

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA (48) DEVELOP THE COMPASSION AND WISDOM TO “PERCEIVE THE WORLD’S SOUNDS”

This is the forty-eighth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the January 1999 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, who is the central figure in the “Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” (twenty-fifth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, has been a popular object of people’s faith throughout Asia from ancient times. In this installment, the participants discuss how Perceiver of the World’s Sounds reveals an aspect of the function of the Gohonzon and the idea that the true benefit of faith in the Mystic Law is developing the great life force that enables us to overcome any adversity. They conclude that the “Universal Gateway” chapter is a doctrine of leadership emphasizing the importance of listening to the voices of the people.

DAISAKU IKEDA: What is it that most deeply touches a person’s heart? While there are various possible answers to this question, I would suggest that it is compassion and kindness. People who genuinely share the worries of others, who pray to overcome another’s problem as if it were their own, who really treasure others; who are compassionately strict, who are kind—these are the people others never forget.

Compassion is the basic prerequisite of a leader. This is all that really matters. To be a leader is to cherish and protect each person. The “Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter calls to mind the image of such a compassionate leader.

KATSUJI SAITO: Indeed, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds¹ displays a kindness that resembles motherly love.

A MOTHER’S WORDS CAN PROVIDE LIFETIME SUPPORT

TAKANORI ENDO: This bodhisattva is also sometimes referred to as the “merciful mother Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.”

IKEDA: We all think fondly of our mothers. I once heard a men’s division member recount the following:

When he was a child, he was one of many siblings in a poor family. His father drank heavily every day. His mother worked extremely hard, and she scrimped and saved even to cover the cost of his father’s drinking. What’s more, the father would frequently beat his wife and children.

Though very young, he was always being sent out to buy alcohol. One cold evening, when he was seven or eight, he was walking home alone with a fairly large bottle that he had had filled at the liquor store. Although he hated his father, he carried the bottle very carefully, telling himself, “This is sake that was wrung from my mother’s hard work.”

The bottle was large, and eventually his hands became numb from the cold. He was so close to home that he could see the lights. He must have averted his attention, and the

bottle slipped from his numb hands. The glass shattered, spilling the sake everywhere. He didn't know what to do.

With tears in his eyes, the boy approached the entrance to the house, but he could not go inside. Within he could hear his father shouting, "What's taking that boy so long!"

At that moment, his mother, perhaps hearing his sobbing, went outside looking very concerned. Thinking that he would be scolded, the boy instinctively retreated a step. Yet, upon learning what had happened, his mother simply hugged him and asked, "Did the bottle hit your feet? Are you injured? Since you're not hurt, there's nothing to cry about." And she gently rubbed his back.

The man reflected that his mother's kindness at that crucial moment became a source of support for him whenever he encountered a difficult situation. He added, "If at that time I had instead been scolded, I might have been deeply hurt." It seems that the awareness that there is someone who loves and cares about us unconditionally gives us the will to live.

ENDO: Indeed. I think it is this quality of motherly compassion that explains why Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds has enjoyed such popularity.

HARUO SUDA: The SGI treasures each member with kindness that is, in a sense, even greater than that of a parent. No matter what a person is going through, SGI members support one another, sharing each other's worries and offering encouragement.

ENDO: The actual examples of this are literally countless.

SAITO: That's why the SGI is so strong.

IKEDA: It is not because the SGI is held together by an organizational structure that it is strong, but because it is made up of heart-to-heart human bonds.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is so named because he listens with great compassion to all sounds and voices in the world, to the voices of suffering people, and he embraces and responds to them. He listens, understands and takes action in response to the true feelings of each person. Isn't this boundless kindness exactly what identifies Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds? This is why he is so widely revered.

SAITO: Certainly, this bodhisattva is so well known that, in the East, even people who have never heard of the Lotus Sutra are familiar with Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

SUDA: In India, China, Korea, Japan and many other Asian countries, no bodhisattva is more well known. And the number of shrines built to him also far exceeds those built to any other bodhisattva. People have continually entrusted their hopes to Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

ENDO: That's because he is said to save people from all dangers and difficulties at all times and in all places.

SUDA: Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is the superstar of the Buddhist world!

SAITO: He is so famous that in China he is revered as a Taoist deity. It seems that the attraction people have toward this bodhisattva transcends even the boundaries of religion.

KINDNESS IGNITES A LIGHT IN PEOPLE'S HEARTS

ENDO: It must be his kindness that people are drawn to.

SUDA: His face definitely displays warmth and gentleness.

IKEDA: Nothing is as powerful as kindness. Nothing can better win over a person's heart. No eternal flame is as strong or bright. Its brilliance illuminates people's hearts. It ignites the light of hope. Kindness is true "soft power."

SUDA: Yes. "Hard power" clearly does not attract people.

IKEDA: "Soft" means compassion, "power" is force. It is the force of compassion. The foundation of culture, peace and education is compassion—kindness toward human beings. The "soft" of "soft power" implies limitless kindness, which gives rise to limitless strength.

Also, underlying kindness is strength; without strength, we cannot be kind to others. Behind the beautiful kindness of Perceiver of the World's Sounds is his courage to seek and spread the Mystic Law without begrudging his life.

SAITO: Nichiren Daishonin in the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" and other writings cites the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China, who said that Perceiver of the World's Sounds and the Lotus Sutra are simply different names for the same thing. This implies that while the bodhisattva's name and the title of the Lotus Sutra are different, their spirit is one and the same; that both are expressions of the Mystic Law.

IKEDA: In fact, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds represents one aspect of the life of the original Buddha from time without beginning that is revealed in the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (sixteenth) chapter. He is symbolic of the boundless compassion of the original Buddha who is at one with the universe. Therefore, the life of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is not separate from that of the original Buddha from the remote past. If it were, he would be nothing but a lifeless shell.

ENDO: So to pray to Perceiver of the World's Sounds without believing in and accepting the Mystic Law would be putting the cart before the horse.

IKEDA: Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is encompassed in the life of the original Buddha from the remote past; that is to say, in the Gohonzon. The function of Perceiver of the World's Sounds is just a small aspect of the beneficial power of the Gohonzon—of the Mystic Law.

From ancient times, no chapter of the sutra has been as widely discussed or had as much written about it as the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter. There is even a history of people placing their faith in this chapter as an independent sutra. To this day people in various places continue to build statues of this bodhisattva. The Hannya Shin (Skt *Prajnaparamita-hridaya*) Sutra, which enjoys particular popularity in Japan, adopts a form of the preaching by Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

Despite the bodhisattva's popularity, many people have misunderstood the source of his power. The source of his power is the Mystic Law. It is in the transmission section of the Lotus Sutra—which includes the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter—that people are urged to propagate the Mystic Law after Shakyamuni's passing.

Of all Buddhist scriptures in which Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds appears, the "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds"

chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the oldest. It is here that the function of this bodhisattva is clearly established. The power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds to lead people to enlightenment derives from the Mystic Law; from Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the depths of the "Life Span" chapter.

ENDO: It would be pointless to worship Perceiver of the World's Sounds apart from the Mystic Law, the source from which his power derives. In fact, it would go against the bodhisattva's intention.

THE THEORETICAL TEACHING IS "LIGHT"; THE ESSENTIAL TEACHING IS "SOUND"

His pure light, free of blemish,
is a sun of wisdom dispelling all darkneses.
He can quell the wind and fire of misfortune
and everywhere bring light to the world.
The precepts from his compassionate body shake
us like thunder,
the wonder of his pitying mind is like a great cloud.
He sends down the sweet dew, the Dharma rain,
to quench the flames of earthly desires.
When law suits bring you before the officials,
when terrified in the midst of an army,
think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and hatred in all its forms will be dispelled. (LS25, 305)

SUDA: Let's look at the chapter's summary.

While Bodhisattva Wonderful Sounds of the previous chapter comes from a land to the east, Perceiver of the World's Sounds has by tradition been held to dwell in the west. Also, while Wonderful Sound produces sounds, Perceiver of the World's Sounds listens to voices. It seems that the two are therefore complementary.

IKEDA: In the essential teaching (second half) of the Lotus Sutra, we find many names that relate to sounds or voices. It's a very vocal group! Besides Wonderful Sound and Perceiver of the World's Sounds, there is Awesome Sound King Thus Come One ("Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" [twentieth] chapter), Cloud Thunder Sound King ("Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound" [twenty-fourth] chapter) and Cloud Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom ("Former Affairs of King Wonderful Adornment" [twenty-seventh] chapter). Voices also figure prominently in the "Dharani" (twenty-sixth) chapter. By contrast, in the theoretical teaching (first half) of the Lotus Sutra, there are many names that relate to "light."

SAITO: These include the Buddhas Sun Moon Bright and Burning Torch ("Introduction" [first] chapter), Flower Glow Thus Come One ("Simile and Parable" [third] chapter), Light Bright Thus Come One (Bestowal of Prophecy" [sixth] chapter), Universal Brightness Thus Come One and Law Brights Thus Come One ("Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples" [eighth] chapter) and Endowed With a Thousand Ten Thousand Glowing Marks Thus Come One ("Encouraging Devotion" [thirteenth] chapter.)

IKEDA: Light represents the truth of the "true entity of all phenomena." It is the eternal

and unchanging truth. Sound, on the other hand, represents action as an emissary of the original Buddha of the remote past. It is inexhaustible wisdom, which functions in accord with changing circumstances.

Also, according to one explanation, the fact that Perceiver of the World's Sounds is supposed to dwell in the west suggests that the bodhisattva's roots are with an ancient goddess thought to reside in lands to the west of India.

At any rate, the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter begins with an inquiry into the origins of this bodhisattva, who has been present at the preaching of the Lotus Sutra from the beginning.

ENDO: That's right. A bodhisattva named Inexhaustible Intent rises and asks Shakyamuni, "World-Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds — why is he called Perceiver of the World's Sounds?" (LS25, 298).

Shakyamuni replies that if there are beings who are experiencing suffering of any kind and they hear of this bodhisattva and single-mindedly call his name, "then at once he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will all gain deliverance from their trials" (LS25, 298–99). In other words, they will be saved just by intoning his name. The fact that his help can be gained so easily would seem to be one reason for the spread of belief in him.

INCONSPICUOUS BENEFIT IS INCOMPARABLY GREATER THAN CONSPICUOUS BENEFIT

Suppose someone should conceive a wish to harm you,
should push you into a great pit of fire.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and the pit of fire will change into a pond!
If you should be cast adrift on the vast ocean,
menaced by dragons, fish and various demons,
think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and the billows and waves cannot drown you!
Suppose you are on the peak of Mount Sumeru
and someone pushes you off.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and you will hang in midair like the sun!
Suppose you are pursued by evil men
who wish to throw you down from a diamond mountain.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and they cannot harm a hair of you!
Suppose you are surrounded by evil-hearted bandits,
each brandishing a knife to wound you.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and at once all will be swayed by compassion!
Suppose you encounter trouble with the king's law,
face punishment, about to forfeit your life.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and the executioner's sword will be broken to bits!
Suppose you are imprisoned in cangue and lock,
hands and feet bound by fetters and chains.

Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and they will fall off, leaving you free!
Suppose with curses and various poisonous herbs
someone should try to injure you.
Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds
and the injury will rebound upon the originator. (LS25, 303–304)

IKEDA: Of course, from the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, calling the name of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds means chanting the name of the “Nam-myoho-rence-kyo Thus Come One,” the original Buddha of the remote past who is the source of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds’ power. It is the practice of chanting daimoku.

SUDA: This means to chant daimoku wholeheartedly.

IKEDA: It is to single-mindedly pray “as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground” (WND, 444). An abstract or self-indulgent prayer to the Gohonzon will not elicit a response. But when we pray to the Gohonzon with our entire life, a path forward cannot but open.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “Those who attained enlightenment by listening to the six chapters from the “Medicine King” (twenty-third) chapter on are merely those who had remained unenlightened after gaining blessings from the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter (WND, 516). Citing this passage, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda would often say, “The ‘Perceiver of the World’s Sounds’ chapter is really nothing but the leftovers from the ‘Life Span’ chapter.”

Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the source from which Perceiver of the World’s Sounds derives his strength. Therefore, the Daishonin declares, “Now in the Latter Day of the Law, the chanting of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo by Nichiren and his followers is as superior to the benefit of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds as heaven is to earth and clouds are to mud.” (GZ, 776).

SUDA: The Daishonin is saying that even though the benefits enumerated in the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter are vast beyond belief, they cannot compare with the benefit of chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. This is quite a statement.

ENDO: The “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter starts out by expounding the benefit of being saved from the “seven disasters.” These are the disasters of fire, flood, rakshasa demons, attack by swords and staves, attack by yaksha and other demons, imprisonment, and attack by bandits.³

You will not be burned even in a great fire, it says. Even if carried away in a flood, you will be saved from drowning. Though you may set out on the sea in search of treasure and are washed ashore by a storm in a land of man-eating rakshasa demons, if one person on the vessel intones the name of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, everyone on board will be free from harm.

IKEDA: It is teaching the principle of standing alone. If even one person stands up in earnest, if one person of sincere and solid faith appears, it will benefit everyone who is part of the community in which that person resides, as their lives are interconnected. They can lead their family, their relatives, their community, society, and the people in the groups they are part of, all in the direction of happiness.

SUDA: The chapter also says that if you are about to be attacked with swords and staves, then Perceiver of the World's Sounds will break those weapons.

IKEDA: This pretty much describes what took place during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution (in 1271). The contemptible officials took Nichiren Daishonin to the beach at Tatsunokuchi where he was to be executed, but they were unsuccessful in their attempt. For that matter, in each of the persecutions the Daishonin faced, whether the Matsubagayatsu Persecution (in 1260), the Izu exile (in 1261), or the Komatsubara Persecution (in 1264), he wondrously escaped serious harm.

Of course, just as he counseled his disciples to do, the Daishonin himself exercised prudence in his activities (cf. WND, 1000). Also, listening with the ears of Shih K'uang and observing with the eyes of Li Lou (cf. WND, 33),⁴ he remained abreast of the happenings of society.

CARELESSNESS IS A FORM OF ARROGANCE

IKEDA: At any rate, to think that just because you are practicing faith everything will be automatically okay, or that things will somehow work themselves out is careless. It is also arrogant. Rather, we need to have the awareness, "Because I am practicing faith, I will make things work out. I will win!" "Because I am practicing faith, I will be careful to ensure that there are no accidents." Otherwise, we will run into problems.

It is probably inadvisable, for example, for young women's and women's division members to walk home alone late at night. We live in unsafe times. Women should exercise every caution, and be sure to get home as early as is reasonably possible. In the event that they cannot avoid being out late, I hope they will use common sense to avoid placing themselves in a dangerous situation, perhaps calling someone who can come meet them. Also, it is important not to cause one's family members to worry.

Men, too, should be mindful of the need for women to get home safely. I hope they will show them every consideration, perhaps seeing them home if the hour is late.

SAITO: Fundamentally, being protected by the Buddhist gods means protecting ourselves. As the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China indicates when he says, "The stronger one's faith, the greater the protection of the gods" (WND, 614), it is strong, fearless faith that spurs the Buddhist gods into action on our behalf. It is by possessing the determination of a lion king that we cause the Buddhist gods to function.

SUDA: The "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter says, "This bodhisattva can grant fearlessness to living beings" (LS25, 299–300). In other words, he gives them courage.

IKEDA: That's right. Strictly speaking, it is not that the Buddhist gods, or for that matter Perceiver of the World's Sounds actually protect us. We protect ourselves through the courageous faith not to shrink back from anything in fear. We are protected by the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds functioning within our own lives. It is faith, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and taking action for kosen-rufu that bring forth this power.

President Toda often said, "To simply yearn for benefit without devoting yourself to the Gohonzon is lazy and irresponsible." Those who pray with all their heart and struggle for kosen-rufu construct a bulwark of safety and tranquillity in their lives. Absolutely no effort in SGI activities is wasted. While it may not be immediately apparent, this is definitely borne out in time. We can appreciate this at the end of our lives. This is the Daishonin's

Buddhism.

SUDA: The “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter next explains that, even if an evil demon should try to harm you, you will not be injured. It also says that if a person, whether guilty or not, has been imprisoned in fetters and chains, his bonds will be severed and broken and he will be freed. It also assures that a merchant who is guiding a band of merchants carrying valuable treasures over a steep and dangerous road will be protected from attacking bandits (cf. LS25, 299–300).

SAITO: The verse section describes various other benefits, such as being saved even if pushed off a high mountain. It also says that, if someone tries to injure you with curses and poisonous herbs, “the injury will rebound upon the originator” (LS25, 304).

ENDO: This is the well-known principle of bad causes returning to the one who perpetrated them.

AN ACCIDENT-FREE AND TRANQUIL LIFE

Now in the Latter Day of the Law, the chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo by Nichiren and his followers is as superior to the benefit of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds as heaven is to earth and clouds to mud.

All in all, the word “perceiver” in the name Perceiver of the World’s Sounds indicates perfect perception. “World” indicates “wonder.” “Sounds” refers to the capacity for attaining Buddhahood. “Perceiver” is another name for the Dharma-realm because it stands for perfect perception already attained. And because Perceiver of the World’s Sounds is a perceiver of the true aspect of all phenomena, he can see and understand the different realms, such as those of hell, hungry spirits, animals and so forth, that make up this wondrous world.

“Sounds” refers to the sounds of the true aspect of all phenomena, and hence it means that there are no living beings that do not possess the true entity of Buddhahood. This has been referred to earlier in the “Life Span” chapter, where it was explained as the original state of the Ten Worlds and the three bodies with which the Buddha is eternally endowed.

The bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds has already received and accepted the Lotus Sutra. And now the practitioners who accept and uphold this sutra can receive benefits that surpass even those of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds. (GZ, 776)

IKEDA: All of these could be summed up as the benefit of achieving an accident-free and tranquil life. This is why the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter is also referred to as the “Chapter for Removing Misfortune and Prolonging Life.”

President Toda described these benefits in terms that we can easily understand, saying:5

1. If you are running a business and trying to earn a profit, some calamity may befall you. At such a time, if you place your trust in the Gohonzon, you can avert disaster.
2. If someone decides to cause you trouble or you experience a major loss, trouble will instead befall that person and your loss will turn into gain.
3. When you are experiencing suffering due to earthly desires or illness, if you place your faith in the Gohonzon, earthly desires will turn into enlightenment and the devil of illness will be powerless.

4. Should you fall from a cliff or have a car accident, if you believe in the Gohonzon, you will not be injured.
5. If someone tries to get you fired from your job, if you believe in the Gohonzon, that person will instead be forced to quit and you will keep your job.
6. If someone hates you or tries to harm you, if you have strong faith, they will have a change of heart.
7. Even if you face execution, if you have strong faith, you will be let off. This is what is meant by “the executioner’s sword will be broken to bits.” this is the principle that the Daishonin himself demonstrated.
8. Even if you face imprisonment, if you have strong faith, you will be exonerated and sent home.
9. If someone tries to poison you or if you are vilified, the perpetrator will find himself in the exact same situation. This is what is meant by the principle that the injury rebounds upon the originator.
10. Even in a powerful storm, those who have strong faith will not be harmed.

ENDO: Mr. Toda’s explanation is very clear.

IKEDA: It is kind to put things in a way that people can understand.

Anyone can make things complicated, but then no one will grasp what you are trying to say. This is not “perceiving the world’s sounds.” This is not what the Lotus Sutra teaches.

As is clear from President Toda’s explanation, the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter is documentary proof of the principle of “receiving benefit in this lifetime.” When we practice the Mystic Law, we receive all of these benefits without fail. This is the promise of the original Buddha. However, these all fall into the category of conspicuous benefit. That is, benefit that suddenly materializes at a critical moment. But it must be stressed that in this time of the Latter Day of the Law, while we certainly experience conspicuous benefit, it is inconspicuous benefit that is central to our faith.

Just as a seed will grow into a great tree with the passage of time, the branches of good fortune and benefit in our lives will thicken and produce abundant flowers and fruit as we continue to practice. This is inconspicuous benefit. A “tree of good fortune and benefit” that is thus rooted in the earth of life will not fall over. It stands firm even when buffeted by a fierce storm.

SUDA: This must be what is meant by benefit that is “as superior. . . to Perceiver of the World’s Sounds as heaven is to earth and clouds to mud..”

IKEDA: And that can be interpreted as the great benefit of attaining Buddhahood. President Toda characterized the state of Buddhahood as “absolute happiness” and as “powerful life force.”

To reiterate, when we practice Buddhism, we will absolutely experience conspicuous benefit of the kinds mentioned earlier. In particular, we gain wonderful benefit when we

first embrace faith and see our immediate sufferings resolved without fail. When we then advance further in faith with confidence gained from this initial experience, we can receive immense benefit. Next to this, our earlier benefit pales in comparison. This is the benefit of absolutely flourishing vitality.

ENDO: This is the human revolution.

IKEDA: Yes, our life is revolutionized. We become stronger and more vigorous. Instead of being controlled and pulled this way and that by hardship, we develop the fortitude to face our suffering head-on, take hold of it, and overcome it with composure.

To illustrate, if our life force is a magnitude of one, and we encounter a problem that measures a magnitude of two or three, we will likely be discouraged. However, if we strengthen our life force to a magnitude of a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand, such difficulties will be nothing more than minor distractions that we toss aside as we joyfully move ahead.

President Toda said: “In this world, we are restricted by all kinds of conditions—our relationship with our parents, our siblings, our friends, as well as material things such as clothing, housing, and taxes. This is the reality of our day-to-day existence. But when we tap into boundless life force, these cease to cause us suffering, and we can instead actually enjoy them. This is what we call ‘emancipation.’”⁶

“EMANCIPATION” MEANS ABUNDANT LIFE FORCE

ENDO: When we use the term emancipation, we are not talking about anything unusual, are we?

IKEDA: We mean obtaining the life force necessary to cast off the chains of suffering. Such abundant life force encompasses compassion and wisdom as well as good fortune and benefit. It is to be infinitely bright and kind. It is to live a life of boundless wisdom.

When your entire being is overflowing with vitality, this painful *saha* world turns into a world of brilliant joy. That is Eagle Peak. That is Mt. Potalaka—the place where Perceiver of the World’s Sounds is said to reside. Incidentally, since ancient times, a number of countries have designated certain sites “Mt. Potalaka.”

SUDA: Potala Palace in Tibet, for example, is named after this Mt. Potalaka. The successive Dalai Lamas are held by their followers to be incarnations of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.

From the standpoint of the original intent of the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter, any place where we take action with the immeasurable life force of the Mystic Law is Mt. Potalaka.

IKEDA: This great life force is itself what is meant by “peace and security in the present existence,” and it also becomes proof of “good circumstances in future existences” (cf. LS5, 99). Nichiren Daishonin says, “One should regard meeting obstacles as ‘peaceful’” (GZ, 750).

“Peace and security in the present existence” indicates the state of life to courageously battle and overcome any ordeal that might confront us, and thereby to secure faith that shines with still greater brilliance and force than before.

SAITO: Such benefit is truly unparalleled.

IKEDA: Though this wonderful state of life is available to all, many people don't seem to want it! Instead, they seem desirous of anything else, and content themselves with pursuing immediate gain! And then if they are subjected to the slightest insult, they begin to doubt the Gohonzon!

Praying with doubt is like trying to keep water in a bathtub with the plug pulled. Your good fortune and benefit will drain away.

A passage from the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" reads, "from thought to thought never entertaining doubt!" (LS25, 306). A confident prayer will reverberate powerfully throughout the entire universe.

The benefit we receive when we initially take faith is comparable to a small mountain. The boundless life force of Buddhahood is like a large mountain. On the way from this small mountain to the large mountain you have to pass through a valley. This indicates the three obstacles and four devils, and other obstacles of all kinds. Only by passing through this "valley" can we ascend the "great mountain" of Buddhahood.

ENTER THE GATEWAY THAT IS UNIVERSALLY OPEN

SAITO: The full title of the chapter we are discussing is "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds." "Universal Gateway" means a gate that anyone can enter. It is open to anyone. It is not a narrow passage; it is a broad and expansive portal.

IKEDA: Perceiver of the World's Sounds recognizes the "sounds" of all people's suffering. A leader should listen to people carefully. Men, in particular, ought to pay heed to what women have to say. A leader who doesn't listen humbly and attentively to others is not qualified to be called a leader. The same goes for men who don't listen to women. It is important that leaders listen with patience and equanimity.

ENDO: There are certainly those whose remarks come across as nothing but complaints.

IKEDA: The Latter Day of the Law is a time when people are full of complaint. A leader must simply hear people out. This is part of our Buddhist practice.

It is also important to create an environment where people feel free to talk about anything. No one will be happy if they find themselves in an environment where, as the saying goes, "not even demons will draw near."

SUDA: Good leaders in all fields, including politics and business, listen to the opinions of others.

IKEDA: One such leader in Japan was the great industrialist Konosuke Matsushita, the founder of Panasonic. Although he would excuse himself as lacking a formal education, he was in fact extremely erudite. He always lent an ear to what others had to say. In fact, it is well known that he would seek out the views of employees on matters in the workplace.

SUDA: For example, if he learned that a new product his company was selling was getting an unfavorable reception, he would go directly to the factory to investigate the cause with the technicians. If there were not problems with product quality, he would personally go to retail outlets and even meet with consumers to get to the bottom of the trouble.

Once when someone suggested that, given his standing, he ought to summon the responsible engineers or marketing staff to take care of such matters, Mr. Matsushita replied: "If I called in my subordinates, they would be nervous and would likely prepare

their replies before coming in to see me. They might even give me dressed up reports to try to humor me. Without any independent knowledge of the situation, I would have no alternative but to accept what they said. That's what I'm afraid of. Therefore, I go out to assess the situation for myself.”⁷

SAITO: Spoken like a true leader. While it is easy to listen to opinions that agree with one's own, it is difficult to listen to opposing viewpoints. The tendency is certainly to try to avoid views that we don't like.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO LISTEN TO “BAD NEWS”

IKEDA: It would seem that the ability to readily hear bad news is a key point that distinguishes a true leader from a tyrant. Tyrants appear proud in their power, but most often they are actually quite timid. For this reason, they cannot listen to others' opinions.

ENDO: History offers countless examples of people who failed precisely because they could not take “bad news.”

SUDA: Such accounts would fill hundreds of volumes.

ENDO: To take an example from the time of Nichiren Daishonin, one reason given as to why the Mongol invasions weren't successful was that information on the actual state of affairs never reached the Mongol emperor, Kublai Khan. Those around the emperor, fearing his wrath, did not accurately inform him that Japan had no intention of acknowledging fealty to the Mongols and that assembling sufficient ships to undertake the invasion of Japan would require enormous effort. So when he was instead told simply that the invasion could not take place because the sea between Japan and China was too rough, he was determined to prove otherwise. This is what led to his launching an ill-advised invasion.

SUDA: An outstanding leader actively seeks out contrary opinions.

Tai-tsung (Taizong: 600–49), the second emperor of China's T'ang dynasty, is known for his outstanding rule. His discussions with his ministers are collected in the work *Chen-kuan Cheng-yao* (Essentials of Government in the Chen-kuan Era).

IKEDA: This work is quite famous. Some have even said that it should be required reading for all leaders in East Asia.

SUDA: It is said that Tai-tsung was able to carry out such benevolent rule because he had devised a system for actively gathering “bad news.”

He created an official post, the holder of which was asked to actively identify mistakes on the part of the dynasty or regime. He also made it possible for people to express harsh criticism without fear of retribution.

IKEDA: If people simply sit on negative information, it will never reach the leader. Therefore, a leader must actively seek out such feedback.

SAITO: In Japanese history, too, there are similar examples. The case of the Kuroda clan in Hakata, Kyushu, is well known. The Kuroda clan made it a practice to hold unofficial conferences known as “divergent opinion meetings” where, in a departure from standard protocol, participants were allowed to say anything, even to criticize the lord of the clan. To have had such a system in a feudal age is most unusual.

IKEDA: Of course, it is likely that many of the opinions voiced in such a forum will be off the mark. But simply knowing that people have certain views becomes an important factor in reaching decisions.

I would like to reiterate that someone who does not have the magnanimity to listen willingly to even harsh opinions is disqualified as a leader. In that sense, I think we can interpret the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter as a doctrine of leadership.

SAITO: Perceiver of the World’s Sounds is a leader who is a skilled listener.

GOOD HEALTH THROUGH LISTENING AND SPEAKING

IKEDA: For those who are suffering, just being heard can help lighten their burden. Having someone warmly listen to what one has to say is in itself encouragement to go on.

Psychologists have clinically verified such effects. Studies have found that, among those who have been deeply affected by stress from the death of a loved one or some other incident, the percentage of people who can continue living in good health is extremely high for those who have someone in whom they can confide. By contrast, a high percentage of those who have no one with whom they can discuss their grief suffer from a variety of illnesses ranging from headaches to internal diseases.

Harvard psychologist David McClelland showed that people in crisis who are disposed to keep their deepest feelings buried inside release hormones that actually lower their immune system’s resistance to disease.⁸ And Hebrew University psychiatrist Gerald Caplan concluded that “when the stress level is high, people without psychological support suffer as much as ten times the incidence of physical and emotional illness experienced by those who enjoy such support.”⁹

ENDO: Human relations are quite literally lifelines.

SUDA: I think it’s also important to meet people face-to-face. One study found that the more time people spend on the Internet, the greater their chances of becoming depressed or feeling isolated.

SAITO: That’s ironic since one of the Internet’s main selling points is that it enables exchange of information and communication around the world.

SUDA: It seems that the purpose of this study, which was conducted in the United States, was to establish that the Internet is a viable and effective medium of exchange.

ENDO: But the results that they got were not at all what they expected.

IKEDA: I suppose that without human contact, there is no stimulation for our life.

SAITO: How fortunate we are to have the SGI organization!

IKEDA: We must not become isolated, nor must we isolate others. It’s important that we listen to what is in the hearts of those who are beset with worries. By doing so, we ourselves are in fact healed. When we welcome and encourage others, we ourselves are encouraged and our hearts expanded.

SUDA: It is certainly true that, even if your spirits are low, when you help others, your mood is naturally uplifted.

IKEDA: That’s because we are connected to those around us. When we start practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism, most of us are consumed just with solving our own problems. In

a sense, our faith at this stage may be comparable to that of someone turning to Perceiver of the World's Sounds for help. Of course, the fundamental difference here is that we put our faith in the Gohonzon.

At first, though, we essentially just want to be heard. Gradually our state of life grows to the point where we can listen to the troubles of others. We go from depending on Perceiver of the World's Sounds to ourselves becoming the bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

ENDO: This is a remarkable transformation.

IKEDA: That's the wondrous power of the Mystic Law.

THE LOTUS FLOWER OF BUDDHAHOOD EMERGES FROM THE SWAMP OF SUFFERING

IKEDA: Why does this change occur? In fact, the world of Buddhahood has already begun to bud within the life of someone who earnestly cries, through their suffering, "I want to become happy!" To discern this is the original meaning of "perceiving the world's sounds."

As we touched on earlier, with regard to the name Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Nichiren Daishonin says that "perceive" means perfect perception, "world" means wondrous and "sounds" refers to the capacity for attaining Buddhahood. He also says that "world" refers to the beings of the Ten Worlds:

"Perceiver" is another name for the Dharma-realm because it stands for perfect perception already attained. And because Perceiver of the World's Sounds is a perceiver of the true aspect of all phenomena, he can see and understand the different realms, such as those of hell, hungry spirits, animals and so forth, that make up this wondrous world. (GZ, 776)

The groans of beings in the world of Hell are also the sounds of a "wondrous world." They are sounds of the world of the Mystic Law. Because of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the world of Hell, just as it is, is an entity of the Ten Worlds and an entity of the world of Buddhahood. To recognize this is the perfect perception of Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

The Daishonin continues:

"Sounds" refers to the sounds of the true aspect of all phenomena, and hence it means that there are no living beings that do not possess the true entity of Buddhahood. This has been referred to earlier in the "Life Span" chapter, where it was explained as the original state of the Ten Worlds and the three bodies with which the Buddha is eternally endowed. (GZ, 776)

We need the ability to recognize the true entity of Buddhahood in the sounds of suffering of all people. It is precisely within the swamp of reality of all phenomena that the beautiful lotus flower of the true entity blossoms. All beings are lotus flower Buddhas, entities of Myoho-enge-kyo. To recognize this is to "perceive the world's sounds."

ENDO: Come to think of it, Perceiver of the World's Sounds is often depicted in statues as holding a lotus flower in his hand.

IKEDA: The lotus flower could be said to be a symbol of compassion.

The "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter says, "He views living beings with compassionate eyes" (LS25, 306). Viewing people with "compassionate eyes" is not the same as simply looking on them with pity. It is to view people with the awareness, "This person is in fact a Buddha. But he is suffering because he doesn't realize this."

People often suffer with such thoughts as: "This is too much," "It's all over," "I am the worst person," and "There is no point in living." We suffer because we seek happiness. The original desire of all people is to live a happy life. What is the purpose of a religion if it ignores these voices and discriminates among people?

If someone is suffering because of a failing business, for example, Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds responds to these desperate "sounds" and does everything he can to help that person. He guides the person to a more profound state of absolute happiness, to the world of Buddhahood. Perceiver of the World's Sounds expresses this compassion of the original Buddha from the remote past.

SAITO: He doesn't look down on the concerns of someone hoping for his business to prosper as "commonplace" or as "geared to immediate benefit."

IKEDA: He simply does not look down on others. Instead, he uses the person's "earthly desires" to lead them to the enlightenment of Buddhahood, changing those desires into the energy to advance. He clearly perceives the essential truth that the bud from which the tree of enlightenment grows is contained in the desperate cries of someone trapped in the painful throes of earthly desires.

SAITO: From this we can well understand the significance of the word "perceive" in his name. He doesn't merely listen to the world's sounds, but perceives their true significance.

ENDO: He doesn't listen with just his ears. He perceives with the wisdom of his whole life.

IKEDA: Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is described as having "the true gaze, the pure gaze, the gaze of great and encompassing wisdom, the gaze of pity, the gaze of compassion" (LS25, 305). Because he has such faculties, he earnestly embraces all people without disparaging the voices of any.

SUDA: In their voices, he perceives the capacity to become a Buddha, the "faculty of Buddhahood."

"RESPONSIBILITY" MEANS TO "RESPOND"

IKEDA: In any event, it is not easy to listen. Someone who knows how to listen humbly is by that virtue alone very wise. The Chinese character for "sage" means to listen with open ears to the sounds uttered by the universe. The virtue to be able to do this is called *so*, and is made up of a Chinese character which also includes the element for "ear." This means that someone who can listen is wise.

In particular, SGI leaders must sensitively respond to the voices of all the members. We must not be insensitive. And we have to respond promptly.

The English word "responsibility" is derived from the word "respond." A responsible person is someone who responds with great sincerity to the voices of the people.

ENDO: In that sense, it occurs to me that there are all too many irresponsible politicians.

SUDA: I can only imagine that their ears are basically clogged.

IKEDA: For precisely this reason, the people have to speak up.

Fundamentally, nothing is stronger than the voices of the people. Nothing is more real than the cries of the people. Nothing is more formidable than the anger of the people.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is said to freely manifest "thirty-three forms." The sutra explains that he can manifest as Brahma (Jpn *Bonten*), Lord Shakra (Jpn *Taishaku*), or in the person of a ruler. This indicates that there will appear without fail politicians with the mercy of Perceiver of the World's Sounds who perceive and hear the voices of the people. Again, we have to see to it that such leaders appear.

When the "cries of the people" influence and move society, true democracy will be born.

To be continued

1. Jp. Kan'on or Kanzeon, Chn. Kwan Yin or Kuan-yin, Skt. Avalokitesvara.
2. While there are indications that this bodhisattva is a woman, and, indeed, the bodhisattva's origins can be traced to fertility and water goddesses, there are very few references to female Buddhas or bodhisattvas in the entire Buddhist canon. Furthermore, images of the bodhisattva reveal facial hair, and the bodhisattva's name in Sanskrit, Avalokitesvara, is a male name. According to some views, while Perceiver of the World's Sounds was originally a goddess, the bodhisattva was turned into a man when inducted into Buddhism. Some argue that, in exhibiting both female and male qualities, the bodhisattva transcends sexuality.
3. Mythological beings who work to protect Buddhism.
4. Shih K'uang and Li Lou: Legendary figures in China famed, respectively, for their extraordinary hearing and vision.
5. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 162–63.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 164–65.
7. *Yonosuke Miki, Ketsudanryoku* (Power of Decision Making) (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1968), p. 28.
8. Julius Segal, *Winning Life's Toughest Battles: Roots of Human Resilience* (New York: Ivy Books, 1986), p. 20.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.