

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA (45) THE COMPLETION OF THE CEREMONY OF TRANSMISSION

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

Following Shakyamuni's transmission of the Mystic Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the preceding chapter, here, in the "Entrustment" (twenty-second) chapter, Shakyamuni completes his transmission of the Mystic Law by entrusting it to all the other countless bodhisattvas in the assembly. This chapter also concludes the Ceremony in the Air, with the venue of preaching reverting from mid-air to the summit of Eagle Peak. What does this shift of venue signify in terms of the bodhisattva way of life? Participants discuss what it means to dedicate oneself wholly to one's mission for kosen-rufu as a disciple.

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and, manifesting his great supernatural powers, with his right hand patted the heads of the immeasurable bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and spoke these words: "For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide." . . . The multitude of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas repeated these words three times, raising their voices in unison and saying: "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. Therefore we beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!" (LS22, 277-78)¹

FROM "THE RECORD OF THE ORALLY TRANSMITTED TEACHINGS"

This chapter describes how the Buddha patted the heads of the bodhisattvas and transmitted the teachings to them, insuring that this wonderful Law would remain in the world after he had passed into extinction.

And since this represents the transmission of the Mystic Law, all the living beings of the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms are bodhisattvas to whom this transmission is made.

Again, the fact that he patted the heads of the bodhisattvas three times indicates that he is using his hand, which is an implement of conversion symbolic of the threefold contemplation in a single mind and the three bodies of the Buddha, to bestow the bright jewel upon the heads of those who are converted.

Speaking in broad terms, this bright jewel bestowed on the heads of the bodhisattvas is enlightenment and understanding. More specifically, the bright jewel bestowed on the heads of the bodhisattvas is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (Gosho Zenshu, p. 800)

SUDA: Today we will discuss the "Entrustment" (twenty-second) chapter.

IKEDA: The “Entrustment” chapter is a chapter of transmission. “Transmission” here indicates succession; and “succession” defines the relationship of mentor and disciple. The “Entrustment” chapter could therefore, also be termed the “Succession” chapter or the “Mentor and Disciple” chapter. It is the “Mentor and Disciple of Kosen-rufu” chapter for accomplishing widespread propagation of the Law in the Latter Day. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda also felt this was a highly significant chapter.

SAITO: The term “entrustment” in the chapter title is composed of two Chinese characters. The first means to commit or leave something to someone with confidence.

The second means something that is difficult or cumbersome. The Buddha is thus saying, in effect, “laborious though it may be, I leave the work of spreading the Law far and wide to you, my disciples.”

ENDO: It really is a chapter of succession and of mentor and disciple.

IKEDA: From the standpoint of those who are entrusted, this is the chapter where disciples pledge to shoulder the hard work of propagating the Law. This defines the connection between mentor and disciple.

The mentor-disciple relationship is strict. Everything depends on how earnestly one can accept and act on even a single word of the mentor. A true disciple strives to actualize the mentor’s vision — not by mimicking the mentor, but by putting into action what the mentor has taught.

This is something of a digression, but once, when we were staying at the Hanazono Inn in Osaka, President Toda abruptly remarked: “I was just thinking, ‘What if I were to die today?’ and ‘What if I were to become prime minister today?’” He was quite serious. I remember it was early in the morning.

At that time of day, people are usually thinking, “Is it time for breakfast yet?” or “I’d like to sleep just a little longer.” But Mr. Toda was engaged in earnest contemplation. From that time forward, I took everything President Toda said as food for serious thought.

SAITO: To think, “Today I am going to die,” is to live with the spirit, “Now is the last moment of my life.”

IKEDA: The point is to have such faith that we can declare with utmost conviction, “Even if I were to die right now, I would attain Buddhahood.”

Of course, it is important that we live out our life wholeheartedly, working for kosen-rufu and fulfilling our mission. We should be confident that whenever we may die, even at this very moment, we will have no regrets in our faith, we will know that we have really given it our best, and that our enlightenment is certain. Though we should not be arrogant, such pride and conviction in faith is vital. This is how I took President Toda’s guidance.

Apart from faith, there is no way to attain Buddhahood in our present life, there is no way to experience the “greatest of all joys” (GZ, 788). This is something that we can only savor when we really exert ourselves for kosen-rufu — regardless of who may or may not be watching. It is important that we constantly keep watch over our own faith.

It is said that a person experiences 804,000 states of mind in a single day (GZ, 471). The heart is in a constant state of flux; 804,000 in a day is a phenomenal rate of change! During that time, how much are we thinking about kosen-rufu? About the Gohonzon? About the SGI or our fellow members? How much action did we take or not take?

The net balance of these determines our state of life. Faith is not a matter of formality. As Nichiren Daishonin states, “The heart is most important.”

ENDO: So our faith shouldn't be lukewarm or formalistic, but should be steadfast— informed by the awareness that “now is the last moment.”

IKEDA: As for Mr. Toda's other comment about becoming prime minister, as his disciple I believe he was talking about the importance of becoming trusted “pillars” in our own fields of endeavor and freely displaying our true strength and ability.

Buddhism is not a religion that exists for the sake of religion. It exists for the sake of society and real life. Faith is the source of energy that enables us to guide society and our lives in the direction of hope.

It is for that reason, Mr. Toda was saying, that as leaders in all areas of society, we must take action and show proof of our practice, causing people to say, “No wonder! That person practices Buddhism!” As leaders in the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu as well, we should become people who are appreciated for always lifting the spirits of others. In our broad struggle for kosen-rufu, it is important that we ask ourselves if we are becoming someone who can say, “In this area, you can leave everything to me. Please rest assured.”

In effect, President Toda was saying: “Develop and perfect yourself thoroughly in the realms of faith and your chosen field.” He was truly an insightful and wonderful teacher.

SAITO: President Ikeda, I feel you have really lived these words of President Toda. The many meaningful dialogues with world leaders you have participated in as a private citizen are a source of inspiration to people of conscience everywhere.

SUDA: The fact that you have received nearly sixty honorary doctorates and professorships from universities around the world is also remarkable.

IKEDA: My spirit is to always accept these honors on behalf of the first two Soka Gakkai presidents, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. They were both educators— educators who died fighting for kosen-rufu. Their good fortune flows to me and continues on; it passed from the first president to the second president, and on to the third president. This is the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is humanity's ultimate principle.

And my good fortune flows to my disciples. It is my fervent desire to share that fortune with everyone. President Toda's spirit was the same.

THE GENERAL TRANSMISSION TO BODHISATTVAS OF BOTH THE ESSENTIAL AND THEORETICAL TEACHINGS

ENDO: To summarize the “Entrustment” chapter, after the “essential transmission” to Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the preceding “Supernatural Powers” chapter, Shakyamuni rises and exhibits his great supernatural powers. He stands up and pats the heads of the countless bodhisattvas present, saying: “For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide” (LS22, 277). This is repeated three times.

SAITO: It's interesting that he touches their heads.

SUDA: As this chapter is about entrustment, it may be that in doing so he is urging them to do their best despite the difficulty of the task.

IKEDA: That may well be.

From his patting them on the head, we can also get a sense of someone encouraging a child saying, “You’re a good child, so please do your best.”

SUDA: Completely different from the transmission in the “Supernatural Powers” chapter, this is a gentle method of entrusting the teachings to the assembly, which now includes bodhisattvas of the theoretical teachings.

ENDO: This is, after all, a “general” transmission to bodhisattvas of both the essential and theoretical teachings.

SAITO: Shakyamuni must now accommodate the participants of even the lowest capacity.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni is most strict with the disciples whom he really trusts. He devotes himself wholeheartedly to their growth and leaves them everything.

President Toda said: “All those disciples with whom President Makiguchi was lenient gave up their faith and turned against him. Not once was I praised by Mr. Makiguchi. But I alone have remained and have carried on his teaching and succeeded him.”

I, likewise, received training from President Toda more strictly than anyone else. Day in and day out he made demands on me that could only be described as unreasonable. There were those disciples who felt that they enjoyed President Toda’s particular favor, or received special treatment from him. That is all well and good, but the important thing is actualizing the mentor’s intent.

People who merely try to imitate their mentor in terms of appearance or manner tend somehow to go astray. This was true in President Toda’s time, and it is true today. There is a unique path for each disciple, a path which lies solely in striving to actualize the mentor’s vision.

Going a little deeper, in patting his disciples on the head three times, Shakyamuni is exhorting them to put his thoughts, words and deeds—the three categories of action—into practice.

SAITO: The “Ongi Kuden” (*Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*) says, “The entrustment of the three pats symbolizes that the Buddha is entrusting to them the three categories of action, namely, actions of the body, mouth, and mind; the three truths; and the three views or meditations made possible by the three truths” (GZ, 772).

IKEDA: The disciples perceive the three kinds of wisdom in their hearts by practicing the teaching of the mentor through their thoughts, words and deeds. In other words, they awaken to the infinite world of Buddhahood existing in their own lives.

SUDA: So it comes down to action.

IKEDA: It’s a matter of propagation, of working for kosen-rufu. When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu in thought, word and deed, then everything turns into great benefit without fail. However, if we simply act like we are working for kosen-rufu, but harbor negativity in our hearts, we will, through our own attitude, erode our good fortune.

ENDO: In the Sanskrit text of the sutra, instead of patting the bodhisattvas on the head with his right hand, Shakyamuni holds their right hands in his. In other words, he shakes their hands. This is said to symbolize the idea that Shakyamuni, the mentor, does not have a “closed fist;” in other words, that he reveals all he knows without hiding anything.

IKEDA: Teachers of the Brahman caste derived their authority from “secret transmissions”

or “secret teachings.” I suppose that’s what is meant by having a “closed fist.” But Shakyamuni was different. Declaring, “At the start I took a vow,/ hoping to make all persons/ equal to me, without any distinction between us” (LS2, 36), he taught his followers the highest secret teaching, the Mystic Law.

SAITO: Buddhism is the first missionary religion in human history. Before Buddhism, while religions might have communicated a secret teaching to a highly select group of people, there was never a teacher like Shakyamuni who sought to share his own enlightenment with all people.

IKEDA: Such teachings are indeed “closed-fisted.”

SUDA: The Nikken sect, too, frequently refers to “secret transmissions” and “lineage.” In that sense, they sound like the Brahmans!

Fundamentally, there is no “secret teaching” more exalted than the Three Great Secret Laws. The transmission of the high priest ought to center around nothing other than the correct faith, practice and study of the Three Great Secret Laws.

ENDO: To accomplish the widespread propagation of the Three Great Secret Laws is, after all, Nichiren Daishonin’s will and testament. By rights, the high priest should take the lead in efforts for kosen-rufu, while bearing the brunt of attacks by the three powerful enemies. Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin, the second and third high priests, respectively, in fact did just that.

Just what kind of lineage is embodied by a high priest who not only fails to do this, but who actively seeks to destroy the movement for kosen-rufu? Such a high priest is transmitting not a “secret Law” but a “false Law.”

SAITO: If he were to open his “clenched fist,” we would find him empty-handed!

SUDA: Come to think of it, there’s a saying in India, “You cannot shake someone’s hand with a fist.” What it means is that peace can only be achieved through dialogue, not brute force.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni did not conceal anything from his trusted disciples. The “Entrustment” chapter demonstrates this yet again, for it is here that he unbegrudgingly leaves them everything.

SAITO: That’s true. It says:

The Thus Come One has great pity and compassion. He is in no way stingy or begrudging, nor has he any fear. He is able to bestow on living beings the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Thus Come One, the wisdom that comes of itself. The Thus Come One is a great giver of gifts to all living beings. (LS22, 278)

IKEDA: He is a “great giver of gifts.” And he is generous. After all there is no such thing as a stingy Buddha.

The Mystic Law is a horn of plenty. It is the “wish-granting jewel” of the Buddha. It is the treasure of all treasures. And since the Buddha hands over this wonderful gift in its entirety, there is no greater generosity. Even so, he is hated, vilified and persecuted.

SUDA: This is truly the evil age of the Latter Day.

ENDO: I am reminded of the experience of a member in Iwate Prefecture, Japan, by the name of Kiyomi Kumagai who lived in the town of Ichinoseki. From the time she joined the Soka Gakkai in 1955, until the day she died, she enabled nearly 140 families to take faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. What motivated her to carry out such earnest propagation activities is quite interesting.

She began practicing when she was told by a physician that she had only three years left to live because of stomach ulcers and heart disease. In just six months, she regained splendid health and left her sickbed for good. She then reportedly told a fellow member, "This faith is so wonderful, it's too good to share with anyone!"

The member then admonished her, saying, "What are you talking about? Do you mean to tell me that as long as you're okay, it doesn't matter what becomes of other people? Someone so lacking in compassion is no member of the Soka Gakkai!" Completely taken aback by these words, Ms. Kumagai at that moment determined to tell as many people about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism as possible.

Because of her absolute confidence in the Gohonzon and the care with which she looked after others, not one of the people she introduced to the practice abandoned faith, and many in fact became leaders. There was just one person of whom she lost track, but to the end of her life, Ms. Kumagai remained concerned about what had become of the person. What a remarkable achievement!

Her children all followed in her footsteps. Among them, they have helped a total of nearly fifty families begin practicing Buddhism.

On one occasion, Ms. Kumagai was presented with a commendation in your presence, President Ikeda—an event which she regarded as her greatest honor. And she died peacefully surrounded by many friends and well-wishers.

IKEDA: Ms. Kumagai is quite well-known. She worked in earnest for kosen-rufu. There are many such uncrowned kings and queens in the SGI. There is no world more noble than this.

THE BUDDHA FULLY REVEALS HIS "SECRET"

SUDA: Nichiren Daishonin says that if Shakyamuni had not expounded the Lotus Sutra, then he would have been guilty of the offense of begrudging people access to his true teaching (GZ, 15). In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni reveals his "secret and his transcendental powers" (LS16, 225) in their entirety.

IKEDA: Nichiren Daishonin describes this passage of the "Life Span" chapter as the "ultimate principle of the essential teaching." Its substance is the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the sutra's depths. He says:

The ultimate principle of the Lotus Sutra is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. All beneficial doctrines, both Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained, the practices and effects of all Buddhas throughout time and space, the cumulative benefit of all the passages and phrases of the Lotus Sutra—all of this is contained in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In concluding this sutra, the Hokke Mongu [chapter ten] says, "Speaking of the sutra as a whole, there are just four principles [name, function, entity and quality]. One grasps the crux of the matter and hands it on to others." The ultimate principle of the Lotus Sutra is none other than the daimoku that is entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices (GZ, 844).

We are spreading the “fundamental cause” that enables all beings in the universe over past, present and future to reveal their Buddha nature. This is exactly what is meant by “the secret of the Thus Come One.”

SUDA: The Lotus Sutra is generosity at its finest; it is the quintessence of free access to information!

IKEDA: It is a teaching of the highest compassion. President Toda used to say that someone who just practices on his own without making any effort to advance kosen-rufu is like a person who stashes away some sweets so that he can eat them later when no one is around. President Makiguchi also emphasized the importance of doing shakubuku, saying, “Unless you carry out bodhisattva practice, you cannot become a Buddha.” And he reprimanded the priesthood for having forgotten this spirit.

SAITO: Distinguishing between “believers” and “practitioners,” Mr. Makiguchi wrote:

If you just believe and offer prayer, you will receive benefit without fail. But this alone does not amount to bodhisattva practice. There’s no such thing as an egoistic Buddha who only seeks benefit for himself and does not endeavor to help others. Unless we carry out bodhisattva practice, we cannot become Buddhas. True faith, in other words, means spreading the teaching to others with the spirit of a parent toward his or her children. Those who do so are genuine practitioners.²

IKEDA: He says that we should spread the teaching with parental love. This makes it very easy to understand. To tell others about the Law with compassion like that of a parent toward a child—that is shakubuku. It’s not a matter of self-aggrandizement or self-advertisement, nor is it simply engaging in theoretical debate.

We should guide the other person with the same care of a parent giving milk to a fussy baby—always warmly, sometimes strictly, sometimes soothingly. When sharing Buddhism with others, if we allow ourselves to be pulled by someone into an emotional confrontation, sinking to that person’s level, then we are no longer behaving as an “emissary of the Buddha.” We need to firmly gird ourselves in the “armor of perseverance” (LS13, 194). On the other hand, asking someone to “please just give it a try” as if begging, amounts to degrading the Law. We need to have the attitude of a parent.

President Toda said, “Shakubuku means refuting the other person’s ‘evil mind’ and enabling them to obey their ‘good mind.’” A parent cannot look on in silence and watch his or her child enter a mistaken path that will lead to misery. There are times when a parent strictly scolds a child. Such strict compassion is shakubuku.

In a word, it is an act of the greatest justice and courage. It is not easy for people to exhibit compassion. Many people who claim to have compassion are actually hypocrites. That is why courage is a more apt word than compassion. To courageously speak about what is right is tantamount to compassion. Courage and compassion are like two sides of the same coin.

SAITO: This was expressed by the passage cited earlier from the “Entrustment” chapter that goes, “nor has he any fear” (LS22, 278).

MR. MAKIGUCHI'S NOTES

IKEDA: The spirit to oppose the evils of the world is the shakubuku spirit. Likewise, we must not sit back and allow injustice to exist within the world of Buddhahood. The spirit of shakubuku applies in each of these realms.

During the war, the authorities went so far as to send special police to monitor Soka Gakkai discussion meetings. If the talk turned to the Shinto talisman, they would immediately yell, "Stop!" President Makiguchi would then turn to other topics for a while, but as soon as he mentioned the talisman again, the police would quickly yell, "Stop!" Those present wondered why President Makiguchi would repeatedly bring up this topic, fully knowing that he would be censured. No one understood President Makiguchi's profound intent. His spirit remained dauntless; it was as if he was trying to practice shakubuku even on the authorities.

By comparison, now is a time of great freedom. Therefore, to fail to fight for kosen-rufu now is to be a coward.

While exhibiting the courage of a lion king, President Makiguchi showed great care and affection for each person. Love for others is the most important condition in a person who leads. This is crucial.

Mr. Makiguchi taught with utmost sincerity and kindness those who had just begun practicing and were unfamiliar with Buddhism. When talking with someone, he would often take out some paper and make notes as the person spoke. He did this in order to remember the person's situation. Constantly referring to those notes, he would continue to encourage the person until they had overcome their problem.

He would also write down appropriate passages from the Daishonin's writings or some words of encouragement on pieces of paper and give them to people. As this was before the publication of the Daishonin's collected writings or any Soka Gakkai publications, members would carry these notes with them as they engaged in propagation activities.

ENDO: In the "Entrustment" chapter, Shakyamuni entrusts all bodhisattvas, regardless of whether they are bodhisattvas of the theoretical or essential teaching, with the task of propagating the Law. Nichiren Daishonin describes this grand and solemn scene:

The essence of the "Entrustment" chapter of the Lotus Sutra is as follows: [Rising from his seat in the treasure tower] the Buddha stood in open space and, in order to transfer the Lotus Sutra, patted no fewer than three times the heads of Bodhisattva Jogyo and his followers, Monjushri and his followers, the great Brahma Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the dragon kings, the ten demon daughters and others. They had clustered before the Buddha as thickly as dewdrops, crowding the four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds, like the grasses of Musashino Plain or the trees covering Mount Fuji. They knelt close to one another, bent their bodies so that their heads touched the ground, joined their palms together, and streamed sweat. Shakyamuni Buddha patted their heads just as a mother strokes the hair of her only child. Then, Superior Practices, the gods of the sun and moon, and the others received the Buddha's auspicious command and pledged to propagate the Lotus Sutra in the latter age. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 911)

IKEDA: The Daishonin describes this scene with allusions to the "grasses of Musashino" and the "trees covering Mount Fuji." He was a poet.

SUDA: The bodhisattvas in this enormous gathering vow, “We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. Therefore we beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!” (LS22, 278). They repeat this three times.

IKEDA: How bold! How refreshing! Their mentor must have been delighted. It’s important not to cause the mentor to worry. The mentor already has concern for the disciples beyond their imagination.

The “Entrustment” chapter further says that those who spread the teaching “will have repaid the debt of gratitude that [they] owe to the Buddhas” (LS22, 278). The sole prayer of the Buddha and the mentor is for kosen-rufu. That is why exerting oneself in spreading the teaching is what it means to truly repay one’s debt of gratitude to one’s mentor.

To forget one’s debt of gratitude is not Buddhism; in fact, it is not the true way of humanity. Buddhism teaches how to live as a human being. A Buddhist must, therefore, be someone who is aware of and endeavors to repay his or her debt of gratitude.

SAITO: I think it is vital that we never forget our debt of gratitude to the SGI, which has taught us about the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Those who look down on the organization while themselves benefiting through their association with it are only bringing on their own downfall.

SUDA: We need to “respectfully carry out all these things” (LS 22, 278) exactly as instructed by the mentor. This means putting the mentor’s teaching into practice in its entirety, without injecting any personal bias. This is the path of a disciple.

ENDO: People nevertheless tend to make excuses, saying things like, “My mentor said such and such, but I’m in such and such a situation, so I can’t do exactly as he says,” or “My mentor says this, but the reality is this.”

IKEDA: That’s like cutting the power line between one’s mentor and oneself. To do so is to stop the flow of electricity, thereby preventing the manifestation of true strength.

The bond of mentor and disciple comes down to the awareness of the disciple. It’s not about formality. Meeting the mentor on numerous occasions, or spending time at the mentor’s side, or being entrusted with a leadership position—these are all form [rather than essence]. Even if someone is physically far away from the mentor, or has never had the opportunity to speak directly with the mentor, if they are aware of their role as a disciple and strive to put the mentor’s words into practice, then the mentor-disciple relationship is alive and intact.

How we define our relationship with the mentor is the foundation of everything. Organizational structures or positions are nothing but expedient means. Without this understanding, there will be grave consequences. It would be terrible if the world of mentor and disciple of Buddhism were destroyed, replaced by bureaucracy and formalism.

Even if one’s efforts go unnoticed or if one is only working behind the scenes, if one is practicing just as the mentor instructs, a profound bond exists between oneself and the mentor. On the other hand, if one deviates from this path, then no matter how much one may be in the spotlight, one’s efforts will amount to nothing. Apart from the path of mentor and disciple, there is no Buddhism.

According to the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China, one reason why the Lotus Sutra is superior to other sutras is that it reveals that the original relationship of mentor and disciple is “far more profound in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra than that in the

theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra and all pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.” This is an extremely important doctrine.

This is the third of the “three standards of comparison explained in the Hokke Gengi (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra). While the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra reveal only the mentor-disciple relationship with Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment during his present lifetime in India, the essential teaching (or second half) of the Lotus Sutra reveals the mentor-disciple relationship with Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past.

THE LOTUS SUTRA IS A GRAND “CEREMONY OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE”

ENDO: One gets the strong impression that the “Entrustment” chapter, in contrast to the “Supernatural Powers” chapter (where transmission is made to Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth), is a “transmission to the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching.” But the transmission in “Entrustment” is in fact a general transmission to all bodhisattvas, of both the theoretical and essential teachings.

IKEDA: That’s right. And Superior Practices is the leader of the assembly in this chapter, too. While in a general sense it appears to be a transmission to the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching, on closer examination we find that Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the central figure. The true meaning of Shakyamuni patting them on the head three times is that of placing the “gem” of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo on their heads.

SUDA: This brings to mind the parable of the priceless gem in the topknot of the king described in the “Peaceful Practices” (fourteenth) chapter.

After a battle, the wheel-turning king rewards those who have fought with various treasures. But there is one object with which he will not part, a priceless gem that he wears hidden in his topknot. Finally he takes the gem from his hair and gives it to the soldier who has fought most valiantly. The priceless gem represents the Lotus Sutra, which is the priceless treasure that the Buddha imparts (LS14, 207).

ENDO: In short, the “priceless gem” is the Gohonzon.

SAITO: The true intent of the “Entrustment” chapter is to exhort people to spread the Gohonzon.

IKEDA: Yes. It predicts the appearance of Nichiren Daishonin.

SAITO: The transmission to Superior Practices is referred to as the “transmission of the object of devotion” or the “transmission of the entity of the Law.” There are two transmissions of the Lotus Sutra. One is the transmission of the scrolls of the sutra — the transmission of the twenty-eight-chapter sutra for the sake of the bodhisattvas of the provisional teaching. The other is the transmission of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo of time without beginning for the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the entity of the Law that is the object of devotion of all Buddhas, the entity of the Law found in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter.

IKEDA: Through the ceremony of transmission, the sutra identifies and praises most highly the “person” who will uphold this Gohonzon in the Latter Day of the Law. The Lotus Sutra is Shakyamuni’s testament; he expounded it to explain who would lead humankind to enlightenment after his passing, and how they would accomplish this.

Specifically, this process begins in the “Teacher of the Law” (tenth) chapter with Shakyamuni’s appeals to the gathered bodhisattvas, and with the appearance of the huge Treasure Tower in the “Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter. Shakyamuni then raises the entire multitude into the air and calls out to them in a booming voice:

Who is capable of broadly preaching the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law in this saha world? Now is the time to do so, for before long the Thus Come One will enter nirvana. The Buddha wishes to entrust this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law to someone so that it might be preserved. (LS11, 176)

SAITO: The Ceremony in the Air continues from that point until its conclusion here in the “Entrustment” chapter.

SUDA: Shakyamuni, having heard the reply of his disciples that he need not worry about the future, instructs all Buddhas who have gathered there from the worlds in the ten directions to return to the lands from which they came. He then brings the Ceremony in the Air to an end with the words, “The tower of Many Treasures Buddha may also return to its former position” (LS22, 278).

ENDO: Seen in this light, it is clear that the reason for the Ceremony in the Air is transmission.

IKEDA: The Lotus Sutra in its entirety is a grand “ceremony of mentor and disciple.” To miss this point is to completely misunderstand the Lotus Sutra.

THE DYNAMISM OF “THREE ASSEMBLIES IN TWO PLACES”

ENDO: Incidentally, in extant Sanskrit texts of the Lotus Sutra, the chapter corresponding to “Entrustment” appears at the very end of the sutra.

IKEDA: We see the same in the Sho-hokke-kyo of Dharmaraksha (231–308?), another Chinese-language translation of the sutra.

ENDO: Some suggest that this is the original format of the sutra.

SAITO: I can see how the “Entrustment” chapter could logically conclude the sutra.

IKEDA: This topic requires some research.

SAITO: People have debated the chapter order since ancient times.

IKEDA: While this is certainly a matter for further investigation, I think it is clear that the current position of the “Entrustment” chapter adds a dramatic touch to the sutra. This is because it establishes the dynamism of the “three assemblies in two places.”

SUDA: That’s true. Prior to the Ceremony in the Air, the preaching takes place at the summit of Eagle Peak. After the Ceremony in the Air, the scene of preaching returns to Eagle peak. Hence, we have three assemblies in two places. If the “Entrustment” chapter concluded the entire sutra, we would have the less interesting structure of “two assemblies in two places”!

IKEDA: As we discussed previously [in connection with the “Introduction” (first) chapter], profound significance attaches to the three assemblies in two places. Through the overall framework of the Lotus Sutra, the move from the real world to the realm of eternal life (i.e., from Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air), and then back to the real world (from the Ceremony in the Air to Eagle Peak) indicates the rhythm of human revolution.

SUDA: We have a rhythm that alternates between two actions: that of “seeking the Way” and that of “guiding living beings.”

ENDO: This is analogous to the rhythm of our daily lives in which we go from the reality of life to the practice of gongyo, and then back to the reality of life and society with renewed vigor.

SAITO: The concept of dedicating one’s life (as expressed by the Sanskrit term *namas*) to Myoho-enge-kyo includes the sense of both “returning to” and taking action “based on” the Mystic Law.

IKEDA: Both of these are indeed essential, for only when our practice incorporates these two aspects are we truly devoting ourselves to Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. To “return to” means to practice for oneself, while basing one’s action on the Mystic Law means to practice for others.

It is when we fully integrate both the practice for oneself and the practice for others that we get in sync with the rhythm of the universe. These two ways of practice are like the two planetary motions of rotation and revolution. The more we advance in the “practice for oneself,” the more our “practice for others” develops. And as our “practice for others” advances, our “practice for oneself” deepens.

President Toda often said with regard to propagation: “The key is to earnestly pray to the Gohonzon. There is no other way to spread this Buddhism!” We need to pray that the other person will be able to sense our sincere desire for them to become happy. We have to pray: “Please enable me to fulfill my mission in this life as an emissary of the Buddha!”

Buddhism is a battle. President Toda was very strict when it came to winning or losing. During athletic events, Mr. Toda would go to the losing team and give them some words of advice. Somehow, that team would often end up winning.

But regarding shakubuku, he once said: “There may be some people who have a hard time doing shakubuku, perhaps because they are awkward with words or simply too good-natured. And that’s just fine but practice joyfully nevertheless.

“There are those who will nevertheless tell them, ‘You absolutely have to do shakubuku!’ But if someone just can’t do it, scolding them will not help in the least. If the person is appreciative to be able to practice to the Gohonzon, that is enough.

“The important thing is that the person be encouraged so that they can truly understand faith. When they really grasp the greatness of the Gohonzon, they will naturally tell others about the practice. And that itself is shakubuku.”³

SUDA: That makes sense.

IKEDA: We need to enjoy our efforts to carry out propagation, keeping a generous spirit and an open mind. And we should do so smiling brightly with pride and appreciation, aware that there is no higher honor than telling others even a few words about the Mystic Law during this lifetime.

If people are instructed to introduce a specific number of people, on the other hand, they will only feel burdened. It will cause them suffering. Everyone will feel heavy, which

will only hinder the kosen-rufu movement!

A leader's role is to enable everyone to enjoy their practice. But most leaders do just the opposite. We need to give people courage and hope. We need to applaud and encourage them with an open heart. It is of course important to set goals for ourselves. When we then pray for all members without exception to receive great benefit, our spirit will absolutely be conveyed.

To enable people to receive immense benefit, we must calmly discuss faith with them, saying, "Let's do our best together!" and "Let's enjoy vibrant health and live long lives!" and "Let's usher in a grand new century together!" When members encourage one another in this fashion, each person grows naturally, as does the entire organization.

Just praising the Mystic Law to others is itself splendid shakubuku. Whether or not the person decides to take faith is a separate issue. By simply talking to people about the Mystic Law, we receive benefit without fail.

It is the same with sports or playing the piano in that by making continuous effort, one's ability develops in time. Likewise, in doing shakubuku, if we tell people about this Buddhism whenever the opportunity arises, our good fortune from doing so will protect our family and our descendants.

Those who tenaciously carry out the practice of shakubuku develop a foundation of good fortune as solid and strong as concrete. No devil can destroy it. Those who avoid the practice of propagation, however, no matter how high their organizational position, are as superficial as plated metal and at the crucial moment they will fall apart.

SUDA: So the rhythm of the Lotus Sutra consists of both practice for oneself and practice for others.

ENDO: I can really see now the significance of having the "Entrustment" chapter follow the "Supernatural Powers" chapter.

BY HELPING OTHERS, WE HELP OURSELVES

IKEDA: By helping other people become happy, we too become happy. This is also a tenet of psychology. How can those suffering in the depths of hell, who have lost the will to live, get back on their feet? Merely thinking about one's own problems more often than not causes one to fall even deeper into despair. However, by going to someone who is also suffering and offering them a hand, a person is able to regain the will to live. Taking action out of concern for others enables us to heal our own life.

SAITO: By helping others, we help ourselves. This indicates the inseparability of self and others. In that sense, when trying to introduce another person to Buddhism, it is important that we humbly appreciate them.

ENDO: It is impossible to know just how much a parent's will to live is influenced by their anticipation of their child's growth and development.

IKEDA: These days, people seem to think that working for the well-being of others is somehow a lost cause. We are living in a world where even the mention of charity and compassion sometimes elicits cool derision. It is hard to imagine just how much suffering such arrogance is causing society.

An American missionary is said to have once asked Mahatma Gandhi: "What religion do you practice and what form do you think religion will take in India in the future?" How did Gandhi respond to this rather difficult religious discussion that had been thrust upon

him?

There happened to be two sick people in the room. Pointing in their direction, Gandhi replied simply: “My religion is serving and working for the people. I am not preoccupied with the future.”⁴

For Gandhi, politics was also a matter of service, of helping the most destitute. It’s all about action. Without bodhisattva practice, there is no religion. There is no Buddhism. Nor is there genuine politics or education.

SAITO: Several years ago, a scholar offered an explanation for the stagnation of Japanese society. He noted that until Japan’s defeat in 1945, the emperor system had served the function of “religion,” in that it provided social standards and a sense of national identity. After the war, in place of the emperor system, “Marxism and its intellectual progeny” fulfilled the role of religion. During the period of rapid economic growth of the 1960s, he argued, Japan’s sole desire to catch up with and surpass the advanced countries of the West became the country’s new religion. That religion came to an end with Japan’s success in becoming an economic giant in the 1980s and 90s. He concluded that unless Japan finds another new religion, it will inevitably decline into a society devoid of all standards.⁵

ENDO: Japan is certainly lacking in standards. It feels as if our society is coming apart at the seams and that anything could happen at any moment.

IKEDA: This is the tragedy of Japan, a country where people don’t pay serious attention to religion. It is for this reason that we have a tremendous mission.

The Daishonin says, “More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all” (WND, 851). To focus only on the “treasures of the storehouse”—the economy—will not improve the economic situation. Things may improve for a while, but this will ultimately not contribute to the welfare of society.

It is people, it is the heart, that matters most. The heart determines everything. Shakyamuni was the “great giver of gifts,” but propagation of the Mystic Law is to give people the ultimate “treasures of the heart.” When we possess “treasures of the heart,” when our lives overflow with good fortune and wisdom, we are naturally endowed with abundant “treasures of the body” and “treasures of the storehouse.”

SAITO: I think this is the most important point to be aware of for the twenty-first century.

IKEDA: What is left when our lives end? It is the memories that we have engraved in our hearts and minds.

I met the Russian novelist Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–84) when I visited Moscow (in 1974). He told me, “The longer we live, the more difficult it becomes to remember the painful experiences. As time passes, the colors of the events in our life fade and everything from the happiest times to the saddest starts to disappear from memory.”

After taking in a breath, with a big smile he continued: “When you turn seventy, Mr. Ikeda, you will know that what I am saying is the truth.” His words conveyed a wealth of feeling. Everything passes. Both the soaring joys and crushing sorrows fade away like a dream.

I would like to state, however, that the memory of having lived one’s life to the fullest never disappears. The memories of having worked wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu in particular are eternal.

“In my lifetime, how many people have I helped become happy? How many people can

say that it is because of me that they know true happiness?” In the end, is this not all that remains?

The Daishonin says, “Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world” (WND, 64). I think this could be taken as the conclusion to President Toda’s remark, “What if I were to die today?”

To be continued

Footnotes

1. 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.

2. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1987), vol. 10, p. 151.

3. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, p. 429.

4. *Tatsuo Morimoto, Ganji to Tagoru* (Gandhi and Tagore) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1995), p. 116–17.

5. From an article by Takamitsu Sawa in the magazine *Sekai* (World), November 1995.