

## **DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA (52) TREASURING EACH PERSON IS THE CONCLUSION OF THE LOTUS SUTRA**

This is the fifty-second 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 May 1999 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

In “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy,” the twenty-eighth and final chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy arrives at Eagle Peak just before Shakyamuni concludes his sermon, and pledges to protect the sutra’s votaries in the Latter Day of the Law. This bodhisattva possesses the wisdom to encourage all people so that they may become happy. In this installment, the participants discuss the Soka Gakkai’s movement to expand the circle of mutual encouragement. They talk about the importance of treasuring each individual as one would the Buddha explained in the Lotus Sutra. They also touch on how to attain a state of freedom both in life and in death and how to bring forth wisdom.

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** I once gave strict advice to a particular leader. In front of everyone, he had berated a member for arriving late to a meeting. I was infuriated when I heard about this and said to him: “What gives you the right to scold that person? It’s outrageous. Didn’t that member take time out of his busy schedule to come and participate in the world of kosen-rufu? Shouldn’t we sincerely praise one another for attending meetings at all, and offer each other support?”

That was a long time ago, but the point is even more important today with our struggling economy. Every guidance or encouragement given without an understanding of a person’s financial situation or what’s going on at home will be empty. We must avoid formalism and never become authoritarian.

In some cases, it might be best to tell someone who has a hard time getting out of work early enough to attend an activity, “I’ll go to the meeting and let you know what is discussed, so please concentrate on your work.” Such consideration provides encouragement worth a million words.

At other times, a person might gain from hearing something like, “The basis for good fortune is created by giving our all in both work and Gakkai activities. This is your chance to change your karma. Let’s do our best together!”

Even strict guidance, as long as it is based on deep prayer and genuine concern for the other person, cannot fail to reach that person’s heart. Without compassion, however, it is just not possible to effectively say what truly needs to be said for another’s benefit.

The bottom line is that when we really care about someone, boundless wisdom wells forth. This is what the life of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy represents.

**KATSUJI SAITO:** Nichiren Daishonin says in the “Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings”:

In the name Universal Worthy, “universal” refers to the principle of the true aspect of

all phenomena, the essential and unchanging truth contained in the theoretical teaching [of the Lotus Sutra]. And “worthy” expresses the idea of wisdom, the wisdom that functions in accordance with changing circumstances, as contained in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 780).

**IKEDA:** The “principle of the essential and unchanging truth” indicates a fundamental principle upon which wisdom “functions in accordance with changing circumstances.” This function of wisdom is to create value. Without fundamental principles, everything becomes arbitrary and falls apart. On the other hand, just brandishing rules amounts to rigid dogmatism. Faith is what can bring the two together.

Faith means to develop a sense of responsibility to ensure that all people become happy without fail. To have such faith is to embody the spirit of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, to possess his “transcendental powers.” This is the driving force behind *kosen-rufu*.

[The “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” states: “It is due to the transcendental powers of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy that this Lotus Sutra is propagated throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa. Therefore, this sutra will be widely spread under the protection of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (GZ, 780).]

## PUTTING ONE’S WHOLE HEART INTO ENCOURAGING OTHERS

**TAKANORI ENDO:** The late Mr. Hiroshi Hojo, fourth president of the Soka Gakkai, once shared with me an incident that took place shortly after your inauguration, President Ikeda, when you were giving guidance to someone in your office. The member, who had been practicing for several years, was suffering from a lung disease. Since he was showing no signs of improvement, he had come to seek guidance together with his wife.

While you were talking, the phone rang and Mr. Hojo answered it. The call was for him, and so he continued to talk in a low but audible tone. Suddenly, you told him to be quiet.

Mr. Hojo, somewhat surprised, put down the phone, and you calmly said to him: “This person is suffering from a lung disease. When I give guidance to anyone, with the Gohonzon in mind, I put my whole life into encouraging that person. Someone who interrupts those interactions is behaving like the thoughtless Wei Yen.”

You were referring to the scene in the Chinese classic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in which Prime Minister Chuko K’ung-ming is making a final prayer after a long battle with illness. For seven days straight, a flame burned in honor of K’ung-ming. Wei Yen’s inconsiderate intrusion snuffed out the flames of both the fire, and consequently, K’ung-ming’s life.

Mr. Hojo recounted that your earnestness while encouraging just one person was unforgettable.

**IKEDA:** I’m sorry for losing my temper with Mr. Hojo! I was so direct with him because I knew he could handle it. If I were to be so direct now, I fear that everyone would disappear! In all seriousness, even though the times may change, we must never forget the strictness of faith.

With whomever I meet, I always put my whole life into each encounter, thinking that I may never have the chance to meet that person again. It has been the same with the

struggle to advance kosen-rufu around the globe. In the early days of our movement, no one believed that worldwide kosen-rufu could become a reality. But this is the prophesy of the Lotus Sutra and the decree of Nichiren Daishonin. My thoughts have been: “If I don’t take that first step now, a path forward will never open”; “If I travel the world now, planting the seeds of peace of the Mystic Law in each country, someday those seeds will bear fruit”; “If I open the way now, eventually others will proudly follow.” I have acted on the firm belief that youth will one day stand up with confidence, encouraged by the extent of my efforts.

From nothing—no funding, no support, no human resources, no time—we have forged a path where none before had existed. And now, true to my conviction, Bodhisattvas of the Earth have appeared in 163 countries around the world.

“Universal worthy” can be taken to mean enabling all people to tap their wisdom and become truly happy. The desire to help everyone we come into contact with is the spirit of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

## THE CORE TEACHING OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

**IKEDA:** Incidentally, I was reminded of the episode of the tardy member I relayed at the outset because Bodhisattva Universal Worthy was, in fact, tardy to Shakyamuni’s sermon.

**SAITO:** That’s right. He turns up just as the preaching at Eagle Peak is about to end.

**HARUO SUDA:** “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” is the last chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It abruptly begins with the statement, “At that time Bodhisattva Universal Worthy [. . .] arrived [at Eagle Peak] from the east” (LS28, 319).

**ENDO:** When he was in the land of a Buddha named King Above Jeweled Dignity and Virtue and heard that Shakyamuni was expounding the Lotus Sutra in the far-off *saha*<sup>1</sup> world, Universal Worthy traveled at once to Eagle Peak accompanied by “great bodhisattvas in immeasurable, boundless, indescribable numbers” (LS28, 319).

**SAITO:** Nichiren Daishonin paints an amusing picture of the scene, saying:

Probably fearing the Buddha’s displeasure at his tardy arrival, he assumed a serious expression and pledged in all earnestness to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age. The Buddha, no doubt pleased with Universal Worthy’s extraordinary sincerity in vowing to spread the Lotus Sutra throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa, thereupon praised him—more warmly, in fact, than he had earlier praised the other bodhisattvas of higher rank (WND, 915).<sup>2</sup>

**IKEDA:** That illustrates the scene very well. The sutra, of course, does not describe its psychological aspect. Based on his thorough understanding of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin explains this passage to a follower in terms she can easily understand. How great was the Daishonin’s compassion! He always gave himself wholeheartedly to encouraging people.

**SUDA:** Bodhisattva Universal Worthy entreats Shakyamuni to explain how people will be able to “acquire” the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha has passed away (LS28, 320).

**SAITO:** This is an important question.

From the “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” (twenty-third) chapter on—through the “The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound” (twenty-fourth), “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” (twenty-fifth), “Dharani” (twenty-sixth) and “Former Affairs of King Wonderful Adornment” (twenty-seventh) chapters—the preaching is consistently directed toward the practice of the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha’s passing.

The foundation having thus been laid, Shakyamuni relates the main point of the practice of the Lotus Sutra in response to this question from Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

**IKEDA:** That is why the Daishonin says of the “Universal Worthy” chapter, “This chapter constitutes a restatement of the Lotus Sutra” (GZ, 802). It is a final review of the entire sutra, so to speak. Shakyamuni is essentially summarizing the gist of the sutra as if to say, “This is the point! If you just remember this, you’ll be fine.”

### **THE SOKA GAKKAI MEETS ALL OF THE “FOUR CONDITIONS”**

**ENDO:** Yes. Shakyamuni first explains “four conditions.”

[He says: “If good men and good women will fulfill four conditions in the time after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, then they will be able to acquire this Lotus Sutra” (LS28, 320).]

The four conditions are: “First, they must be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas. Second, they must plant the roots of virtue. Third, they must enter the stage where they are sure of reaching enlightenment. Fourth, they must conceive a determination to save all living beings” (LS28, 320).

**IKEDA:** To sum up the significance of these four conditions, to be “protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas” means to be protected as a result of embracing and upholding the Gohonzon, which is the source of the enlightenment of all Buddhas—past, present and future. “Planting the roots of virtue” means to believe in the Gohonzon and chant daimoku for the happiness of oneself and others. Herein lies the source of all goodness. “Entering the stage where they are sure of reaching enlightenment” means joining in solidarity a group of people who are continually striving to advance and determined never to backslide in faith. Practically speaking, one cannot fulfill these conditions without being part of a harmonious body of practitioners who uphold the correct teaching. In modern terms, I am confident that these conditions are met by living out one’s life nobly as a member of the SGI organization.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda used to say, “The Soka Gakkai was called forth by Nichiren Daishonin himself.” The great flourishing of the True Law began as a result of the Soka Gakkai’s appearance at a time when that Law had nearly perished.

**SUDA:** This is a clear and undeniable fact.

**IKEDA:** President Toda had tremendous confidence. He stated:

I would like to make a declaration for the sake of the future. Apart from the faith practiced by the Soka Gakkai, there is none that accords with the Daishonin's spirit. Nowhere else can the true benefit of the Gohonzon be found. . . . Victory and defeat in Buddhism are very strict. Eventually everything will become clear. The Daishonin will never forgive those who pit themselves against the Soka Gakkai, whoever they may be. Without this conviction, I could not be president. Anyway, just watch and see what happens.

Why was he able to make such a bold declaration? Only because the SGI meets the Buddha's fourth condition of "conceiving a determination to save all living beings." Only the SGI is resolutely carrying out kosen-rufu.

**SAITO:** In other words, the SGI meets all essential points of the practice of the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni articulates—the Gohonzon, daimoku, harmonious unity of believers and the advancement of kosen-rufu.

**IKEDA:** Though you have omitted detailed doctrinal proof—yes, this is the conclusion.

**ENDO:** The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China correlates these four conditions with the concept of "opening, showing, awakening to, and inducing people to enter into the Buddha wisdom." This means ultimately giving people access to their Buddha nature.

**SUDA:** These are all encompassed in a life dedicated to working for kosen-rufu together with the SGI. How wonderful!

## **A VOW TO PROTECT PRACTITIONERS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA**

Universal Worthy, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period, if you see someone who accepts, upholds, reads, and recites the Lotus Sutra, you should think to yourself: Before long this person will proceed to the place of practice, conquer the devil hosts, and attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. He will turn the wheel of the Dharma, beat the Dharma drum, sound the Dharma conch, and rain down the Dharma rain. He is worthy to sit in the lion seat of the Dharma, amid the great assembly of heavenly and human beings. (LS28, 323)

**IKEDA:** Nothing is wasted in our struggle for kosen-rufu. All our efforts turn into great good fortune. Everything works to our benefit.

As long as we conduct our activities based on the Gohonzon, we will essentially reach no deadlock nor experience contradiction. The Gohonzon is the embodiment of the actual—as opposed to theoretical—principle of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life." The Gohonzon enables all people of the Ten Worlds to function as Buddhas, their lives illuminated by the Mystic Law.

I recall a time when I prayed with my whole being: "May all the people—though some may be in the world of Hell, Hunger, or Animality—join in the struggle for kosen-rufu! May they all become our allies!" "Universal worthy" means that all the people of the Ten Worlds can develop wisdom and dedicate themselves to creating value.

Also, *kosen-rufu* is a struggle undertaken while challenging the malicious and the wicked. I have come this far determined never to allow a single one of them to lay a finger on our pure and precious Soka Gakkai. I hope that everyone will share such resolve. This surely must be the spirit of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

**SAITO:** When he hears the four conditions, Universal Worthy vows, “In the evil and corrupt age [. . .] if there is someone who accepts and upholds this sutra, I will guard and protect him” (LS28, 320). He further pledges to “free him from decline and harm” and to ensure that no one will be able to “take advantage” of him (LS28, 320). He also says, “If that person should forget a single phrase or verse of the Lotus Sutra, I will prompt him and join him in reading and reciting so that he will gain understanding” (LS28, 321); and that “when the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas, who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence” (LS28, 322). He concludes his vows saying, “after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, I will cause it [the Lotus Sutra] to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end” (LS28, 322).

**IKEDA:** That’s right. What courage and hope this vow must have given to all who were present! How it must have lifted their spirits!

Bodhisattva Universal Worthy arrives from afar and calls out, “I will protect you, so do your best! Do not let anything defeat you!” This is the meaning of the word “encouragements” in the chapter’s title.

**SUDA:** It means to persuade others to embrace the teachings of Buddhism and to awaken them to faith.

**IKEDA:** It means to encourage and inspire others.

The components of the Chinese character meaning “encouragement” could be interpreted to mean “the power of ten thousand.” Truly, there is no greater force than encouragement. There is significance in the fact that the Lotus Sutra concludes with the encouragement of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

The SGI has successfully spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism to the extent it has precisely because it is committed to encouraging each person. People are not robots. No matter how strong a determination we have made, there will be times when we become disheartened. That is why I have given my all to offering hope and courage to people using all available means.

The world after the Buddha’s passing is an “evil age”. This is a time when good people are scarce while the wicked are many. Because the wicked are so numerous, it is only natural that the few good people will be oppressed. For that reason, unity is crucial, as is mutual support and encouragement.

**ENDO:** I imagine that the concrete forms of encouragement you have given to SGI members over the years, in the way of messages, *haiku* and *waka* poems, and calligraphy, must number in the hundreds of thousands. Including all the spoken words of encouragement you have offered, the amount is beyond calculation. Encouraging people to take action with such words as, “Don’t give up! Keep going!” you have inspired many.

## UTMOST SINCERITY MOVES PEOPLE'S HEARTS

**SAITO:** People tend to view the Soka Gakkai as a tightly organized group. But in fact it is not so much the organization itself that is strong, but the bond that exists between you, President Ikeda, and each member. I think our organization cannot be understood correctly if this point is overlooked. Ill-intentioned people, on the other hand, realize this fact, and so are concentrating their efforts on destroying this bond.

**IKEDA:** Putting talk of myself aside, in this day and age, it is absurd to think that people will take part in an organization simply because they've been told to. No organization has the power to coerce people into joining. Furthermore, any group whose members are acting against their own will cannot produce any lasting strength.

Treasuring each person is the only way to success. Victory is won where people cherish one another. This point cannot be emphasized enough.

There are instances when leaders encourage members, but then don't make an appointment to meet again. Without setting in place another time to meet, however, the member will not have a target. When a leader and member decide together to see each other, say, in two or three months time, then their determination to produce a result by the designated time will be solidified. This is what is meant by encouragement.

Once we make a promise to someone, we must keep it at all costs, no matter how difficult it may be. Kosen-rufu has advanced because of such consistent efforts based on utmost sincerity.

**SUDA:** I recall how once a long time ago, President Ikeda, you spent a long time encouraging a particular youth division member during a meeting. Repeatedly saying his name, you urged him to keep going. The person had in fact distanced himself from faith. Through your encouragement, however, his spirits were quickly restored.

But what really struck me was your remark at the end of the meeting when you said: "For that young man to come today, there must have been someone who went to encourage him. Who was that?" Several people raised their hands. Although they were all very busy, they had taken turns going over to see the young man. The way you immediately sense the efforts of those struggling behind the scenes made me reflect on my own behavior.

**SAITO:** I imagine that you can do this because of your own experience working tenaciously in supportive positions, out of the limelight.

**IKEDA:** I hope all leaders will serve and support the members in my place. Leaders must not be insensitive.

In Japan's past, people tended to view nonchalance and inattentiveness to details as a sign of greatness. But this is completely backwards. Buddhism exists solely in the realm of human life. Therefore, practicing Buddhism means helping others lead satisfying and fulfilling lives.

Leaders cannot be too perceptive. They should always ask themselves, "What does he need right now?" "Is she tired?" "Is she hungry?" "Is there something he wants to say? Something she needs to talk about?"

## FOCUS ON SUBSTANCE, NOT FORMALITY

**IKEDA:** When it comes to our Buddhist activities, unproductive meetings are only detrimental.

In the 1956 Japanese Upper House elections, we succeeded in electing our Osaka candidate to office but lost the election in Tokyo. At that time, President Toda strictly admonished us to “focus on substance, not formality.”

The SGI exists to help those facing hardship. Meetings are a means. It would be utterly pointless if the sole purpose of our organization was to conduct meetings. We need to go out and look for people who are suffering and organizational areas that have become deadlocked. That there are problems around is certain. Once we find them, we should go directly there and offer advice and encouragement.

When I meet someone, I do my best to encourage the person to the very end. Even if that person were to move to the remotest parts of the earth or take a little break from faith, I will do whatever I can to support him or her. And for those who are considering giving up their faith altogether, I want them to enjoy once again the amazing benefits of practicing the Mystic Law. I want to encourage them as if carrying them on my back or in my arms, or pulling them along. I want them to feel deeply just how wonderful is the benefit gained from exerting oneself in faith.

If others can sense our sincerity in wanting them to be truly happy, they will stand up on their own without a lot of pressure or prodding. The important thing is to pray so that our sincerity will reach them.

Also, when holding a meeting, we need to make sure we are prepared. Since those attending are all people with full calendars, we must plan the meeting so that they come with anticipation and leave feeling satisfied. Leaders should give serious thought to the agenda of the meeting, to the order of the speakers and to the content of the presentations, so that not a single person leaves thinking, “That was boring.”

There’s no rule saying that meetings have to be long. It’s probably preferable if a meeting can end early; the point is that meetings should be worthwhile. We are an organization dedicated to the creation of value, after all. This accords with the spirit to treasure each person. Every meeting is a struggle, and its outcome is either victory or defeat.

Along those lines, requiring members to make unnecessary reports only wears them out and is not concentrating on substance. Just dabbling with numbers produces nothing.

Of course, I’m not saying that we should not collect reports and data on matters necessary for the operation of the organization. The point is to create an atmosphere in which everyone enjoys participating and passing on the information. It is toward that end that we put our hearts into offering encouragement—so that people can happily report on their propagation efforts, saying, “I did it!”

## ADORATION FOR THE MYSTIC LAW

**SAITO:** T’ien-t’ai says that the term “encouragements” in the chapter’s title means “adoration for the Law.”<sup>2</sup> I think this is referring to a spirit of such longing and thirst for the wonder of the Mystic Law that one cannot help but recommend it to others.

**ENDO:** SGI members who understand the greatness of the Mystic Law and who feel compelled to share it with others are the very essence of such “adoration for the Law.”

**IKEDA:** Faith is to genuinely feel, “I love the Gohonzon,” “I love to do gongyo,” “I love SGI activities.” With such faith, we feel joy just for being alive and appreciation for our lives.

**ENDO:** In “Persecution by Sword and Staff” the Daishonin states, “As you crave food when hungry, seek water when thirsty, long to see a lover, beg for medicine when ill, or as a beautiful woman desires powder and rouge, so should you put your faith in the Lotus Sutra. If you do not, you will regret it later” (WND, 965).

**IKEDA:** Faith is a matter of the heart. It’s not about formality. Nor is it related to the length of one’s practice.

Benefit derives from a spirit to seek the Law. It might be that someone is extremely busy and has a difficult time participating in activities. Nevertheless, he or she makes an effort to attend meetings for even just thirty minutes, or devotes even a few hours a week to activities. It is that spirit which brings great benefit.

It’s also important that the situations of those people are understood and that they are offered support and encouragement. To reject people simply because they are not always present at meetings is the opposite of compassion. Those who always participate in activities, on the other hand, we need not worry so much about. Those who cannot attend regularly are in even more need of our encouragement, and we should think of the best ways to provide it for them. If we can do this, we will see kosen-rufu advance in leaps and bounds.

#### **Like the “Bond between Parent and Child”**

**ENDO:** In speaking of “adoration,” the Daishonin says that we should place our trust in the Lotus Sutra “as a woman cherishes her husband, as a man lays down his life for his wife, as parents refuse to abandon their children, or as a child refuses to leave its mother.” In this way he explains that “what is called faith is nothing unusual” (WND, 1036). Faith is nothing exceptional or out of the ordinary. Rather, it is the extension of our natural human sentiments.

**IKEDA:** The phrase about children not wanting to part from their mother brings to mind a story I heard about a child who was born prematurely. One week after birth, the baby’s condition suddenly deteriorated, and it would not respond to any stimulus from the nurse. Yet when they brought the mother into the intensive care unit and she called her child’s name, the baby’s heart rate suddenly increased. Life is truly a mystery.

The Buddha is constantly thinking of all living beings with immense compassion, just like that of this mother. Believing this, we should chant daimoku to the Gohonzon with sincere hearts, the way a child naturally runs to its mother’s arms. Also, the stronger our adoration toward the Law, the more encouraging we will be to others.

**SAITO:** It is certainly true that sometimes a single word from a pioneer member moves people far more than a thousand words from those of us in the younger generations with less experience.

**SUDA:** The depth of their conviction and concern for others goes much further.

**IKEDA:** That concern is itself the spirit of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy. It is a warm and passionate spirit.

In fact, I believe the Sanskrit term for “universal worthy” (*samantabhadra*) was originally an expression of praise for bodhisattva practice itself.

**SUDA:** Yes. It seems the term can also mean “broadly venerable,” “most wonderful” and “praised by all.” A Chinese translation renders it as “more wonderful than any other.”

A “universally worthy practice” means one that is supreme and altruistic. It is also held that Bodhisattva Universal Worthy personifies the “universally worthy practice” of the Buddha to benefit others.

## **THE WISDOM OF MANJUSHRI AND THE PRACTICE OF UNIVERSAL WORTHY**

**IKEDA:** It all comes down to practice. Bodhisattva Universal Worthy symbolizes practice. This corresponds to wisdom, which is symbolized by Bodhisattva Manjushri (Jpn *Monju*), who appears in the “Introduction” (first) chapter of the sutra. The wisdom of Manjushri is so well known in Japan that there is the saying, “Three heads put together equals the wisdom of Manjushri.”

The Lotus Sutra, which begins with a question from the wise Manjushri, concludes with Universal Worthy, who represents practice. This is because it is practice that will spread the Mystic Law expounded in the sutra throughout the world.

Manjushri and Universal Worthy are the two representative bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism. They stand watch over the Lotus Sutra like two guards. In fact, they protect Bodhisattva Superior Practices (Jpn *Jogyo*), who propagates the Mystic Law implicit in the sutra. In a way that anyone can easily understand, this indicates just how noble is the person who spreads the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

**ENDO:** These two bodhisattvas are indeed heroes of Mahayana Buddhism.

**IKEDA:** Shakyamuni later explains this when he says, “Universal Worthy, if you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha” (LS28, 324).

## **THE ULTIMATE TRANSMISSION**

**SAITO:** Nichiren Daishonin describes this passage as the “ultimate transmission” (GZ, 781).

This contains the ultimate transmission [of the Buddha’s teaching] chapter [“Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” of the Lotus Sutra]. Shakyamuni condensed the Lotus Sutra, which he preached over a period of eight years, into eight characters and left them behind for all living beings in this later age. These eight characters are rendered as: “[if you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra,] you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha” (LS28, 324). These words conclude the sutra.

The word “should” shows that these words refer to the future. The words

“should rise and greet him from afar” indicate that one should without fail show the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra the kind of respect one would show a Buddha (GZ, 781).

He is saying that if the entire Lotus Sutra, which was expounded continuously over a period of eight years, were to be summarized in a single statement, it would be that one should revere a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra who will appear in the future as one would the Buddha. To revere that person with “the same respect one would show a Buddha” means to revere that person as a Buddha. The true meaning of this statement is that a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law is a Buddha.

**IKEDA:** That point itself is the spirit of the entire Lotus Sutra. That’s why the Daishonin calls it the “ultimate transmission.” This means that in the Latter Day the Lotus Sutra is meaningless unless one reveres Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha.

On that premise, the Daishonin instructed that if one sees disciples with a direct connection in faith to the Daishonin who are dedicated to kosen-rufu, one should “rise and greet them from afar showing them the same respect one would a Buddha.”

**SUDA:** The priesthood, in trampling on the Daishonin’s declaration of this “ultimate transmission,” has completely betrayed him.

**ENDO:** In light of this one point alone, it is perfectly clear that what Nichiren Shoshu calls “transmission” has absolutely nothing to do with Nichiren Daishonin.

**SAITO:** Nikko Shonin, the second high priest to whom the Daishonin entrusted his teaching, clarifies this in his final “Admonitions.” In what represents firm dedication to the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple, Nikko Shonin says: “As for practitioners who treasure the Law more highly than their own lives, even if they are but humble teachers of the Law, you must hold them in great esteem, revering them as you would the Buddha” (GZ, 1618).

**ENDO:** This is the Soka Gakkai spirit.

**SUDA:** He is saying that those who exert themselves in sharing Buddhism with others are far worthier of respect than any person of high status.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. There may be those, however, who have a difficult time with propagation and whose efforts are not appreciated by other members. But if they truly respect and care for their fellow members, for the SGI and for the Gohonzon, and do activities to the best of their ability out of a desire to achieve kosen-rufu, then they are truly noble. They are emissaries of the Buddha.

No matter how they might be slandered or persecuted, in the end they will attain the state of Buddhahood without fail. This is clear when viewed from a long-term perspective. We can definitely see this over five, ten, twenty or thirty years, or over the course of a lifetime.

On the other hand, though some may hold high positions in the organization or become famous in society, if they lose their faith and their spirit of concern for fellow members, they will not be able to attain Buddhahood. And if members, who are the Buddha’s

children, are made to suffer on account of such people's lack of concern, then those people will naturally suffer retribution.

### **THE FIRST AND LAST CHARACTERS REPRESENT "LIFE" AND "DEATH"**

**IKEDA:** We must not forget that the final Chinese character of the "Universal Worthy" chapter means "departed." ["They bowed in obeisance and departed (LS28, 324).] This signifies death.

**SAITO:** After Bodhisattva Universal Worthy makes his vow to protect practitioners in the Latter Day, Shakyamuni praises him. Shakyamuni then tells Universal Worthy that since he himself will also protect future practitioners, Universal Worthy should revere them all as Buddhas.

**SUDA:** This brings Shakyamuni's preaching in the Lotus Sutra's twenty-eight chapters to a close.

**SAITO:** After that, all those in the great assembly at Eagle Peak rejoiced greatly and, embracing the Buddha's words in their hearts, show reverence to the Buddha and take their leave. This concludes the sutra. The Daishonin says that the word "departed" that concludes the twenty-eight chapters signifies death. He also explains that the first word in the sutra, "thus" expresses birth or life.

**SUDA:** I think that Kumarajiva (344–413) must have done this consciously when he translated the sutra from Sanskrit into Chinese.

**SAITO:** The Daishonin says that this signifies the two principles of birth and death.

**IKEDA:** It's a wonderful translation.

The *jigage*, or verse section of the "Life Span" [sixteenth] chapter, begins with the word *ji*, or "I," and ends with *shin*, or "body." The Daishonin explains this, saying, "It [the *jigage*] starts and ends with 'oneself' [because *ji* and *shin* form the word meaning 'oneself']" (GZ, 759). One's life itself continues over the eternity of past, present and future as the Buddha. This is the gist of the *jigage* teaching. These two characters directly express the fundamental intent of the entire section.

In a similar manner, the twenty-eight chapters in their entirety, from the first word "thus" to the last word "departed," express "life" and "death."

**SUDA:** The translator Kumarajiva was indeed a genius.

### **THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE IS COMPRESSED INTO ONE'S MIND**

**IKEDA:** Why, then, does "thus" (*nyo*) signify life?

**SAITO:** We have a hint in the Daishonin's statement, "When the Dharma-realm is compressed into a single mind, this is the meaning of 'thus'" (GZ, 782). Simply put, it seems that life, which is at one with the universe, is compressed into our individual

consciousness. We receive life in this world as an entity of the oneness of the macrocosm and the microcosm.

**SUDA:** “Thus” could be taken to mean “like”. In this sense, the Daishonin’s statement may indicate that “a single mind is *like* “The Dharma-realm,” that is, the universe. “Thus” also has the meaning “according to.”

**ENDO:** In the Judeo-Christian tradition God created people “in his image, according to his likeness” (Genesis 1.26). If God is viewed as the “cosmic life,” then there might be some point of commonality with the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

**SAITO:** The Daishonin also states: “The meaning of ‘departed’ is that [a single mind] spreads out into the Dharma-realm” (GZ, 782). The microcosm of our life opens to and dissolves into the macrocosm. At that point, we “depart.” This is death.

Of course, macrocosm, here, does not mean only the physical universe, but the universe of all life, of which the physical universe is a part. It is the Ten Worlds from Hell to Buddhahood.

**IKEDA:** When persons in the world of Hell “depart” this world, their life will melt into the world of Hell pervading the universe. For that life, the entire universe becomes the world of Hell. It’s not that Hell or any of the Ten Worlds exists in a particular location.

## EINSTEIN’S INTUITION

**IKEDA:** With regard to the meaning of the character *nyo* or “thus,” the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China states: “It is known that one’s body is comparable to the universe.” He identifies parts of the human body as resembling the sun and moon, mountains and rivers. This is explained in detail in “On the Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas Throughout the Three Existences” (cf. GZ, 567).

Also, as the Daishonin discusses elsewhere (cf. GZ, 693), our bodies can be viewed as consisting of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and space; with each of these further corresponding to the five planets — Saturn, Mercury, Mars, Venus and Jupiter; and to the five organs — spleen, kidneys, heart, lungs and liver, respectively.

The Daishonin explains that Myoho-enge-kyo is the foundation underlying all of these. In other words, both the macrocosm and the microcosm are entities of the Mystic Law, and so they are one.

We find comparisons between the macrocosm and the microcosm in ancient and medieval Western thought. In the modern age, while coming from a somewhat different angle, it seems that Einstein intuitively believed in the existence of a grand harmonizing principle in the universe. He remarked:

Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe — a spirit vastly superior to that of man. . . . In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort, which is indeed quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive.<sup>4</sup>

And:

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Propagation Study Sutra Treasuring

Everything is determined . . . by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust—we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper.<sup>5</sup>

**SAITO:** He was a man of great intuition.

**IKEDA:** Einstein believed that the idea of an anthropomorphic God should be abandoned because such a concept pits science and religion against each other.

## **TOTAL FREEDOM IN BOTH LIFE AND DEATH**

**IKEDA:** At any rate, the first and last chapters of the Lotus Sutra express the two aspects of life and death. This is evidence that life and death are the basic theme of the Lotus Sutra. In fact, the same can be said about each of the sutra's twenty-eight chapters. The title of each chapter signifies life and the conclusion of each chapter signifies death. Each chapter reiterates this theme of life and death.

The two phases of life and death are functions of Myoho-enge-kyo. When we uphold the Mystic Law and become one with it, for the first time we attain the state of life in which we enjoy total freedom in both life and death, a state where both life and death are joyful. The Lotus Sutra was expounded to enable us to achieve such a state.

There are many profound teachings concerning the two words “thus” and “departed,” and I would encourage everyone to look further into their meanings.

## **HUMANKIND'S NEED FOR COMPASSION**

**SUDA:** Until now, I had thought of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy as representing merely the power of intellect. But through our study of this chapter, it has become clear that this bodhisattva symbolizes the power of encouragement and the power of action. I have a completely new understanding.

**IKEDA:** Of course, Universal Worthy also includes intellect. He could perhaps be described as “intellect in action.” This is not simply knowledge or wit, but the light of intelligence to lead people to happiness. That is what makes him a bodhisattva. Concretely speaking, he represents intellect that is based on faith.

Religion that lacks intelligence becomes self-righteous. Examples of the harm brought on by such religions are too numerous to count. Intelligence alone will not produce happiness.

I am reminded of the unforgettable words of the champion of Korean independence, Kim Ku (Kim Gu; 1878–1949):

I want our country to become the most beautiful country in the world. I do not want our country to become the richest and strongest. . . . What humankind today lacks is neither force of arms nor economic strength. . . . We have already achieved a great deal in the natural sciences, making it fully possible for all people to live happily. The fundamental reason that humankind is miserable at present is the lack of humanity and justice, the lack of a spirit of compassion, the lack of love. If such a spirit could be developed, it would be possible, with the material resources existing at present, for

all two billion people on the planet to lead fulfilled lives.<sup>6</sup>

Kim Ku spoke these words after Korea had achieved independence. Korea had such a great statesman.

It is not intelligence, but intelligence infused with compassion that humankind lacks. It is true wisdom. Kosen-rufu is a movement to develop such wisdom.

**SAITO:** A scholarly book examining the SGI-USA organization was recently published in the United States. It is titled *Soka Gakkai in America: Accommodation and Conversion* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

*This work is by Phillip Hammond, a prominent sociologist, and David Machacek, both of the University of California, Santa Barbara.*

The authors note that while many Eastern religions have rapidly spread throughout the United States since the 1960s, groups regarded as dangerous because of “anti-social” leanings have foundered, while those not perceived as dangerous flourished for a short while. Of this second group, while the rest declined, the SGI alone has steadily continued to expand and become more firmly established in American society. In seeking to explain this phenomenon, the scholars conducted a survey of SGI-USA members. Among their findings, they note that eighty-six percent of survey participants cite either an interest in the goals and philosophy of the SGI or a positive feeling toward the people they met as their motivation for joining.

**SUDA:** Philosophy and character—isn’t this another way of saying intelligence and compassion?

**IKEDA:** When both are present, there is brilliance. People shine. And Buddhism shines, too.

## **WISDOM ARISES FROM A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY**

**IKEDA:** My endeavors to realize kosen-rufu do not derive from a narrow-minded desire to simply spread the religion that I practice. They arise from my conviction that the more people there are in the world who chant and uphold the Mystic Law, the more the world will move in the direction of peace. This will become clear in the long run.

If nuclear war were to break out, the earth would be destroyed. During the Cold War, in particular, no one could guarantee that a third world war would not occur.

This may sound presumptuous, but I have spread the teaching of the “Treasure Tower of Life” that is the Lotus Sutra throughout the world. While this movement has only just gotten under way, I believe the flow has been established.

President Toda used to say, “I am struggling right now for the sake of people two hundred years in the future.” This is exactly how I feel. I ask myself, “How can I guide humankind today, along with our children and grandchildren, in the direction of happiness and peace?” I have taken action with the attitude that I am carrying the world on my shoulders.

When I stood up with such a sense of responsibility, it was as though a gale of wisdom started to blow through my mind. I was able to seize the initiative.

**ENDO:** Your efforts to promote friendship with China and the Soviet Union, your many dialogues with leading figures in various fields, the cultural and educational activities of the Min-On Concert Association, Fuji Art Museum and Soka University—all of these must have been born from that wisdom.

**IKEDA:** It's not a question of whether or not one is intelligent. As long as one is earnest, wisdom will well forth without fail. That is why Bodhisattva Universal Worthy pledges that if a practitioner forgets a phrase or verse of the Lotus Sutra, he will appear to instruct the person. If we could not gain wisdom through our practice, then the "Universal Worthy" chapter, the entire Lotus Sutra, would be a lie.

There might be some who say, "I am practicing wholeheartedly, but I'm not gaining wisdom." It is usually in such cases, however, that the person thinks of him or herself as smart. If we think, on the other hand, "Well, I'm not that bright, but if this is all I can do, then I will be letting everyone down," and then chant with our whole being, there is no way that the situation will not change.

As long as we have the attitude deep down that "Surely someone else will take care of it" or "This has nothing to do with me," then the "transcendental powers" of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy will not appear in our life. When we stand up in faith, however, determined to do it ourselves, we are able to transcend our ordinary capabilities and take action that accords with supreme wisdom.

### **"THUS" AND "DEPARTED" INDICATE THE FAITH OF ONENESS OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE**

**IKEDA:** President Toda gave guidance on all kinds of matters during his lifetime. Hearing him speak, many people thought, "You say that, but the reality is different." I, however, listened to him and tried to accept everything he said. And I have put everything into practice exactly as he taught.

He once told me: "Whatever your position, always protect the Soka Gakkai." This was a single comment of my mentor. Even if, against all odds, President Toda were to have forgotten this himself, his having said it was a fact. Therefore, cherishing these words in my heart, I have at all times conducted myself just as he instructed.

Twenty years have passed since I retired from the position of the Soka Gakkai president. Because I am now honorary president of the Soka Gakkai, I am technically free of many responsibilities. Organizational positions, however, are only temporary, while faith is a lifetime issue, a matter of one's heart.

"Whatever your position, always protect the Soka Gakkai." I have endeavored to put my whole life into living my mentor's instructions. Oneness of mentor and disciple exists when one practices exactly as the mentor teaches. This is the Lotus Sutra. This is what it means to "practice the Buddha's teaching." This is the true meaning of "This is what I heard."

The word "thus" that starts the Lotus Sutra expounds the oneness of mentor and disciple. It is when we start to take action with the goal of realizing this state of "oneness" that we are able to "depart" from the fundamental darkness in our own lives. We "depart" from the sickness of earthly desires and delusions, and the sun of Buddhahood brilliantly rises within us. This is the significance of the final word of the Lotus Sutra, "departed."

The twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra passionately call on us to take action based

on the oneness of mentor and disciple.

1. *saha* world: A world full of sufferings. The sanskrit word *saha* means endurance. People in this world must endure many sufferings stemming from the three poisons and other earthly desires.
2. Editor's Note: All quotations by Nichiren Daishonin are from the newly published translation *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (abbreviated as WND) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), unless otherwise stated. The number indicates the relevant page number.
3. Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra (*Hokke Mongu*), vol. 10.
4. Albert Einstein, *The Quotable Einstein*, ed. Alice Calaprice (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 152.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
6. Kim Ku, *Pekupomu Iruji—Kim Gu Jijoden* (Baek Bum Ilji—Autobiography of Kim Ku), trans. Hideki Kajimura (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), p. 331.