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GLOSSARY

Buddha

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

Gohonzon

The fundamental object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. It is the embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, expressing in graphic form the life-state of Buddhahood, which all people inherently possess. *Go* means *worthy of honor* and *honzon* means *object of fundamental respect*.

Karma

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

Kosen-rufu

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

Lotus Sutra

The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members’ daily Buddhist practice.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo

The fundamental law expounded in

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

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82)

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

Shakyamuni

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

Ten Worlds

Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven (or Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. The Ten Worlds are also interpreted as states of life.

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Frequently Cited Sources

For convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:

— *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*: **WND**, followed by the page number.

— *Gosho Zenshu*: (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese) **GZ**, followed by the page number.

— *The Lotus Sutra*, by Burton Watson: **LS**, followed by the chapter and page number.

A MATTER OF THE *Heart*

F R O M T H E G E N E R A L D I R E C T O R

It is the heart that is important” (WND, 1000): I have been pondering this phrase from “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra” in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* for some time now. In this writing, Nichiren Daishonin tells his disciple Shijo Kingo that in all matters it is the heart of faith that will determine the outcome of his prayers.

Elsewhere in his writings, Nichiren Daishonin describes three kinds of treasure: treasures of the storehouse, treasures of the body, and treasures of the heart.

“More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!” (WND, 851)

Treasures of the storehouse are what we might think of as material well-being—financial prosperity and good circumstances. Treasures of the body may be thought of as good health, but this also refers to having a good standing in society. Treasures of the heart, however, are the most innate qualities of character—integrity, sincerity, courage, compassion, and so forth. In an essay on this passage, President Ikeda contrasts such treasures of the heart with outward measures of success: worldly fame, honor, status or wealth. In a book he wrote also named *Treasures of the Heart*, he urges us not to judge people by standards of worldly success; rather, develop the capacity to appreciate “the supreme value inherent within the life of the human being” (*Treasures of the Heart*, p. 150).

For many people, there appears to be a conflict between the material and the spiritual, between pros-

perity and altruism. But in Buddhism, inner richness and external prosperity are not thought of as opposing forces. Inner richness—“treasures of the heart”—is our primary goal. Developing such inner treasures enhances our capacity to use external treasures—money, status, talent—in the most valuable and humane ways.

Money, seen from this perspective, is a neutral factor, neither good nor evil. It is what we do with it that can be classified as good or evil. Our capacity to use money to create value determines if it has a positive or negative influence on us.

Nowhere do the Buddhist teachings imply that we must choose between “treasures of the storehouse” and “treasures of the heart.” Rather, when we base our practice on accumulating treasures of the heart, the pursuit of material wealth doesn’t rule our lives.

Instead, when we cultivate a supremely humane character, the treasures of the body and of the storehouse gain true worth in our lives. Money, status or reputation—rather than mistaking them for happiness, we view them as tools that help us to live lives of great worth and mission. Through cultivating positive relationships with others, achieving success in our personal lives, and engaging in meaningful work to contribute to the world, we prove the power and benefit of Buddhist practice.

Buddhism teaches the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds; the oneness of body and mind, of matter and spirit. In the Buddhist worldview, there is no fundamental opposition between the material and the spiritual. As we know from our Buddhist practice, personal development and spiritual growth are reflected in

The heart of offering is the heart of the bodhisattva. It is the heart of a person dedicated to helping their fellow members practice, a spirit devoted to contributing to the widespread propagation of the Law.

material improvements in our lives. By the same token, material offerings can have spiritual value. According to the Daishonin's writing "The Gift of Rice," material offerings support and sustain human life. In 13th century Japan, Nichiren Daishonin was able to sustain his life through the offerings of his believers. Those offerings were thus the embodiment of compassion and passion to support Buddhism. In contemporary terms, without material offerings, the activities of the SGI could not continue — we could not sustain our community centers and other facilities, and provide support for the members and activities in each area.

In that such contributions support activities that lead people from suffering to happiness, they are offerings of compassion. Such offerings express the spirit of a bodhisattva — the spirit of Buddhist altruism — and are a source of good fortune.

In commenting on the Buddhist parable called "the poor woman's lamp," President Ikeda states:

It is not the material worth of an offering but the spirit behind it that counts. The poor woman's [offering of a] single lamp meant far more than the five thousand barrels of lamp oil which Ajatashatru, the ruler of that country, donated to the Buddha. The little lamp contained the sincerity that a nameless woman felt with her entire being. A mind which attaches importance even to the slightest matters and which loves and treasures even seemingly insignificant things can profoundly move people even through a small action (*Treasures of the Heart*, p.5)

By the same token, our financial contributions to

the SGI organization express our appreciation and our determination to contribute to the advancement of kosen-rufu. Not only do such offerings express a generosity of spirit that is praiseworthy. Through the sincere act of offering, we make a cause to enrich our character and our compassion. In other words, through our sincere act of offering treasures of the storehouse, we accumulate treasures of the heart.

It is therefore my hope that any contribution we make for the sake of kosen-rufu and SGI-USA can be made with the awareness and prayer that it be put to the best use in enriching humanity through the Daishonin's Buddhism. Each person's contribution, regardless of the dollar amount, should be valued as a beautiful offering of the heart. After all, as Nichiren Daishonin reminds us again and again, it is the heart of faith and sincerity behind an offering that determine value.

I am deeply moved when I think of the sincerity of members who, every year, despite difficult personal circumstances, decide to contribute money to support the activities of their fellow members. At the same time, I know that the depth of their sincerity guarantees unfathomable good fortune in their lives.

The heart of offering is the heart of the bodhisattva. It is the heart of a person dedicated to helping fellow members practice, a spirit devoted to the widespread propagation of the Law. Thank you all so much for your tremendous sincerity and the example you have shown. "It is the heart that is important."



Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director

BUDDHIST COMPASSION

Removing Suffering and Giving Joy

The Daishonin Took the Sufferings of All Living Beings As His Own

There is a “self-centered” part of us that is constantly functioning—thinking first of ourselves, and then of others only when necessary.

This is not necessarily a bad thing; it’s an important part of being alive. When self-interest becomes the dominant force in our lives, however, it can cause us to act insensitively and even harmfully toward others. It has the potential to make us selfish and, if unchecked, even criminal.

On the one hand there are times, especially in emergencies, when failure to look out for ourselves may have catastrophic results. While we all have to solve our own problems, there are some problems that we cannot solve alone. We must rely on the help of others.

On the other hand there are times when, by extending a hand to others, we can help them in ways that they may not be able to help themselves. What is needed in such situations is compassion.

In Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts, including Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, the word for compassion comprises two Chinese characters. It is pronounced *ci bei* in Chinese and *jiji* in Japanese. The first character, *ci* or *ji*, is a translation of the Sanskrit word *maitri*, meaning “to give happiness.” The second, *bei* or *hi*, comes from the Sanskrit *karuna*, meaning “to remove suffering.” Taken together they describe the function of relieving

living beings of suffering and giving them happiness.

Almost anyone can feel kindness toward someone who shows them kindness. It is the spirit of Buddhism to develop a sense of compassion toward all people—toward any person. It is in this spirit that Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “The various sufferings experienced by all living beings are without exception Nichiren’s own sufferings” (GZ 758).

The Behavior of a Bodhisattva

The compassion of Buddhist enlightenment—the desire to “remove suffering and give happiness”—is expressed in the human behavior of a Buddha or bodhisattva. Nichiren Daishonin also writes, “Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him.” (WND, 358).

This statement makes it clear that anyone and everyone possesses the potential of a bodhisattva—the potential to behave with compassion toward another person. Yet, it is an ordinary human tendency to place concern for ourselves first and foremost. This may be the strongest human impulse. Furthermore, there long have been those who hold the view that compassion is a sign of weakness; that generosity only spoils the receiver of kindness.

There may be a grain of truth to this assertion. Kindness that does not empower the receiver creates little lasting value. From the Buddhist view, true compassion is that which has the power to root out the cause of misery in people’s lives and direct them to the cause of happiness. Such compassion by its very nature requires courage and strength.

“True kindness presupposes the faculty of imagining as one’s own the suffering and joys of others.”

How then can ordinary people, who are governed by the impulse for self-interest, express compassion in a constructive and meaningful way?

A natural example is the actions of a mother toward her child. A mother will do anything she can to protect her child, even if it means braving flames or flood.

The Kindness of a Parent

Nichiren Daishonin wrote, “I, Nichiren, am sovereign, teacher, and father and mother to all the people of Japan” (WND, 287). He made this statement to convey his state of life as the original Buddha—a state of life capable of embracing all people with the compassion of a parent toward his or her children.

Now this is not an easy thing. We sometimes even lose patience with our own children, let alone strangers. Since that is the case, most of us without assistance tend to be lacking in the quality defined as Buddhist compassion.

What can we do about it? Well, to state the conclusion first, we can expose our hearts and minds to the very state of compassion manifested by the Buddha. When we believe in and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, which embodies the compassionate state of life of the original Buddha, we stimulate and bring forth a source of boundless compassion latent within us.

Taking a lesson from the Daishonin’s writings, it is also useful to apply the model of a parent—or teacher—in developing compassion for others.

Any successful parent or teacher knows the importance of seeing things from the child’s perspective. They exert themselves in caring for and educating their children,

wanting to see them grow and develop their humanity. Such people transcend divisions of self and other to view the sufferings and joys of their children or students as their own. Constant is their concern for the children. Always thinking of them, they are eager to offer help, protection, and an opportunity to learn. This sort of concern will certainly reach the hearts of others, be they children or adults. The Nobel-prize winning French author André Gide (1869–1951) put it clearly: “True kindness presupposes the faculty of imagining as one’s own the suffering and joys of others” (*Pretexts, “Portraits and Aphorisms”* [1903]).

Compassion also includes the ability to recognize in others strengths and capacities that we ourselves may be lacking, and our wish to learn from those qualities. While it is easy to identify another’s weak points, it is harder than we may think to clearly recognize and appreciate that person’s strong points. If we focus on the strong points, however, we will naturally come to appreciate, feel closer to, and even develop a fondness for him or her. As a result, we may find ourselves thinking of that person more often and feeling concerned about his or her well-being.

We practice Buddhism for our own happiness and that of others. These two aims of faith cannot be separated. When our thoughts for others’ well-being become part of our daily prayer, we transcend the innate impulse to be concerned only with ourselves, and illuminate the fundamental ignorance that is the source of suffering with the light of our innate Buddhahood. ▣

By Jeff Kriger, managing editor, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study), published by the Seikyo Press in 1994.

Live Diligently and Proudly As Soka Gakkai Members

By Josei Toda

“No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality,” means that the Gohonzon and our jobs are inseparable. If we deeply understand the meaning of the Gohonzon, how can we slight our jobs? We should carefully ponder this matter.

The following is a translation of an essay by second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda. The original article was published in the December 1955 issue of *The Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai’s study journal, and reprinted in *Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 1, pp. 175–78.

The True Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind” reads, “Volume five of Great Concentration and Insight says, “The realm of the environment also has the ten factors. Thus an evil land has appearance, nature, entity, power, and so on” (WND, 356). Here “the ten factors” also refers to the ten worlds. Our nation of Japan is not excluded from “the realm of the environment,” so it also has the ten factors, and therefore the ten worlds. Which of the ten worlds then does the condition of our land reflect? Needless to say, it is an evil land. Immersed in the four lower worlds,¹ people are suffering beyond description.

We are all too familiar with how hard it is to live in this country. That is probably why many of us took faith. It is also why I pray morning and evening to the Dai-Gohonzon: “Please relieve the people of all their suffering.”

There can be no doubt that pure faith produces ben-

efit. However, if people are negligent at work, they will never succeed in their careers. It is a great mistake to imagine that as long as we have faith, benefit will appear and we will somehow become successful without exerting ourselves at work twice as much as others.

Iwant to strongly proclaim that each of us should devote ourselves to our work! In “Reply to a Believer,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by ‘No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality’” (WND, 905).

“Your service to your lord” means our jobs, and the “Lotus Sutra” the Gohonzon. The Daishonin’s intent is that we must consider our jobs as if they were the Gohonzon. If we are not diligent at work, then our negligence amounts to slander of the Law.

Those who feel no joy toward their jobs are like those who lack joy in faith. No matter how much they may chant daimoku, they cannot possibly succeed in society.

“Worldly affairs of life or work” indicates our jobs, through which we sustain our living as members of society, and the “true reality” is another name for the



There can be no doubt that pure faith produces benefit. However, if people are negligent at work, they will never succeed in their careers. It is a great mistake to imagine that as long as we have faith, benefit will appear and we will somehow become successful without exerting ourselves at work twice as much as others.

Gohonzon. The passage “No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality,” therefore, means that the Gohonzon and our jobs are inseparable. If we deeply understand the meaning of the Gohonzon, how can we slight our jobs? We should carefully ponder this matter.

As I mentioned before, our nation [Japan] is an evil land. Unless we work hard, exerting our utmost, we cannot live happily. Each of us must get out of debt and poverty as quickly as possible. We must cherish our work, think hard, and make every effort to succeed. If we work for a company or someone else, we should delve into and take delight in our jobs. It is important that we live with the resolve to fulfill our responsibility at work.

I sometimes hear that there are young men’s and women’s division members who dose off at work. What a shame this is for a member of the Soka Gakkai! I hope they will read “Reply to a Believer” not merely with their eyes or minds, but through their actions. I hear that there are such people among men’s division members as well. This is truly disappointing. I hope that all Gakkai

members will rid themselves of such attitudes and lead lives more exemplary than others in society. In other words, I hope that they will live diligently and proudly as members of the Soka Gakkai.

I want to reemphasize the Daishonin’s intent when he states: “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra.” We members of the Soka Gakkai must look upon our jobs as the Gohonzon, developing a sense of adoration and deep respect toward our work. Those who do so are in accord with the true Buddha’s intent and possess resolute faith. If we strive in our daily lives with this spirit and do not neglect our Buddhist practice, we are sure to be protected by the true Buddha. Please live diligently and proudly as members of the Gakkai, and win in your daily lives. □

1. The four lower worlds are the four lower states of the ten worlds, that is, the realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals and asura (a type of demon in Indian mythology). In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the ten worlds signify the states of people’s lives. Therefore, the four lower worlds represent the life-conditions of hellish suffering, hunger, animality and belligerence.

2. This passage appears in T’ien-t’ai’s Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra as a summary of the following passage from the “Benefit of the Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “The doctrine that they preach during that time will conform to the gist of the principles and will never be contrary to the true reality. If they should expound some text of the secular world or speak on matters of government or occupations that sustain life, they will in all cases conform to the correct Law.”

BEYOND IDOLATRY AND SELF-WORSHIP:

A Perspective on the Object of Devotion in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

By Shin Yatomi,
SGI-USA Vice Study Department Leader

The following essay is based on a presentation Mr. Yatomi delivered at the Florida Nature and Culture Center on January 28-30, 2000.

Introduction: No intermediary is necessary

Nichiren Daishonin stresses the individual and direct relationship between each believer and the Gohonzon—the object of devotion in the Buddhism he founded. In this regard, he writes to one believer: “No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith” (WND, 1000-01). The Daishonin makes it clear that each practitioner’s relationship with the Gohonzon must be without any sort of intermediary. To derive the ultimate benefit of Buddhism, we cannot depend on an external power that is separate from ourselves, or abilities of others.

At the same time, however, he encourages us to pray for the happiness of others as he, himself, constantly did. For example, to his persecuted followers, the Daishonin writes from exile: “I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground” (WND, 444).

While the Daishonin cautions us not to depend on someone else’s prayer, he encourages us to pray for the sake of others. From his seemingly contradictory statements emerges an essential point in the Daishonin’s Buddhism: Our faith must be self-reliant, but not selfish.

Those who become aware of this will naturally reject anyone or anything that tries to interpose itself between themselves and the Gohonzon—be it a figure of religious authority or a benevolent intercessor. Removing such obstacles is only half the step toward establishing a correct relationship with the Gohonzon. Our relationship with the Gohonzon must be individual and direct. But what is the nature of this direct relationship?

Why is the Gohonzon “out there”?

‘The Buddha nature’

To shed light on the nature of our relationship with the Gohonzon, it is important to consider why the Daishonin inscribed it in the first place. The Daishonin admonishes us: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself” (WND, 832). The Gohonzon depicts the Daishonin’s enlightened life and thereby represents the innate Buddhahood of all people. So when the Daishonin says that the Gohonzon exists within us, he refers to our Buddha nature. If we



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To see our own face, we need a mirror. Likewise, to perceive the supreme potential of Buddhahood within, we need something to reflect this ultimate truth.

already possess the Buddha nature, why do we need an external physical manifestation?

We often say that we all have the Buddha nature. However, if we look at this statement closely, we find that it is not as simplistic as it seems. The Daishonin explains the subtle difference between the Buddha and unenlightened people as follows: “When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha” (WND, 4). The Daishonin explains that Buddhas are those awakened to their Buddha nature. Once people become enlightened, however, their Buddha nature no longer remains innate or dormant. It is expressed in their thoughts and actions.

The Buddha nature, once manifested, becomes the “Dharma body,” indicating that it is a concrete part of a person’s being—both physical and spiritual. Manifesting one’s Buddha nature, in this sense, is different from mere intellectual understanding.

We do not know what we have until we experience it.

In the parable of “the gem in the robe”¹ from the Lotus Sutra, the poor man continues to live in destitution, unaware of a precious gem sewn into the lining of his robe by a friend. As far as this poor man is concerned, the gem does not exist until one day he reunites with his friend and is told of its existence. Similarly, we would not truly “know” that we have the Buddha nature until we become Buddhas.

In this sense, the statement that all people have the Buddha nature is made from the standpoint of a Buddha. For example, someone who can lift only forty pounds, theoretically, may know that they can potentially lift 300 pounds. It is only after working out and developing the strength to actually lift the 300 pounds, that they know for certain. Attainment of the goal is because of belief in one’s potential, even though, at times, there was doubt. The same thing can be said of any substantial challenge or accomplishment in life, and certainly of our Buddhist practice. Although we hear or read that we all have the Buddha nature, all we can do is place our belief in this supreme potential and continue our Buddhist practice. When we break through our doubt and delusion and reveal the great compassion, wisdom and life-force of Buddhahood, we become certain of that potential. At the same time, we become certain that others have it too. The key is to maintain our faith in our Buddha nature.

The Daishonin created the Gohonzon as a physical representation of our innate Buddha nature to establish a concrete reality we can believe in. If the Buddha nature remained an abstract notion, it would be extremely difficult to believe. To experience it, one must believe in it. It is in this context that the physical reality of the Gohonzon serves to enhance our faith. If we had nothing concrete upon which to focus our faith, we might have difficulty directing our practice and efforts toward bringing that nature forth. What we are seeking would not be so clear. The Gohonzon in this sense serves both; as an object of faith and as a concrete reality that encourages us to develop faith in our inherent Buddha nature.

To have faith, we need something to have faith in. Belief only begins to have meaning where there is something to believe in. Those who believe in their potential and aspire for enlightenment are called the “Bodhisattvas of Initial Aspiration.” This aspiration to awaken to and reveal one’s Buddhahood is a starting point in one’s journey toward enlightenment. Practice to the Gohonzon arouses such aspiration for Buddhahood and gives it concrete meaning.

The Concept of ‘Dependent Origination’

In the course of a day, you may experience many emotions. On your way to work, if an SUV cuts in front of you on the freeway or someone steps on your foot in the subway, you may experience anger.

You may think the whole day will turn out to be unpleasant. If you meet your boyfriend or girlfriend for lunch, you may experience tender affection.

Our emotions—or states of being, to be broader—manifest themselves in the context of our relationship with our environment. We cannot just get angry for the sake of getting angry; we need something to be angry about. We cannot just smile; we need a reason to smile.

All phenomena arise in the context of their complex relations with one another. Nothing happens purely on its own accord. Put simply, this is one of Shakyamuni’s central teachings, “dependent origination.” Within our lives we have a potential (or cause) for various states of being: joy and sorrow, love and hate, hope and despair. No state of being can manifest itself on its own accord. Life expresses a certain condition in response to relationships with others or the environment. Whether or not a particular state of being is manifested depends on the kind of relation we form with our external surroundings.

In this regard, it is important to remember that our state of being, or “life-condition,” is not an automatic response to a certain type of relation or stimulus in our environment. We don’t always react the same way when the same person does the same thing. For example, when something unfortunate happens, it can stimulate us to express courage or despair, depending on the nature of our relationship to it. Similarly, what if there was something in our environment that could stimulate our inner enlightenment or Buddhahood to come forth?

The Daishonin understood this principle and inscribed the Gohonzon as a crystallization, in written form, of the otherwise invisible Buddha nature potential to all human beings. His intention was that it function as a stimulus. He explained that our relationship with this object of devotion is one based on faith: “Muster your faith and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (WND, 412). From the standpoint of a Buddha, we all have the potential for Buddhahood. The Gohonzon functions as an external cause to help this seed of Buddhahood within us sprout and grow. Nichiren Daishonin compares this growth to new leaves and shoots that come

out in the spring rain and eventually bear fruit under the autumn moonlight.² The Gohonzon is like rain and sunshine for the seed of our Buddhahood.

All people have the potential of Buddhahood—the potential to lead both themselves and others to unshakable happiness. Many, however, lack a relationship to the appropriate external cause to manifest their supreme potential. Instead, influenced by negative surroundings, they are prone to experience negative states of life. Some who are fortunate enough to encounter the Gohonzon, misunderstand its significance and thus fail to form the optimum relationship with it. This is why it is important for us to continue praying to the Gohonzon, and grow in our understanding of its true meaning.

‘The Fusion of Objective Reality and Subjective Wisdom’

The sixth-century Chinese priest T’ien-t’ai (also called Chih-i) discusses “the fusion of objective reality and subjective wisdom” in one of his major works, *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*. Here “objective reality” refers to the truth of a thing in and of itself, and “subjective wisdom” to the understanding of an observer—the subject. Most of our action requires an object of that action. A musician plays an instrument to create music. An office worker has tasks to perform and projects to complete. In one sense, when our actions and their object are meshed together in harmony, we may expect a positive result. Depending on the nature of an object, however, the value and result of such harmonious interplay will vary. Pulling the trigger on a power drill and pulling the trigger on a gun have vastly different results, even though the action is basically the same. In the Buddhist concept of the fusion of objective reality and subjective wisdom, the “object” particularly refers to the true aspect of all phenomena that is also the ultimate reality of one’s life. When our subjective wisdom correctly perceives this true aspect or reality, the resulting fusion of reality and wisdom calls forth our Buddhahood. In this regard, T’ien-t’ai explains that such fusion is both the cause for and the effect of the attainment of enlightenment.³

The Daishonin explains: “Reality means the true nature of all phenomena, and wisdom means the illuminating and manifesting of this true nature...When this reality and wisdom are fused, one attains Buddhahood in one’s present form” (WND, 746). To



A portrait of the German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). In his lecture on aesthetics, Hegel suggests that we need something external to observe what is within us.

perceive the true nature of all phenomena does not indicate that someone intellectually understands all things in the universe. Rather, it means that someone understands the ultimate truth of his or her life. The fusion of objective reality and subjective wisdom, therefore, indicates the attainment of ultimate self-knowledge. Regarding this, the Daishonin states: “No other knowledge is purposeful” (WND, 299). Buddhas are not omniscient—they do not have magical powers that allow them to see through walls or into the future. Yet, they are deeply conversant in the ultimate reality of their lives as well as that of others. Whatever they observe, they observe in its true aspect—they comprehend its real nature and the causes and effects it entails.

One of the greatest difficulties in accomplishing such fusion may be that, in this case, the subject (i.e., the observer) becomes one with the object (i.e., the observed). It is difficult because seeing ourselves is per-

haps the most difficult challenge in life. At the same time, the attainment of self-knowledge has been one of humanity’s greatest desires throughout history. The German philosopher George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel relates people’s fundamental desire to see themselves and acquire self-knowledge to the production of art:

The universal need for art . . . is man’s rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes again his own self. The need for this spiritual freedom he satisfies, on the one hand, within by making what is within him explicit to himself, but correspondingly by giving outward reality to this his explicit self, and thus in this duplication of himself by bringing what is in him into sight and knowledge for himself and others. This is the free rationality of man in which all acting and knowing, as well as art too, have their basis and necessary origin.⁴

In his lecture on aesthetics, Hegel talks about a boy who “throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing.”⁵

Although the Gohonzon is not an art object, Hegel’s explanation and example for what he calls humanity’s “universal and absolute need”⁶ for art give us insight into the reason why the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon.

The Daishonin created the Gohonzon as an external object. So our first reaction to it may be that “this is not me.” But through our prayer and understanding of what the Daishonin intended the Gohonzon to be, we come to realize that it is the extension of what is most precious inside us. What was not us before now becomes an essential reflection of us just like the boy who sees himself in the ripples on the water. As Hegel suggests, we need an external object to observe what is within us. By recognizing outside us what is within us, we outwardly expand our awareness of self to embrace what was before foreign to us. We thereby reach inwardly to grasp the ultimate self-knowledge of Buddhahood.

It may be said that the Daishonin created the Gohonzon to duplicate externally what is essential within us so that we may fuse with it. This is applying the principle of the fusion of objective reality and subjective wisdom. The Daishonin says: “What then are these two elements of reality and wisdom? They are simply the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND, 746). By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to

the Gohonzon with faith in it, this external object ceases to be alien and becomes part of our lives. When this happens, we see and manifest the Buddha nature within us. This is why the Gohonzon is sometimes called “the entity of the fusion of reality and wisdom.” It must be noted that the Gohonzon becomes such only through our faith and practice. Unless we pray to it with the awareness that Nichiren Daishonin teaches, the Gohonzon remains as a object separate from our lives.

The Daishonin’s Analogies for the Gohonzon

In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin uses various analogies to explain the role of the Gohonzon in our practice. Those analogies are the excellent tools for making concrete our conception of the Gohonzon. After all, the Gohonzon is our object of devotion, not the object of endless theoretical analysis, although our understanding of its significance is crucial. The Daishonin’s frequent use of analogies to communicate the importance of the Gohonzon to his disciples seems to confirm this point.

Our Innate Buddhahood as a Caged Bird

In this analogy, the Daishonin compares our Buddha nature, which is yet to be recognized and revealed, to a caged bird:

When we revere Myoho-renge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is what is meant by “Buddha.” To illustrate, when a caged bird sings, birds who are flying in the sky are thereby summoned and gather around, and when the birds flying in the sky gather around, the bird in the cage strives to get out. When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law, our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. (WND, 887)

The caged bird does not know that it can fly away into freedom. It may be too accustomed to its caged life to realize its restriction. This caged bird, in a sense, is a metaphor for our lives when we are limited by our own ignorance of the Buddha nature. The birds in the sky may be compared

to the Gohonzon. If the caged bird were to see the birds in the sky as creatures of an essentially different kind, the notion of flying free would never occur. Because it sees the birds in the sky as its own kind, the bird in the cage realizes that it too can fly. To view the Gohonzon as a mysterious entity that transcends our own existence would be as ineffectual as the caged bird failing to identify with the birds in the sky.

The analogy of the caged bird tells us of the importance of an external influence to help us awaken to our inherent Buddha nature and cause it to emerge. It explains the importance of identifying with the Gohonzon rather than alienating it as if it were a god or idol when we pray. Lastly, the cage is not to be taken as a physical cage. It represents instead the bird’s own illusion. It remains real so long as the bird thinks of it as real. Once the bird realizes what it can do with its wings, the cage will disappear.

The Gohonzon as a Mirror

The Daishonin compares the Gohonzon to a mirror that reflects our innate Buddha nature. For example, he states: “The mirror of the Lotus Sutra reflects not only people’s figures but their heart as well” (GZ, 1521). Here the Lotus Sutra means the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day, that is, the Gohonzon. He also states: “The five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo mirror all things without a single exception....Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is a mirror to reflect one’s own image” (GZ, 724). Again “the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo” and “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” in this passage refer to the Gohonzon, which embodies Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the fundamental law of life and the universe.

This analogy of the Gohonzon as a mirror may be the easiest to appreciate through our daily experience. To see our own face, we need a mirror. Likewise, to perceive the supreme potential of Buddhahood within, we need something to reflect this ultimate truth. If some reject the value of the Gohonzon because they already possess “the Gohonzon within” (i.e., the Buddha nature), it is similar to someone rejecting the value of a mirror, claiming that they already know that they are beautiful. Since they cannot see their own images, their awareness of their beauty is merely an assumption. Without a mirror, our confidence in our appearance may be shattered after a few negative remarks from others. But with the use of a mirror, we can be clear about

our own appearance and not have to depend on the opinions of others.

Since we have the Gohonzon in our environment, it is far easier for us to be confident of our Buddha nature within, once we believe in the Gohonzon as the reflected image of our supreme potential. After all, if we don't believe in what is reflected in the mirror as our own image, the mirror serves no purpose. Likewise the Gohonzon becomes useless if we regard it only as a representation of someone else's enlightenment.

Our Lives as a Mirror

In “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” the Daishonin reverses the simile of the Gohonzon as a mirror. Instead, he compares our lives to a mirror:

When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. (WND, 4)

The Daishonin had written this letter in 1255 before he started to inscribe Gohonzon. (He started to inscribe Gohonzon after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271. The previous analogies are all mentioned in the Daishonin's writings after 1271.) The basic principle of attaining Buddhahood illustrated in this analogy, however, is certainly applicable to our practice with the Gohonzon.

Compared to the previous analogy of the Gohonzon as a mirror, this analogy is more practice-oriented. In the previous analogy, we see the reflection of our innate Buddha nature on the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon, from this perspective, serves as the goal of our practice. That is because the innate Buddha nature, though clearly reflected on the Gohonzon, is yet to be revealed from within. So the previous analogy stresses the importance of our faith in the result of our practice. In the present analogy, the Gohonzon—which is not directly mentioned but indicated by “the essential nature of phe-



Adam Woolfitt/CORBIS

Nichiren Daishonin compares our innate Buddha nature to a caged bird that is unaware of its ability to fly.

nomena and the true aspect of reality”—functions more or less as the starting point of our practice. The Gohonzon as the embodiment of the Mystic Law permeating the universe is out there to be reflected in the microcosm of our lives within. It is up to our constant “polishing” whether or not our lives reflect the life-giving universal truth of the Mystic Law. In this sense, this analogy emphasizes the importance of practice.

In order to reflect the Mystic Law in our lives, we must continue to polish our lives. In other words, although our life may shine like a clear mirror today, it may become tarnished again in few days if we cease our efforts to “polish” it. This is why the Daishonin encourages us to polish our mirror “day and night.” This analogy is important in that it points to the fact that Buddhahood is not a static state that we attain once and for all. Instead, Buddhahood is a dynamic state that needs constant maintenance and enhancement through practice.

The Daishonin also reminds us here that our practice must be rooted in our faith, exhorting us to “arouse deep faith.” At times, we may feel that the mirror of our lives remains tarnished; reflecting no light of truth regardless of how hard we polish it. It may be difficult to believe in the potential of our mirror, especially when faced with hardship. During the Daishonin's time, mirrors were

made of polished metal alloys such as bronze and steel. The Daishonin confidently asserts that our lives will shine like a crystal-clear mirror as long as we keep polishing. It may be a gradual process in which one spot at a time begins to shine; but so long as we do not stop, the mirror of our lives will become brilliant with time.

Conclusion: Beyond Idolatry or Self-Worship

Beyond Dependency on the External

The more closely we consider why the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon, the clearer it becomes that he did not intend the Gohonzon to be an idol. The Gohonzon is not the image of a god from whom we beg blessings. Down the center of the Gohonzon is written “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Nichiren,” which means that the Daishonin was awakened to the Mystic Law. The Daishonin’s enlightenment, however, is not limited to him alone. As he writes to one elderly disciple named Abutsu-bo, “The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself” (WND, 299). The Gohonzon exists for us to reveal our supreme potential. In this sense, the Gohonzon is a tool of self-reliance and self-empowerment.

Those who worship the Gohonzon like an idol or a god miss the Daishonin’s intent behind its inscription. They assign to it a power of action that in reality rests only with the practitioner. The Gohonzon is not a conscious being that bestows blessings on us. Rather, the Gohonzon allows us to awaken to our Buddha nature. It is our awakening of this enlightened nature and informing our actions with it that give rise to benefit. For this beneficial function, we should cherish and appreciate the Gohonzon.

Beyond Self-Satisfaction

The opposite extreme from worshipping the Gohonzon as an idol would be an attitude of narcissistic self-worship. Some may reject the Gohonzon as unnecessary because they already have the Buddha nature. Some spiritual paths focus solely on trying to perceive the truth within through



According to classical mythology, Narcissus loved no one until he saw his own reflection in water. As punishment for his scornful rejection of others, he fell in love with himself. He finally pined away, died, and was turned into the flower of same name.

introspection or meditation. However, looking only inward without an external standard or “mirror” can cause us to fall into the trap of mistaking an imperfect aspect of our minds for the perfection of Buddhahood. This is the condition that the Lotus Sutra describes of Buddhist practitioners who “suppose they have attained what they have not attained” (LS13, 193). In effect, such people are worshipping a deluded aspect of their own minds.

The Buddha nature remains only as a potential until it is revealed in one’s thoughts, words and actions. The Buddha nature needs to manifest from moment to moment and gradually solidify as the foundation of our day-to-day conduct.

While viewing the Gohonzon or the Buddha as a supernatural power equates to idolatry, viewing Buddhahood as a static state of assumed perfection equates to self-worship. While the Daishonin’s Buddhism declares that all people are Buddhas, the

healthy way to view this is as a declaration of a potential that we need to strive to realize. To boldly state that people are Buddhas can give confidence to those who lack confidence in their potential. However, to passively make the assumption “I am a Buddha” while remaining lax in our efforts to bring forth and apply that potential can be a pitfall. To assume that one is a Buddha while others are not is the gravest pitfall of all.

To avoid this, a seeking spirit tempered by humility is key. This simply means to realize that we can continually strengthen Buddhahood as our foundation throughout life, and be diligent in striving to do so.

The Daishonin points out the danger of self-worship as follows: “Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha’ may be read as follows: single-mindedly observing the Buddha, concentrating one’s mind on seeing the Buddha, and when looking at one’s own mind, perceiving that it is the Buddha....The Buddha wrote that one should become the master of one’s mind rather than let one’s mind master oneself” (WND, 389-90).

Here the Daishonin stresses the importance of determined efforts to seek and see the Buddha nature within. As a result of such practice, we come to manifest our innate Buddhahood. If we take our own enlightenment as a given, without making real efforts to develop it and behave accordingly, we are simply engaging in self-worship—a narcissistic form of arrogance. This principle applies equally to all practitioners, regardless of their function and status in the Buddhist community or society.

A Buddha as a Person of Eternal Progress

Our worship of the Gohonzon is neither idol-worship nor self-worship. The Daishonin’s creation of the Gohonzon as an external object that reflects the Buddha nature within the lives of all people creates a kind of positive tension. That is the tension between the practitioner’s current and ideal state of life. On one hand, the Daishonin unequivocally asserts that the Gohonzon exists within our lives, urging us: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself” (WND, 832). On the other hand, he creates the Gohonzon as an external object. The Gohonzon is to be found in reality nowhere but within our lives, but it also exists outside. This seemingly self-contradictory view of the Gohonzon actually guides our practice in an optimum direction—one that is neither idol-worship nor self-worship.

Prayer that is self-disparaging, or views a Buddha as a

transcendental being, may be compared to idol-worship. A prayer or attitude based on an inflated sense of self—an assumption that one is already and forever in the state of perfection called Buddhahood—equates to self-worship. It may be said, however, that the seemingly contradictory aspect of the Gohonzon’s external inwardness elevates our approach to Buddhist practice, transcending these two extremes. When we firmly believe in the existence of the Gohonzon (i.e., the Buddha nature) as the foundation of our lives, we have no need to supplicate ourselves to a higher power or authority. On the other hand, the external existence of the Gohonzon and the Daishonin’s teachings regarding it discourages the arrogance of self-worship. Although the Buddha nature exists as a potential for Buddhahood within our lives, it needs to be cultivated and nurtured into an actual foundation for our thoughts, words and deeds. The external presence of the Gohonzon serves as a goal toward which we must continue to practice and as a reminder that we can forever strengthen our Buddhahood.

From the external reality of the Gohonzon emerges the view of a Buddha as a person of eternal progress. In this sense, attaining Buddhahood is a continuous process of self-improvement. With deeper insight into the meaning of the Gohonzon, we may continue our practice without disparaging ourselves at times of hardship or becoming arrogant at times of success. No matter how hopeless our circumstances may seem, we can gain renewed confidence about our Buddha nature with a correct view of the Gohonzon. Although things are going smoothly for us, when we pray to the Gohonzon in accord with the Daishonin’s intent, we will be reminded that we should further strive to practice for ourselves and work for the happiness of others. The proper view of the Gohonzon, in this way, allows us to stay on the right course in our practice. □

1. This parable is contained in the sutra’s eighth or “Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples” chapter. *The Lotus Sutra*. Trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. pp. 150-51.

2. This analogy is based on the Daishonin’s explanation of the importance of an external cause in “The Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas of Past, Present and Future” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 574).

3. T’ien-t’ai. *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 9. Quoted in *Bukkyō Tetsugaku Daijiten* (Dictionary of Buddhist Philosophy), Tokyo: Seikyō Press, 1985, p. 327.

4. Hegel, G.W.F. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol. 1. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. pp. 31-32.

5. *Ibid.* p. 31.

6. *Ibid.* p. 30.

Social Architecture for the Grand Main Temple

By David W. Chappell

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In April 1998, Nikken Abe, the current high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, announced his plan to transfer the great object of devotion of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—the Dai-Gohonzon—from the Grand Main Temple (Jpn Sho-Hondo). That temple complex was completed on the grounds of the Nichiren Shoshu head temple in 1972 with approximately \$100 million in donations from eight million believers. This was prior to the split between the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and SGI laity orchestrated by Mr. Abe in 1991. Soon after the Dai-Gohonzon was removed, the high priest ordered the demolition of the Grand Main Temple, and by the beginning of 1999, the structure was leveled.

Mr. Abe cited his reason for the demolition as to “completely refute the great slander of [SGI President] Ikeda and others.” According to his predecessor Nitatsu Hossoi, the Grand Main Temple had been considered to be the High Sanctuary, one of the three basic elements of Nichiren Daishonin's teaching along with the Object of Devotion and the Invocation of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. However, it is clear that the significance of a “high sanctuary”—or more literally “ordination platform”—lies beyond any specific physical structure. In the following essay, Dr. David Chappell explores the meaning of a high sanctuary from a Buddhist historical and social perspective.



Construction and Destruction





Dean Conger/CORBIS

The temple at Wutai Mountain Monastery in China was once the greatest Buddhist complex in the medieval world. Today it is mostly a tourist site.

The Sho-Hondo, the Grand Main Temple of Nichiren Shoshu, is no more. The land is there, and pictures remain. But these are but traces of its grandeur and nothing of its purpose. While I only know the bare details of the tragic story of the Sho-Hondo, now that it is gone I feel it is important to reflect on its meaning. Especially for Soka Gakkai members who were largely responsible for visualizing the temple, and then the enormous effort of funding and building it.

Practice is not Limited to Temples

The destruction of the Sho-Hondo in 1998-99 is not the first temple destruction in Buddhist history. The monastery on the site of Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, Bodhgaya, is no more. Only the foundation stones remain. But the Buddha was not enlightened in a temple. In fact, his road to enlightenment involved leaving the buildings and palaces of

his father. And his saving awakening occurred not in a building, but under a tree; not with a crowd, but alone. He was confirmed not by a priesthood but by the earth, as is portrayed in sculptures in which he touches the earth to bear witness.

Other great Buddhist temples are no more. For half a millennium the Buddhist university-monastery at Nalanda was the leading light of learning in India. Now only the stones remain to remind us of its intellectual grandeur. Wu-tai Shan in China once was the greatest



David H. Wells/CORBIS

Jews praying at the western wall of what was once a great temple built by King Solomon in the tenth century BCE. Twice destroyed, it is now called the Wailing Wall.

Buddhist complex in the medieval world. The mountains are still there, and many of the temples still survive. But the practice is gone; the knowledge is gone, and the learned monks are gone. A few monks are located there as remnants of the Buddhist community largely to serve as photo opportunities for tourists.

Buddhism is not defined by buildings and architecture, and the message of Buddhism is not limited to stone and steel. Once, in ancient Greece, a traveler from Athens was sent to Sparta—famous for its military prowess—to see its fortifications, but was surprised to find no city walls. “Where are your fortifications,” he asked. “Wait until morning,” came the reply. At dawn, as the

visitor looked out, he saw the soldiers of Sparta practicing in the glinting rays of the rising sun. The fortifications of Sparta were its people, its soldiers, and the strength of their training; not its buildings.

Where is Buddhism to be practiced? The most brutal tragedy in modern history was not Nazi Germany or Stalin’s gulag, but happened recently in Cambodia when thirty-one percent of the Cambodian people were murdered by the Khymer Rouge government in just four years (1975–78). Fighting still continues in parts of Cambodia, yet beside those killing fields that exist outside most villages walks a Buddhist monk, Maha Ghosananda. Along with his followers, he walks

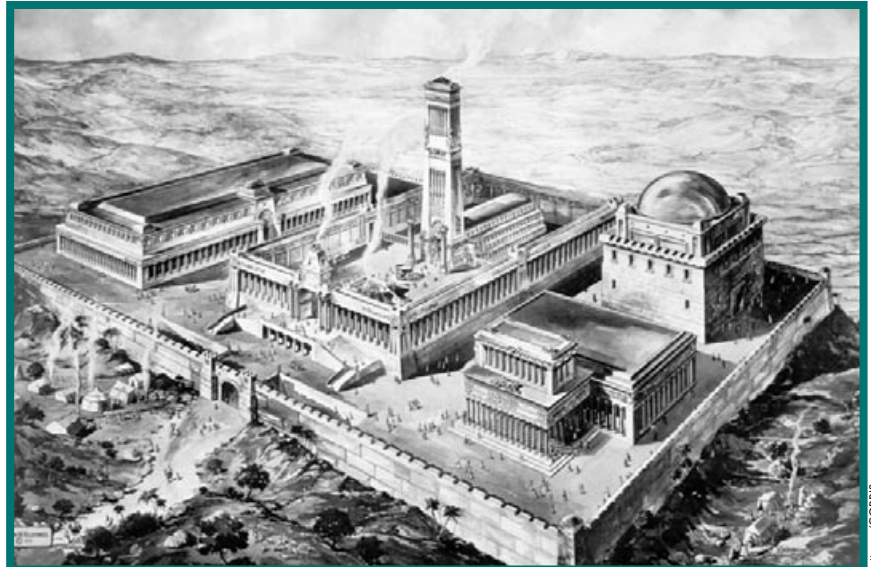
into the dangerous corners of Cambodia to encourage people to trust again, to have hope again, to rebuild their villages and their lives again. When people criticize him by saying, “Venerable One, monks belong in the temple,” he replies:

We Buddhists must find the courage to leave our temples and enter the temples of human experience—temples that are filled with suffering. If we listen to the Buddha, Christ, or Gandhi, we can do nothing else. The refugee camps, the prisons, the ghettos and the battlefields will then become our temples. We have so much work to do.¹

He goes on to say that many Buddhists in Asia “have been trained to rely on the traditional monk-hood” that kept away from society and its problems. However, Maha Ghosananda recalls the example of the Buddha who went onto a battlefield to prevent war. The Buddha was a great social activist. It is well known that when the Sakya clan and the Koliyas were about to go to war over the use of water from the Rohini River, the Buddha intervened to avoid conflict.² His community (*sangha*) rejected caste distinctions and built a more inclusive community. But his disciples were taught not to focus on themselves, but to care for others. In the first year of his teaching when the Buddhist community was just beginning and consisted of only sixty monks, the Buddha sent them forth: “Go forth, monks, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, for the good, for the happiness of gods and men” (Mahavagga Vinaya 1.11.1).³

Wailing Wall or Launching Pad?

Ancient Israel believed that they were commanded to build a great temple to God, and in the tenth century BCE a temple was constructed under King Solomon. Then in the sixth century BCE, it was destroyed by the Babylonians, but then rebuilt in that century after their defeat. Then in 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the temple for a second time. Today in Jerusalem, Jewish people gather at a remnant of the temple, now called the Wailing Wall



An illustration of John W. Kelchner's 1913 model reconstruction of King Solomon's Temple.

since Jews for 1900 years have gone there to lament the destruction of the temple.

But was Judaism destroyed? No. Were the teachings lost? No. Did the practice die out? No. What did they use for their altars to make offerings to God? Their family table. Their homes became temples. Instead of dying out, Jews spread around the world, enlivening cultures everywhere; giving humanity great gifts of learning, hard work, talent, and a sense of justice. Other people do not lament the destruction of the temple, but are grateful that Judaism expanded across the world with creativity. The destruction of the temple certainly caused great suffering, but that suffering became a crucible—a launching pad—that transformed suffering into a gift for the world.

Is the SGI dying out with the destruction of the temple? No. Instead, other buildings are rising. On May 3 of last year, the eighteen-story Central Tower of Soka

University in Japan was completed—“to symbolize peace and culture spreading in world society in the 21st century” (May 21, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 1). Inside will be a World Language Center to be a communication bridge integrating people across different cultures, and a Correspondence Education Office so that learning can be shared beyond geography. The Central Tower of Soka University is a different kind of high sanctuary of true Buddhism (Jpn *Honmon no kaidan*): it is a working temple, much like the Temple of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, or the Temple of Understanding in New York. The goal is not to create a fortress to keep people out, but a platform for bringing people together.

There used to be a clothing line with the logo “For Members Only.” That is what I remember about the Sho-Hondo, not its grand architectural style, since as a non-member I was not allowed to go there. Is that Nichiren Buddhism? Is that



Belmont/Corbis

An image of a helmeted Spartan. A visitor to ancient Sparta found that the city's fortress was not made of stone, but of its soldiers.

the way to bring peace to the world? Did the Buddha want to have a temple that is restricted to only a few select members?

The basic principle underlying Buddhist social activism is Dependent Origination, meaning that “We are all interdependent and share an inescapable responsibility for the well-being of the entire world” (Ven. Kosan). This is the principle of Buddhist peace work.

In the past, people described the basic foundation of Buddhist training as morality, mindfulness, and wisdom. But these three virtues have been expanded by compassion and courage. Compassion and courage mean that we must find ways to include everyone.

The High Sanctuary as a Platform of Justice

I do not know how Nichiren understood the “high sanctuary of true Buddhism” (Jpn *honmon no kaidan*), but I do know that *kaidan* was traditionally understood not as a temple but as an ordination platform where monastics took their vows to keep the Buddhist precepts. *Dan* means an elevated platform, a stage, where the ceremony of vowing to keep the precepts, the *kai*, was performed in the process of ordaining new monks and nuns. In East Asia, there were several levels of ordination; first as novitiates who promised to keep a basic list of ten

rules while they studied to be a monk, then the full ordination of accepting the 250 rules of a monk or 308 rules of a nun, and then finally the ceremony of vowing to keep the precepts of a bodhisattva. This is the traditional meaning of *kaidan*; a platform for publicly vowing to maintain the Buddhist rules.

In traditional China, Korea and Japan, the government strictly controlled the building of a *kaidan* because they didn't want many monks or nuns since they no longer would be available for taxation and military service. In medieval Japan, having government permission to erect your own ordination platform meant that you had the authority to begin your own lineage of

Buddhism. You had the authority to train and ordain Buddhists, based on your interpretation of Buddhism. To survive a group needed government recognition and approval. In the Tendai School, only after the death of the founder, Saicho, did the government grant permission for Tendai to start its own lineage by building an ordination platform.

Later, in the Kamakura period, Nichiren and other leaders like Honen, Shinran and Dogen developed ordinations and lineages in spite of the government. Only several centuries later, did the Tokugawa government in 1635, again bring all the reform Kamakura Buddhist groups under government supervision, and required everyone in Japan to be registered at a Buddhist temple. This sealed the

fate of these new reform movements by again making them part of the power elite.

Even in the early part of the twentieth century, most Buddhist temples in most Buddhist countries were not free to establish their own *kaidan*. Even today, in Thailand, people are imprisoned when they try to establish their own Buddhist ordination practices without government approval. But the separation of church and state based on constitutional governments is increasing in Asia, and the opportunity for more



A monument to the killing fields in Cambodia. It is estimated that thirty-one percent of the Cambodian people were killed in just four years (1975-78).

Catherine Karnow/CORBIS

kaidan is spreading. But, with this new freedom, the question arises, not how to build the physical platform, the *dan*, the temple, but what are the guidelines that we should agree to follow.

Too much attention has been paid to the building—the *dan*—and not enough to the social relations, the guidelines for practice, the *kai*. The reason the Sho-Hondo was destroyed is not because of bad *physical* architecture, but bad *social* architecture.

The challenge facing the SGI, and all Buddhist groups in the increasing

freedom of today, is to discover better *kai*, better guidelines or social architecture. Neither Nichiren Shoshu nor the SGI follow the monastic rules—the *kai* developed by Shakyamuni Buddha. In fact, most Buddhist organizations are not monastic. Instead of NGOs—non governmental organizations—I have developed the term NMBO, non-monastic Buddhist organizations.

In Japan, these reform Buddhist groups (NMBO) often have vowed to follow not the monastic rules but the “complete and sudden” rule that was supposed to arise from the enlightened life. But the problem has been that those who claim enlightened authority often simply followed government and cultural patterns. In East Asia these patterns were

often hierarchical and male-dominated elites. The priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu obviously fits this pattern and wishes to maintain strict control of its denomination and the subservience of its members.

The SGI, however, offers a different model. Each year SGI President Ikeda offers peace proposals that offer methods of social organization that will support a better world. The major *kai*, or ethical guidelines, that the SGI has supported has been the Declaration of Human Rights. As you know, these thirty rules can be



An engraving depicting Portuguese Jews at Passover dinner. For 1900 years, Jews have lamented the destruction of King Solomon's Temple. Rather than being defeated by the destruction of the temple, they used the family table as an altar to make offerings to God.

divided into three levels: one to protect the individual from exploitation (#2-21), those that encourage the development of people in society (#22-27), and those that visualize a global order for peace (#28-30). These three levels closely reflect the three major Mahayana goals: avoid all evil, cultivate all good, and save all beings. In addition, today we realize that to save all beings it is important to support four particular practices: dialogue, transparency, accountability, and democracy for all people. In addition, the SGI has encouraged discussion of a new Earth Charter to protect the envi-

ronment. Supporting these new *kai* provides a new ethical foundation as the social architecture to build a more inclusive and significant global temple than Taiseki-ji.

The Diversity of SGI-USA

In 1997, I was asked to study SGI-USA to discover whether it was ethnically diverse or not. I was not asked to visit the main temple Taiseki-ji, the Sho-Hondo, but to investigate SGI practice in the United

States. Since I couldn't interview every member, I looked at the SGI leadership at the district level in nine major urban areas in the United States in 1997. Thanks to the helpful support of regional leaders, I was given the ethnic identity of 2,449 district leaders. The ethnic composition of the district leaders in nine cities in 1997 is shown in Chart II.

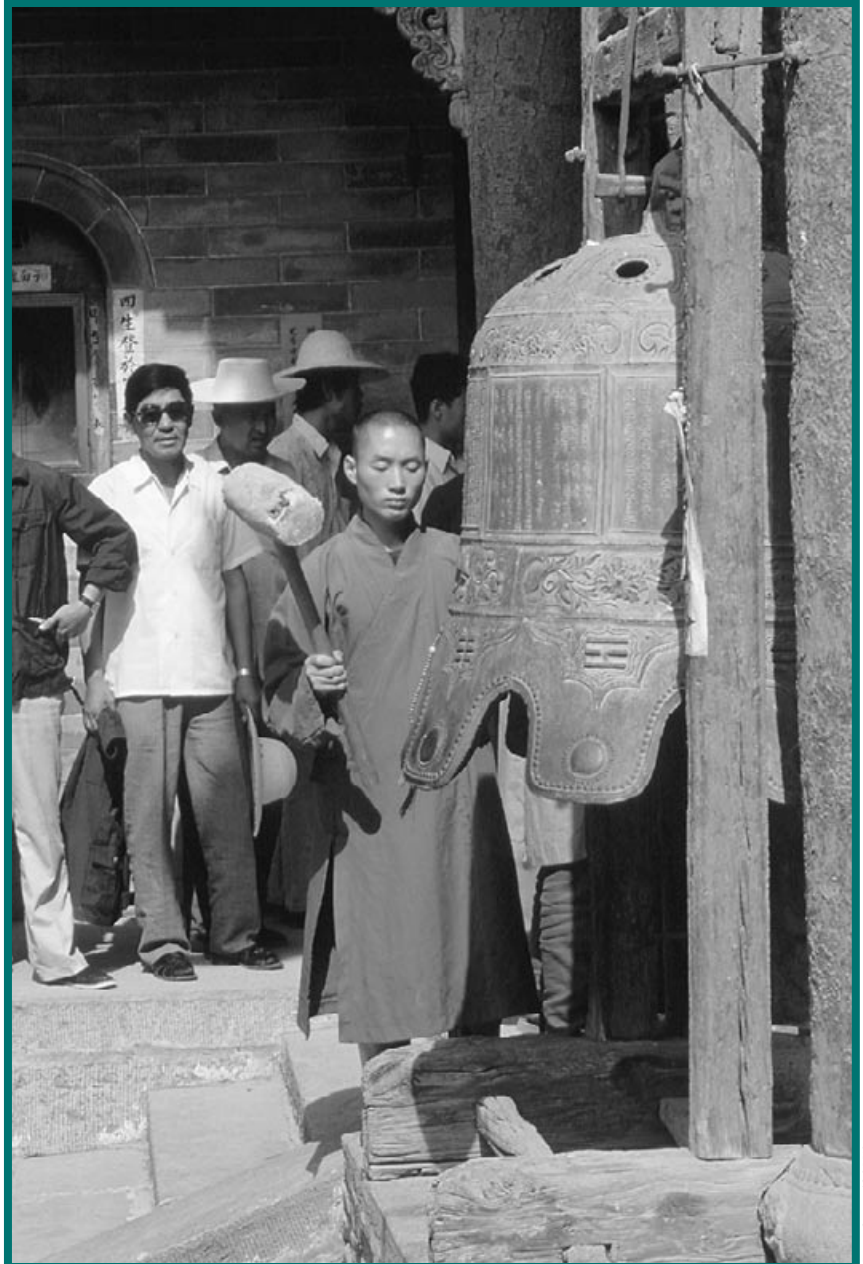
If these 2,449 district leaders from nine cities are arranged by race, the percentages are as shown in Chart I.

Part of the study revealed that the biggest discrepancy between the membership and district leaders in

Southern Florida was the high numbers of Hispanic leaders who represented a much higher percentage than the percentage of members. This ratio contrasts with the national leadership which had been dominated first by Japanese leaders and then supplemented by White leaders without reflecting the growing Black and Hispanic general membership. Although the profile of national leaders in the 1990s reflect the earliest period of Soka Gakkai, recent appointments have started to reflect the more diverse constituency of the 1990s.

Conclusion

Sunday morning is said to be the most ethnically divided time in America, and most Buddhist groups are divided along ethnic lines. Jan Nattier has classified American Buddhism into three groups: ethnic Buddhism, elite Buddhism, and evangelical Buddhism. Elite Buddhists are largely White, middle-class, educated European Americans who practice Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, or Vipassana Buddhism. Ethnic Buddhism consists of those temples that are identified in term of the Asian origin of their membership, such as Chinese, Vietnamese, or Korean Buddhist temples. In the USA the largest Buddhist group for many decades was the Buddhist Churches of America (Jodoshinshu, Nishi Honganji) that has been in America for more than a century but whose membership is still over ninety percent Japanese ancestry. However, in less than forty years SGI has become fully integrated so that less than twenty percent of its membership is of Japanese ancestry. Even at the national level SGI is also



A monk strikes a bell at Wutai Mountain Monastery in China.

becoming more diverse through the appointments of such leaders as Shielah Edwards and Ronnie Smith, both African Americans. With the memory of the propagation campaigns of 1960s and 1970s in mind, Jan Nattier made a special category called “evangelical” Buddhism to account for the unusual pattern of

SGI. However, perhaps a better term would be “socially inclusive.” It is clear that the racial diversity of SGI-USA is one of the social values—one of the *kai*—that is a necessary foundation for a peaceful world, and represents the kind of social architecture that is needed to build a lasting Buddhist *kaidan*. □

Footnotes:

1. Maha Ghosananda, *Step by Step*, (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991) pp. 62-3.
2. John A. McConnell, "The Rohini Conflict and the Buddha's Intervention," in Sulak Sivaraksa et al, ed., *Radical Conservatism: Buddhism in the Contemporary World* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1990), pp. 200-208.
3. Prayudh Payutto, "Sangha: the Ideal World Community," in Sulak Sivaraksa et al, ed., *Buddhist Perception for Desirable Societies in the Future* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1993), p. 276.

Chart I

The 2,449 SGI-USA district leaders from nine cities arranged by race show the following percentages.

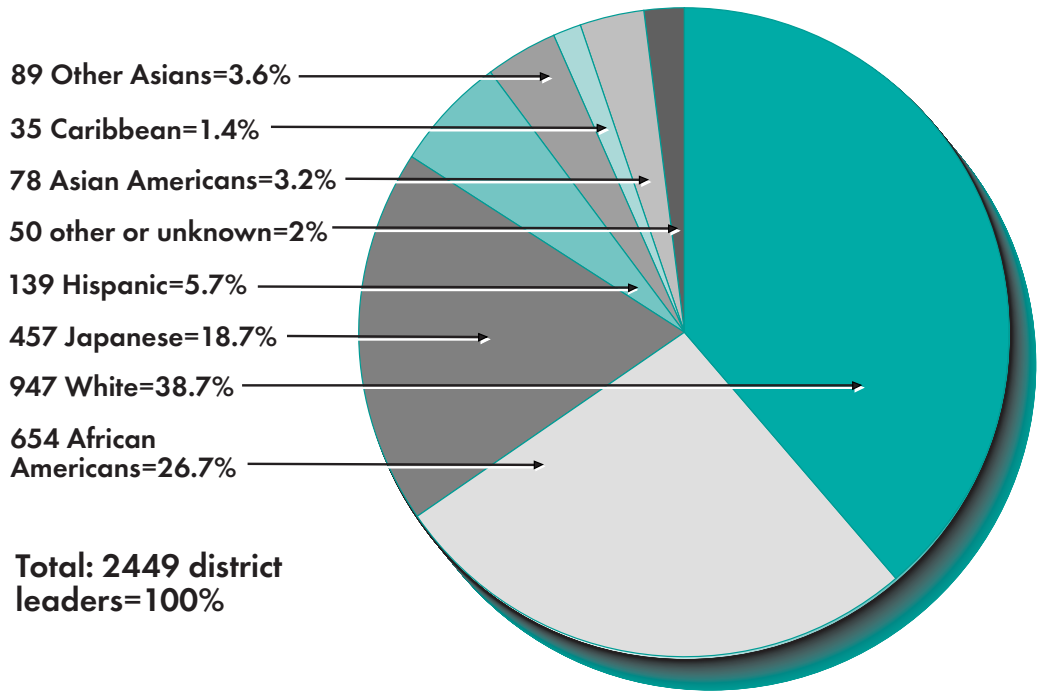


Chart II

The ethnic composition of 2,449 SGI-USA district leaders from nine U.S. cities in 1997.

	Atlanta	Boston	Chicago	Los Angeles	Miami	New York	Philadelphia	San Francisco	Washington	Totals
White	12	123	56	156	21	142	44	280	113	947
African American	43	24	75	101	4	141	60	103	103	654
Japanese	6	18	26	140	7	56	10	127	67	457
Korean	4	1	1	15		4			20	45
Jamaican	1									1
Japanese/White	1	3							4	8
Brazilian		3								3
Japanese/Black		1			2					3
Chinese		1		14	1	13				29
Chinese-American		1								1
Hispanic		1		13	24	53		44	4	139
South-east Asian				7						7
Israeli					1					1
White/African American					1				1	2
Caribbean						31				31
Asian/American						21		30		51
Other Asian								15		15
African									4	4
Half Japanese			1							1
Japanese American									8	8
Other	4	1		12	3	4	6		13	43



MY STORY— NICHIGEN-NYO

By Fay Hovey, Maui, Hawaii

The following story is a fictionalized first-person account of Nichigen-nyo and what it might have been like for her to live in thirteenth-century Japan as a follower of Nichiren Daishonin. Along with her husband, Shijo Kingo, she was one of the foremost disciples in Kamakura, an important center of power. Those who practiced the Daishonin's teachings bore the brunt of persecution from government and religious authorities.

One of the most familiar quotes from the Daishonin is contained in his letter "Reply to Kyo'o." Kyo'o, Nichigen-nyo's second daughter became seriously ill when she was less than a year old—even though Shijo Kingo was skilled in the art of medicine. In the letter addressed to her, the Daishonin encourages her parents' faith in the Gohonzon by stating:

In inscribing this Gohonzon for her protection, Nichiren was like the lion king. Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?...I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412)

Nichigen-nyo was the recipient of "The Gods Same Birth and Same Name" which appeared in last month's issue, as the April study material. An earlier installment of Nichigen-nyo's story appeared in the June 1998 *Living Buddhism*.

Nichigen," my husband said, "I must make the journey to Sado Island to see how things are for him!" This determination of his came abruptly one morning as we were about our household duties. Because my husband was not currently in the favor of the mercurial and powerful Lord Ema, we couldn't afford even a few servants to help us during this period.

My husband's exploits as a samurai warrior and his utter lack of fear had earned him grudging respect, if not ongoing support, from the military shogunate at Kamakura. He could be very passionate and outspoken, and our circumstances were always ebbing and flowing like the tides at Tatsunokuchi.

I am just a woman, and as the wife of Shijo Kingo, it is not likely that I will ever know completely what he must have gone through to keep the holdings we still had. My husband had led the Daishonin's horse to that beach at Tatsunokuchi, defying Hei no Saemon who was bent on executing the priest who would not go away. The descriptions of the angry and easily swayed

Lord Ema, to whom my husband was attached in service, were enough for me to know that the ground we walked on was in jeopardy. So we had been treading very carefully since that dark night by the shore.

The Daishonin had our very hearts. It was as if a great mountain surrounded by magnificent vistas had arisen in our midst. He awoke within his followers a new-found hope that defied the pitiful evidences of these times. Confident, even in times of near poverty and unremitting natural disasters, we navigated through it all—chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, studying the Lotus Sutra and holding close to his guidance.

We had been fortunate to live near him when he lived at Matsubagayatsu. Our bond was strong and could not be broken by the disdain and, yes, even the hatred of people who could not understand what it is to live with a vibrant, optimistic viewpoint. He knew what we faced and never failed to mention it. He never took our loyalty to him for granted and always considered it wondrous. This was completely in character with his genuine concern for all of his followers. His letters flowed to us in a steady stream of confidence and sup-

port from his exile on the desolate and dangerous island of Sado in the Japan Sea.

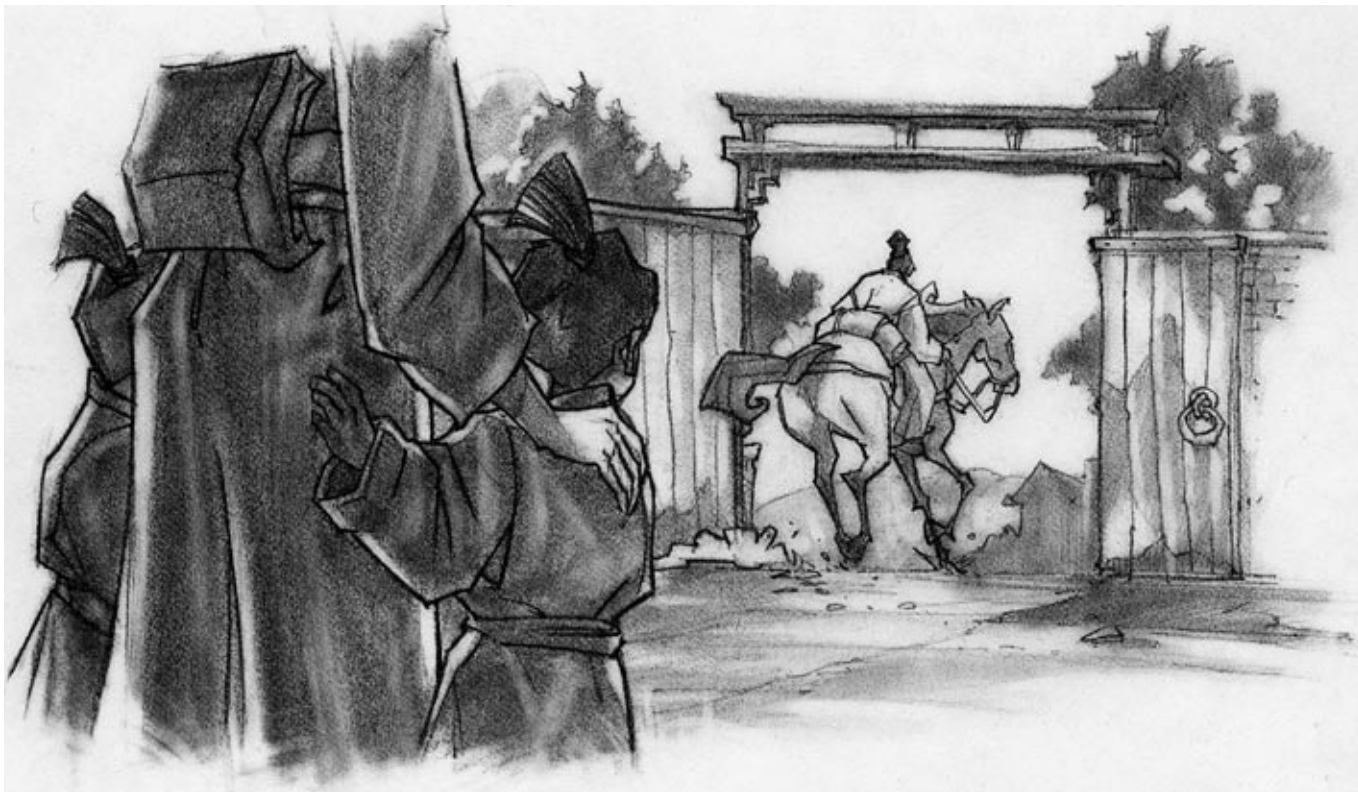
I looked up into the crisp spring sky. I knew there was no holding my husband back once a notion took him. With our two children, there would be more work for me. I could rely upon his brothers for some protection, but surely my days would be spent with one ear waiting to hear his returning horse and deep voice. He was right. He would have to go to see that the Daishonin was still alive and safe. This was a certainty, and yet in my heart, I still harbored a fear of losing my husband. Ours was not a marriage of convenience. We truly loved one another in all the ways two people can love. He was my life. However, the Daishonin taught us that a sword is useless in the hand of a coward, and my faith was strong despite any fear I felt.

“Husband,” I said, “of course you must go to him and very soon. I will help you prepare.” As a woman I was dependent upon him for everything. But I knew that we both had great lives to live as we shared the Daishonin’s Buddhism with others, and so I put my fear aside and made ready for his departure. While he saw to his horses, I washed and dried his clothing. In

our dim hall, I took out his swords and polished them to brilliance. In the kitchen—children playing underfoot—I folded rice cakes into paper, slipping them into a package along with dried fish and other items.

I heard him in the courtyard speaking with his brothers. His voice urgent and firm. We gathered things we thought the Daishonin might need: a thick, quilted silk robe, writing materials, rice and sake. As I tied things together with cord, I thought how much he would appreciate these things, so little he had. And I thought of my husband’s journey





there: the rugged mountain passes, bandits lurking in wait for the unsuspecting, the dangerous crossing to Sado Island, and then the return.

I gathered his healing herbs, potions and instruments into a small traveling box so that he could treat the Daishonin should there be a need.

“Ah, good, Nichigen, you have thought of everything!” he exclaimed. Soon, all was in readiness. That night we slept closer. Can there be a greater thing for two people than to hold fast to their faith? In the morning, we gathered together in front of our Gohonzon for morning prayers. The sound of our voices filled the hall and floated with confidence across the courtyard, over the gate and into the world outside our small estate. Facing the Gohonzon, I knew that I had courage enough to face anything while he was away. He left to me the task of encouraging the followers in our area in his absence.

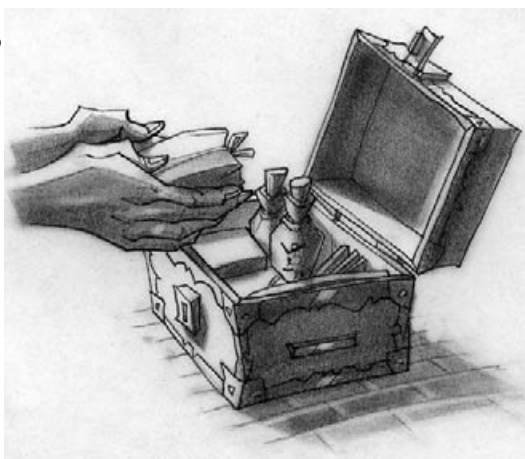
We said our farewells to each other privately for

that was the way it was between husband and wife. As I bowed low, I heard his voice saying, “I will return as

surely as geese fly south in autumn, and I will bring a letter to you from our mentor.” Touching his leg lightly in the stirrup, I felt the horse, eager to be on his way, wheel and turn. They clattered through the gate.

My young children clung sadly to my robe. “Come, little ones,” I said. “Let’s go chant together for your father’s successful journey and for the Daishonin!” and I gathered them up in my arms and walked up the steps of our home.

He always returned, just as he said he would. We lived a long and loving life together. Perhaps it is true that Shakyamuni Buddha and the bodhisattvas Universal Worthy, Medicine King and Constellation King Flower dwelt in our hearts as the Daishonin wrote. I like to think it was because we knew the truth when we heard it and we followed it, making of our lives a great journey of true happiness and hope. □



Illustrations by Ed Lee

DIALOGUE

ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

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



Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sound is sometimes called a “Merciful Mother.” The awareness that there is someone who loves and cares about us unconditionally gives us hope.

Picture Press/CORBIS

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 he² 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



Craig Aurness/CORBIS

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, is a leader who is a skilled listener.

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 darknesses.
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 “Dharaṇī” (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!

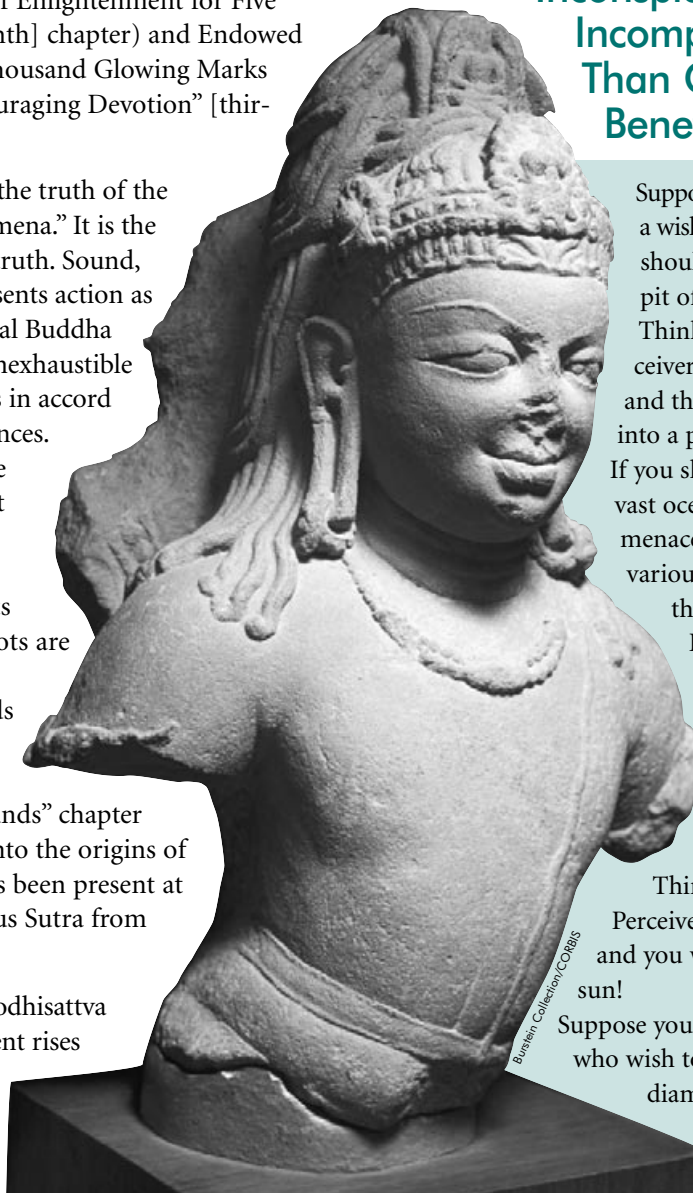
Suppose you are on the peak of Mount Sumeru and someone pushes you off.

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 sur-



A statue of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sound from India’s Gupta period (320-540 CE), located at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

rounded 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

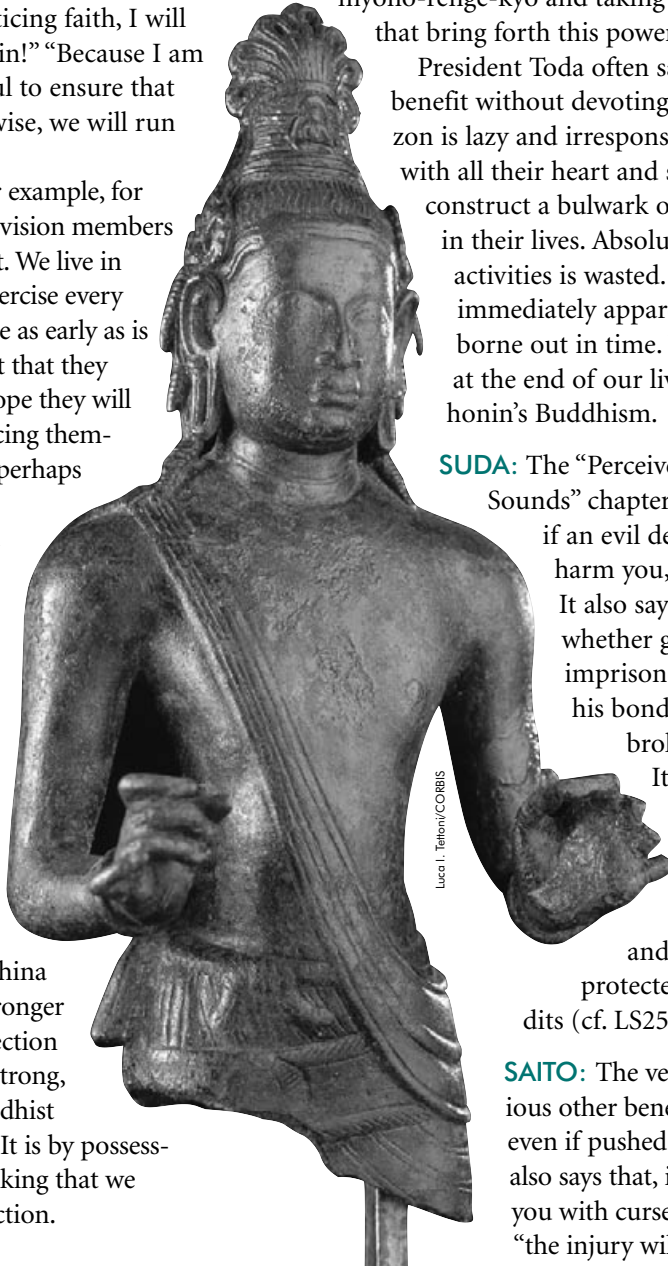
IKEDA: At any rate, to think that just because you are practicing faith everything will be automatically okay, or that things will somehow work themselves out is careless. It is also arrogant. Rather, we need to have the awareness, “Because I am practicing faith, I will make things work out. I will win!” “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.



Lucia I. Telleri/CORBIS

A bronze statue of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds from Thailand. The worship of the bodhisattva was widely spread throughout East Asia.

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 Daisyonin’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.

Fundamentally, being protected by the Buddhist gods means protecting ourselves.

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



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The Potala Palace, Tibet. The palace is named after Mt. Potala, the place where Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is said to reside. The successive Dalai Lamas are held by their followers to be incarnations of the bodhisattva.

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 magni-

tude 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.

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

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.



A painting of Marco Polo in audience with Kublai Khan. One of the reasons why the Mongol invasions of Japan weren't successful is that Kublai's ministers, fearing his wrath, never communicated accurate information to the emperor. President Ikeda says: "The ability to readily hear bad news is a key point that distinguishes a true leader from a tyrant."

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.



A Japanese painting of the Mongol invasion. During Nichiren Daishonin's lifetime, Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan's forces attempted to invade Japan twice, in 1274 and 1281.

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”



Ronnen Eitel/CORBIS

Surfing the Net? One study found that the more time people spend on the Internet, the greater their chances of becoming depressed or feeling isolated, suggesting the importance of face-to-face communication.

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.

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?

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’non 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.



SGI President Ikeda welcomes the Brazilian poet Amadeu Thiago de Mello at the Seikyo Shimbun building in Tokyo in April 1997.

Recollections of MY MEETINGS with LEADING WORLD FIGURES

By SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

BRAZILIAN POET AMADEU THIAGO DE MELLO—*Guardian of the Amazon*

In his travels for peace, SGI President Ikeda meets with world leaders from all walks of life. In this series, he introduces the lives and character of those memorable figures.

Those who battle oppression can be trusted. I respect those who carry out their vows to the people in the face of persecution and even imprisonment.

Such a person came to see me one day, and he brought with him the green breezes of the Amazon. “Don’t think of me as a great literary figure, please,” he said. “I am a child of the forest. I am a child of the river, of the wind.” Even his speech flowed with the cadence of the mighty river. “The

children of the Amazon can hear what the wind has to say. They know the meaning of the rustling of the wind through the treetops. They know what the birds are saying.”

Amadeu Thiago de Mello, “guardian of the Amazon,” is a poet. To be a poet is to have the heart of an innocent child untouched by the world’s impurities. It is another name for a person who has for years battled against the pollution of the spirit that we call modern civilization.

“I remember when I was a boy. I grew up in a poor town near the middle reaches of the Amazon,” he reminisced. “At night the sky was an uninterrupted blanket of stars. The night sky was reflected perfectly in the



Buddy Mays/CORBIS

Originating in the Peruvian Andes, the Amazon flows almost 4,000 miles across northern Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean. It is estimated that about twenty percent of all the water that runs off the Earth's land surface is carried by the river.

gleaming jet-black waters of the Amazon, as if in a mirror. Stars in the sky and stars in the river. Then, one night, fireflies danced in the air linking river and sky. Fireflies, fireflies—millions of fireflies. It took my breath away.” The young boy was intoxicated with this magic spectacle of light spanning heaven and earth.

Today, at seventy-two, he continues struggling in his hometown of Barreirinhe in Brazil, to defend “the home of life,” the mighty Amazon. His weapons are his pen and his voice. He continues to educate the young and work for the people using his knowledge of medicine.

Mr. Thiago de Mello explains, “The indigenous peoples of the Amazon may not be able to spell the word Utopia, but it is among them that we can discover a society of beauty, impartiality and brotherly love. They live in seamless harmony with nature. They are friends of the sun and follow the conversations of the stars.”

The tragedy of the noble indigenous people in the Central and South Americas came with the arrival of

Europeans five hundred years ago. The persecutions perpetrated on them can fairly be described as another holocaust. The European invaders treated these “uncivilized” peoples mercilessly, butchering, plundering, exploiting and driving them to extinction. They destroyed or tortured into compliance any that dared to oppose their reign of terror. With lie after lie, the foreign invaders usurped their lands, stole their gold, and tricked them into debt and forced labor. In the name of their god, they demanded subservience to their authority; outlawing and destroying indigenous cultures, invading even the people's souls and leaving indelible scars.

This is not simply a tale of a half-millennium ago. Such despicable behavior by professed “civilized” peoples has been seen frequently in modern times as well. Unscrupulous developers seeking to exploit the rubber trees of the Amazon rain forest gave the indigenous people clothing infected with diseases to which they had no resistance, and annihilated them. In some regions, the native

people were forced to labor so hard that it is estimated that seven people died for each ton of rubber harvested.

Which people are civilized? Which are uncivilized? The greed of “civilized savages” continues unabated to plunder and destroy our natural world.

The poet asks, “Have these ‘conquerors’ really won anything? Are these ones, who have stolen all the people had, the victors? And even if they were to ‘win’ their blind struggle to conquer nature itself, is that a victory? Haven’t they in fact called down on themselves the most hideous of all defeats?”

Yes, we are children of nature. The destruction of nature is the destruction of the very root of human existence. It also eats away and destroys the verdant richness, the humanity, of the destroyers themselves.

Mr. Thiago de Mello’s entire life has been devoted to resisting this devastation. When he was a young boy, he used to lead his blind grandfather around. He asked him, “Why are those people always so poor, yet they work so hard?” Then there were the wealthy landowners, who amassed tremendous riches, though all they did was arrogantly order others about. “How can they treat others so badly?” he would ask. His grandfather told him about the injustices of human society, and the young poet was unable to suppress his indignation.

He studied medicine, and through his contact with the poor and destitute among his patients he learned more about the cruel reality of their lives. He could not remain silent. The poet was too loving to remain unmoved. “One who believes in love must decide which path they will take. Will it be the path of goodness, or the path of silence — of being an accomplice to injustice?” He wrote fiery poems denouncing social injustice. He led strikes for which he was jailed. Each time he refused to give up. He was determined that he would fight, and fight with all his might.

His mother always said to him, “Do whatever you must, so long as you are helping others.”

A tempest of military rule was sweeping Latin America. In the spring of Mr. Thiago de Mello’s thirty-eighth year (1964), Brazil underwent a military coup. The barbaric men in power imprisoned the poet of human rights. They banned his books.

But on the wall of his military prison cell, the poet found written the verse: “Night is coming, but I sing, because, without fail, morning will come.” It was a line from one of his poems. Someone had scratched it into the wall. Someone had been roused to courage in the darkness of this cell by his words. All the schemes of the authorities could not erase them. What greater honor could there be for a poet?

Mr. Thiago de Mello’s words were not empty literary exercises — they were the voice of surging waves of love for humanity, the voice of roaring winds of passionate prayers by a man who was one with nature. I believe that if the Amazon could speak, it would be with a voice like Mr. Thiago de Mello’s. If the millions of native peoples who were massacred could take up a pen, they would write as he writes.

The Brazilian poet lived in exile for many years, including in Chile. His friend, who had welcomed him, Chilean President Salvador Allende, was himself murdered in a military coup. Afterward, Mr. Thiago de Mello came within an inch of being shot by a Chilean rebel soldier. With the gun barrel pointed at him, he was filled not only with fear but also with rage. “Is justice to be extinguished by the forces of evil? Is all hope gone?” At that moment, his life force rose within him to reply: “No! You must live! This is no time to die! Survive! Take action, and bring hope to the people once more!”

After periods of exile in Germany, France, and Portugal, he returned to his homeland in the Amazon. He returned to the vast reaches of rain forest, to the town of fireflies. He returned to the days of his youth.

Decades had passed since he was last there. The mighty Amazon River spoke to him, telling him of the terrible destruction that had taken place in the months and years gone by.

The Amazon region is very important as a climate stabilizer of the entire planet. Destroying the Amazon is like destroying one’s own home.

Humanity! Is there no end to your greed? How long will you arrogantly go on repaying the beneficence of the great forest of life with exploitation and destruction?

I raise my voice with the poet: “Listen, listen to the Earth’s angry voice! Have respect — respect for the pure spirit of the people!” Respect is the first step toward learning. People talk about protecting the environment, protecting indigenous peoples, but what is really necessary is the profound humility to learn from the laws of nature. To study the wisdom of peoples who have lived in harmony with their environment for centuries.

When Mr. Thiago de Mello spoke at the Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High Schools in Japan, he said to the students:

Today, some 800 million children and adults are threatened by starvation. Hundreds of millions cannot read. I want each of you to be aware of just how fortunate you are.



Owen Franken/CORBIS

Mr. Thiago de Mello says, "The children of the Amazon can hear what the wind has to say....They know what the birds are saying."

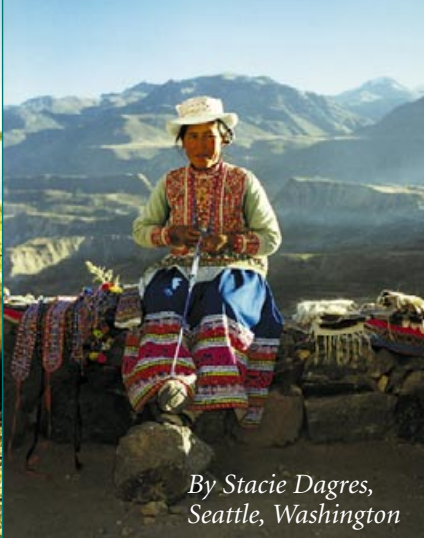
To possess good fortune means to have a responsibility to others. The purpose of your studies is not simply to receive a diploma, find a good job, and live a comfortable life. You mustn't be so selfish. I have a request for all of you: please grow into upstanding adults and be active as exemplary world citizens. Make sure that in the twenty-first century not a single child has to lie awake at night unable to sleep because of hunger. Make sure that not a single adult is prevented from grasping the light of wisdom because he or she cannot read. I want all of you to make an effort to serve humanity.

And I am sure that if you do so, no one will be happier than President Ikeda, the founder of your school

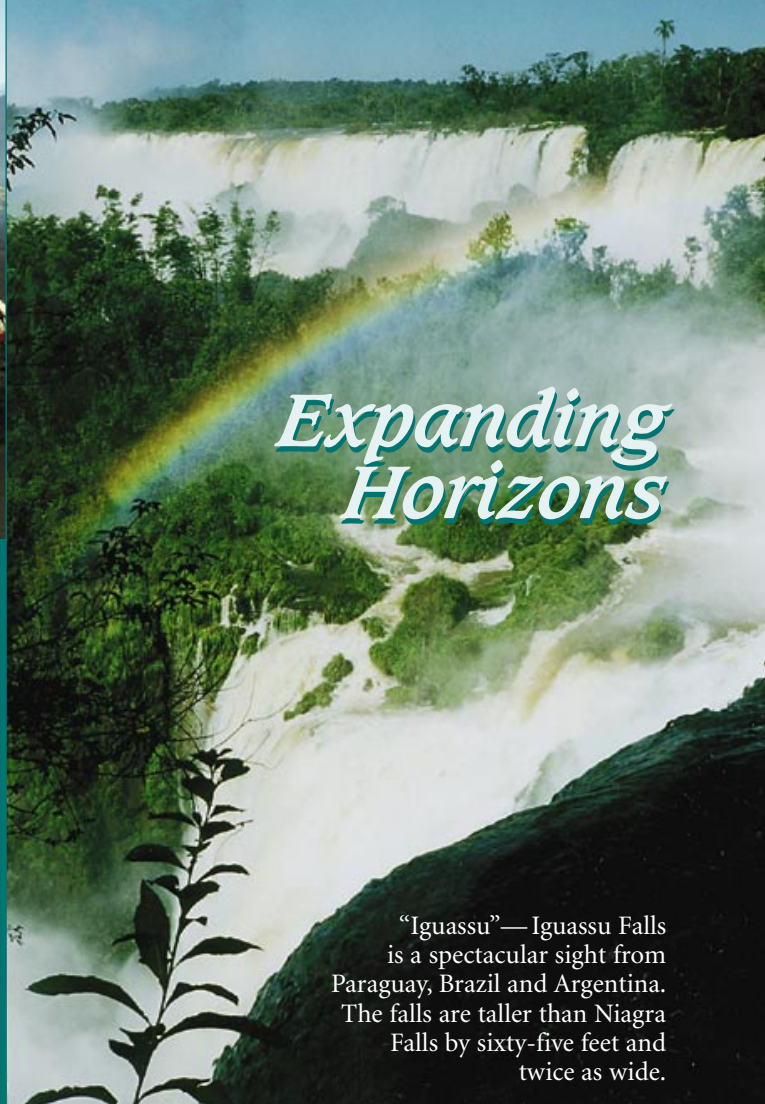
system. That is the very reason that he has withstood all the challenges and difficulties that he has faced so far.

Here is a man who understands my thoughts, and here and now I would like to express my great appreciation for his profound understanding.

The poet said to me: "What future awaits the world? I believe that the crucial thing is for each individual to carry out his or her mission in life. That is the key to saving the world." He almost seemed to be speaking to himself as he said these words, and it was the voice of a man determined to see the dawning of a century of respect for the dignity of all life. □



By Stacie Dagues,
Seattle, Washington



Expanding Horizons

My trip to South America was launched after attending a Florida Nature and Culture Center conference May 23, 1999. In extremely high spirits I departed from the Miami International airport to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I visited five countries (Argentina, Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Brazil), enjoyed meeting members in three countries, in two months. Every since I was a kid it had been a dream of mine to see the Amazon after pouring over the encyclopedia volume showing native peoples of the Amazon. About my photos: (above) “Serpent Spirit Boat”—I took a ride in this exotic canoe in the shape of the Uros Indian’s most sacred spirit. This tour began on Lake Titicaca, the highest fresh-water lake (13,000) in the world. Uros Island is literally a floating island made from the abundant totora reed. There are 300 inhabitants of Uros. The Uros Indians began their floating existence to isolate themselves from the Incas. “Peruvian Weaver”—Our tour bus stopped at this beautiful spot where a native Indian woman demonstrated her ancient folk art. We found her outside the villages on the road to Canon del Colca where were travelling to watch the flight of the Andean Condors.

“Iguassu”—Iguassu Falls is a spectacular sight from Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. The falls are taller than Niagra Falls by sixty-five feet and twice as wide.



“Macchu Picchu”—The name means “old peak.” The sacred city is protected by magical mountains that seem to take the shape of animals.



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GUARDIAN OF THE AMAZON

Brazilian Poet Amadeu Thiago de Mello

SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE FOR THE GRAND MAIN TEMPLE

A Scholar's Commentary on the Destruction of the Sho-Hondo

BEYOND IDOLATRY AND SELF-WORSHIP

A Perspective on the Object of Devotion

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA

Develop the Compassion and Wisdom To "Perceive the World's Sounds"



An architect's drawing of renovations to the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium scheduled to be opened May 3, 2001.

What is the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?

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

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

What we believe...

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

The Buddhist tradition...

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlightenment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated

in the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

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

The SGI Heritage...

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

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