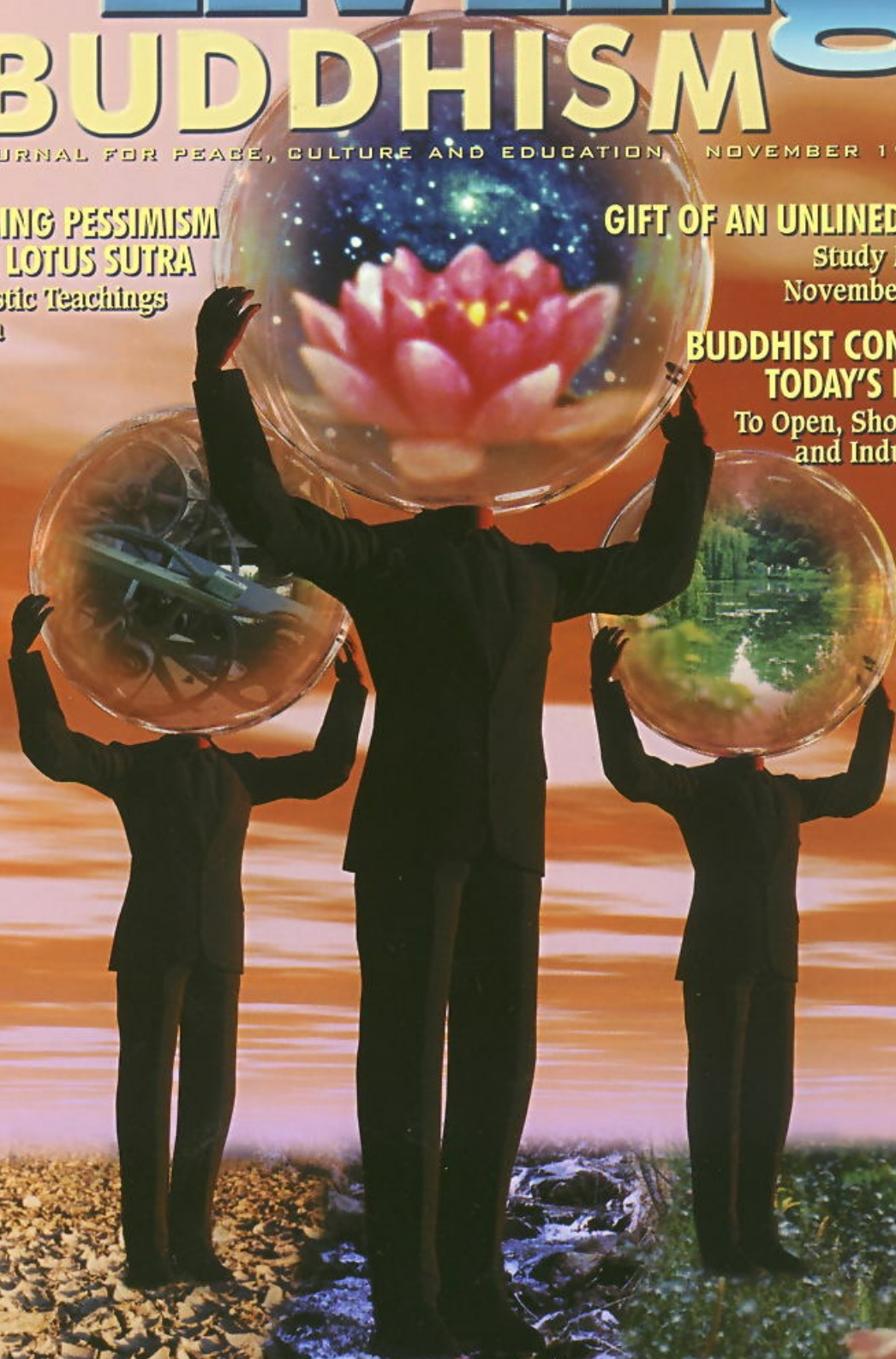
The Optimistic Teachings  
of the Sutra

## GIFT OF AN UNLINED ROBE (2)

Study Material for  
November/December

## BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (7)

To Open, Show, Awaken,  
and Induce to Enter





*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 enlightenment 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 term *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 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.