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"What state or condition of being we manifest at any given moment determines how we experience our environment. On the deepest level, it is not our environment or external circumstances that determine our state of life but the nature of our 'relation' with our environment." Page 7

4 General Director's Message

People of Creativity and Diversity

6 Buddhist Concepts for Today's Living (14)

Making the Best of Everything: The Ten Factors of Life

8 The Powers of Faith and Practice

By Josei Toda, Second President of the Soka Gakkai

10 Conversations on Education With Friends From Around the World

For the Future of Our Children

18 SGI Presentations at World Parliament of Religions

Buddhist Values and Conflict Resolution, Buddhist Values and A Culture of Peace

25 Making a Difference

Pediatrician Learns to Face Reality

26 My Story — Sairen-bo

A Disciple of Nichiren Daishonin also exiled to Sado Island

29 Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra #49

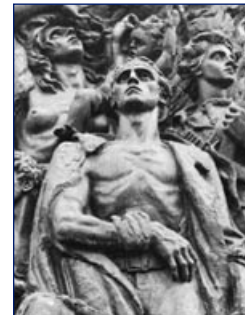
A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century
Kosen-rufu Is the Ultimate Path in Life

45 Recollections of My Meetings With Leading World Figures

President Kocheril Raman Narayanan of India



10



18



29



45

COVER: The Taj Mahal by David Sutherland/Getty Images

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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-renge-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-renge-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-renge-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; *renge* (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-renge-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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BUDDHISM

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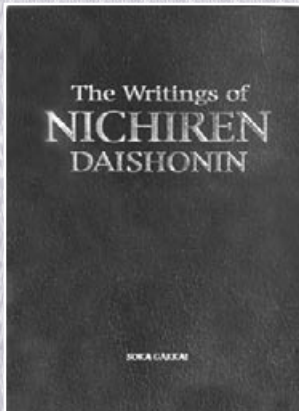
To Our Readers

This month, I move from the position of managing editor of *Living Buddhism* magazine to that of director of the newly formed SGI-USA translation department. Over the past year and six months I have received a tremendous education while working with the *Living Buddhism* staff to try to bring the heart and philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and the SGI spirit to our readers through this journal. With this issue, Ted Morino has taken the helm as managing editor, while Dave Baldschun continues as assistant managing editor and the engine behind the monthly production of *Living Buddhism*. Shin Yatomi and I will keep serving *Living Buddhism* and the entire SGI-USA publications center by providing translation and editorial support. I want to express my deepest thanks to all of our readers for their dedication and feedback, and to SGI President Ikeda and the leadership of SGI-USA for giving me what has been a growth-inspiring opportunity.

Jeff Kriger

What's New at SGI-USA Bookstores?

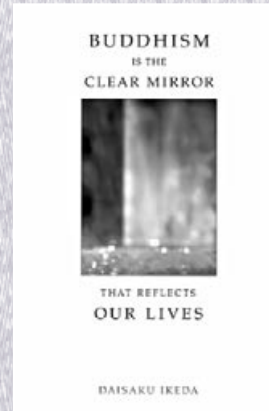
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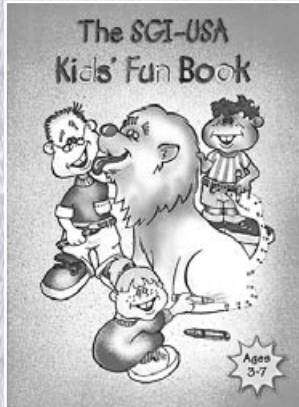
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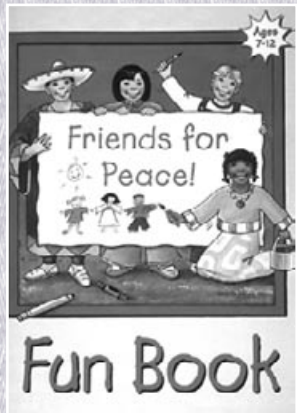
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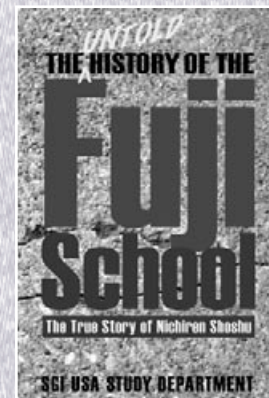
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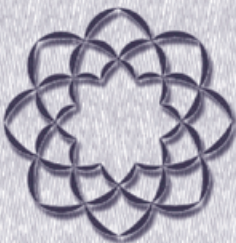
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People of *Creativity and Diversity*

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

As I travel the country, I am repeatedly awed by the creativity and diversity of our members. I am filled with pride to be a member of the SGI-USA.

June is the month in which first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born. As you know, he was a groundbreaking educator and the originator of the theory of value creation. This principle of *soka* is his lasting legacy to humanity. In this sense, our worldwide movement of people from diverse backgrounds pursuing value creation was born during this month.

Recently, I attended the SGI Spring Training Course held in Tokyo along with five hundred participants from fifty nations. Seventy SGI-USA members attended the Forty-fifth Headquarters leaders meeting with SGI President Ikeda, which commemorated May 3, the Day of the Soka Gakkai.

SGI-USA members and jazz legends Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter also attended to present President Ikeda with the Global Artist Award, which they created in conjunction with the SGI-USA culture department in appreciation for his many years of encouragement to them. In his acceptance, President Ikeda said it was especially meaningful because it was given to him by people who, like him, are dedicated to promoting peace and culture through their practice and propagation of Buddhism.

President Ikeda went on to praise the sincerity and goodwill of all SGI members. He announced that the number of nations and regions where SGI members are practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism recently grew from 148 to 156, and said that this was because SGI members have gained the trust of people through-

out the world. He urged us to possess conviction that through our efforts, we are creating peace in this world.

After the meeting, I joined in a conversation with Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and President Ikeda's oldest son, Hiromasa Ikeda. Hiromasa explained that President Ikeda thinks so highly of jazz because it is improvisational, it innovates, and it seeks interaction among all the musicians and with the audience. No two performances can ever be exactly alike, but because of this, each performance is exciting.

Spirit of Improvisation

In response, Herbie and Wayne said that they felt this same spirit of improvisation and exchange when President Ikeda plays the piano. Though he doesn't perform jazz when he plays, they felt that despite any technical limitations he might have, President Ikeda seeks to communicate with and respond to his audience.

This conversation caused me to reflect on President Ikeda's dialogues with people from all over the world — scholars, politicians, artists — all kinds of people. In each, he seeks to learn, to find common ground, to open the way for a broader understanding of our SGI movement. He communicates the profound principles of Buddhism without necessarily talking about Buddhist doctrine. I believe that the art of dialogue is an improvisational form, and President Ikeda is a master of this art.

As I watched the beautiful exchange among Mr. Hancock, Mr. Shorter and President Ikeda, and as I listened to their musical performance at the meeting, I reflected on the amazing creativity that SGI-USA

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based on the principle of cause and effect,
sincere offerings become engraved in our lives as fortune,
as causes to receive tremendous support
from our environment.*

members possess. I realized that in our Buddhist practice, we make many kinds of offerings and that our offerings take on diverse and creative forms.

Contributions are those things we do that contribute to the general good, and one can contribute to any organization. Offerings, in Buddhism, carry the connotation of “offerings to the Buddha” and in that sense carry a special significance.

Today, for the sake of kosen-rufu, we make contributions in the form of financial donations, which sustain our organization’s activities. In fact, we are just this month concluding our annual commemorative contribution, and I offer my most sincere gratitude to all of you for your efforts.

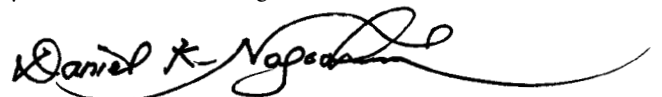
Supporting the Work of the Buddha

For many members, financial contributions are made in the spirit of offering, in the spirit of supporting the work of the Buddha. Material offerings also take the form of the phone calls we make from our homes, the gas we use to travel to activities, offering our homes for meetings, or preparing food for those long trips to attend activities. Such actions are not required of us, but many people do them out of their sincere desire to promote kosen-rufu and support their fellow members and friends. We need to acknowledge these efforts, which are certainly recognized by Nichiren Daishonin. To put it another way, based on the principle of cause and effect, sincere offerings become engraved in our lives as fortune, as causes to receive tremendous support from our environment.

At the same time, there are offerings of the body—offerings of our time, our energy and our effort. These are also offerings of the heart. When we take the time to listen to a member who is suffering; when a poet or musician presents his or her art to encourage members; when we offer a smile or a friendly word to encourage another—such actions are impossible to quantify, but they are truly precious offerings. Such contributions are as diverse and varied as the people within our organization. While such actions certainly contribute to our organization, they also support and encourage the precious members. In this sense, they are offerings in the most profound sense of the term.

I would like to share one more incident from that meeting that touched me. As President Ikeda left the auditorium, he told the audience: “I respect you all. I believe all of you are Buddhas.” This conviction is the heart of Buddhism. It is the heart of the SGI. I felt very keenly that all of President Ikeda’s efforts to encourage SGI members are not simply actions taken in his capacity as the international leader of our organization, but are offerings to the millions of Buddhas around the world.

This month, as we conclude our annual commemorative contribution, I would like to express my appreciation to all of you for the many ways in which you contribute to our beautiful organization, for all of your heartfelt “offerings to the Buddha.”



Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director

Making the Best of Everything: **THE TEN FACTORS OF LIFE**

Life is dynamic—its capacity for change from one moment to the next is immense. A hungry baby who was crying a minute ago now smiles in the arms of its mother. A heated dispute between lovers suddenly turns into an affectionate embrace. Does this mean that we are always at the mercy of whatever happens to us, that we must rely on pleasant experiences and circumstances at every moment to be consistently happy? It need not be so. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism explains how we can make the best of everything—positive or negative—and take control of our lives.

Our lives express any of what Buddhism describes as the Ten Worlds¹—from the state of Hell to Buddhahood—at each moment, like each frame of a movie film projecting its image one at a time. Another set of ten—the ten factors—describes the workings of our lives in the context of the Ten Worlds and how we manifest change from one moment to the next. The concept of the ten factors, in other words, provides a philosophical still shot of our lives. It clarifies the functions common to all life in any given condition at any given moment.

The ten factors are described in the second, or “Expedient Means,” chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end” (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 24).

The first three factors—appearance, nature and entity—make up life itself. “Appearance” describes the visible, outward aspect of life such as facial expressions

and behavior. “Appearance” thus represents the physical or material aspects of life. “Nature” indicates the invisible inner quality and tendencies of life, for example, our disposition and character. “Nature” thus represents the spiritual aspect of life. “Entity” means life as a whole or the essence of life itself from which the material and spiritual aspects of life are manifest.

The rest of the ten factors describe the workings of life and their characteristics. “Power” is the capability latent within life. When this latent power becomes manifest, it is called “influence.” “Inherent cause” refers to our karmic orientations or tendencies formed by our past actions, that is, our thoughts, words and deeds. It refers to the internal causes or karma active at the moment we exert “influence” on our environment. “Relation” refers to our relationships with external circumstances, through which inherent causes become manifest. In this sense, “relation” may be viewed as an external cause. “Latent effect” is the result simultaneously implanted in one’s life when an “inherent cause” acts in “relation” with an external event. “Latent effect,” however, is not yet manifest. When a “latent effect” becomes visible, it is called “manifest effect.” From the standpoint of a “manifest effect”—that is, if manifest effect is the only recognized effect—“inherent cause,” “relation” and “latent effect” collectively constitute a cause. “Consistency from beginning to end” means that life’s appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect and manifest effect all consistently express the condition that life is in at any particular moment.

For example, when doctors tell their patients that they have a serious illness, despair may result. The patients’ complexions may pale (“appearance”), and

they may feel depressed (“nature”). The body and mind, that is, their whole existence (“entity”) expresses a state of suffering. This hellish state can be also explained as follows: Upon hearing the diagnosis (“relation”), the fear of illness (“inherent cause”), developed through past experience, is brought forth. The patients’ latent fear is now realized, and they feel hopeless (“latent effect”). They become anxious, break into a sweat and breathe heavily (“manifest effect”). When they hear this unfortunate news, all aspects of their entire being consistently manifests the state of Hell (“the consistency from beginning to end”). But if they later find out that their illness is much less serious, they may experience a state of joy.

What state or condition of being we manifest at any given moment determines how we experience our environment. On the deepest level, it is not our environment or external circumstances that determine our state of life but the nature of our “relation” with our environment. The same event, for example, may cause different reactions in different people. Some may feel defeated by illness or relationship problems while similar difficulties may inspire others to further develop their strength and character. Angry people are upset by small things while optimistic, confident people tend to remain calm regardless of their circumstances. The Ten Worlds are potentials within each of us. What we experience day to day, however, differs vastly from one person to another.

From the standpoint of Buddhism, how we relate to our environment largely depends upon how we have lived our lives, not only in this lifetime but in our past lives as well. Our past actions form karmic orientations, or what we might term life-habits, which constitute “inherent causes.” Based on these deep inner tendencies, we sometimes react automatically, either positively or negatively, to stimuli in our environment. Our reactions to our environment are often beyond conscious control or intellectual understanding. It is hard to explain why we hate certain animals or insects or feel attracted to a certain type of person.

The concept of the ten factors, therefore, teaches us the importance of developing good karmic habits in our lives so that we may consistently form positive “relations” with the events in our environment regardless of what they are. No matter how adverse our current circumstances, if our karmic tendencies are firmly grounded in the states of Bodhisattva or Buddhahood, our lives can transform every hardship into personal

The concept of the ten factors, therefore, teaches us the importance of developing good karmic habits in our lives so that we may consistently form positive “relations” with the events in our environment regardless of what they are. No matter how adverse our current circumstances, if our karmic tendencies are firmly grounded in the states of Bodhisattva or Buddhahood, our lives can transform every

growth. Without such grounding, we tend to react negatively to negative situations and cause further confusion and suffering for ourselves and others. Our Buddhist practice—praying to the Gohonzon and encouraging others to practice—is the key to solidifying within us the states of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood, thus developing the habits or “inherent causes,” of happiness. □

By Shin Yatomi, SGI-USA vice Study Department chief, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study), published by the Seikyo Press, 1994.

1. The Ten Worlds are distinct realms or categories of beings. From the lowest to the highest; they are the realms of 1) hell, 2) hungry spirits, 3) animals, 4) asuras, 5) human beings, 6) heavenly beings, 7) voice-hearers, 8) cause-awakened ones, 9) bodhisattvas, 10) Buddhas. The Ten Worlds are also interpreted as states of life (from “Glossary,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1274). In the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, those Ten Worlds are viewed as states of being that we experience from moment to moment, rather than distinctive physical realms. The Ten Worlds, therefore, may be understood as the states of hellish suffering, insatiable hunger, animality, belligerence, tranquil humanity, heavenly yet momentary joy, learning, self-realization, altruism and the supreme state of being characterized by compassion and wisdom.

The Powers of FAITH and PRACTICE

By Josei Toda

Josei Toda was the second president of the Soka Gakkai, who was responsible for rebuilding the organization after World War II by spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism to more than 750,000 households in Japan. He was imprisoned during the war, along with his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, for opposing the policies of the militarist Japanese government and refusing to incorporate state-sponsored Shintoism into Buddhist beliefs of the Soka Gakkai. He died on April 2, 1958. February 11, 2000, was the one-hundredth anniversary of President Toda's birth. The following is a translation of an essay by Mr. Toda originally published in the May 1955 issue of The Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai's study journal, and reprinted in Toda Josei Zenshu (Collected Works of Josei Toda), p. 148.

There are four principles by which human beings can connect themselves with the Gohonzon. These four are the power of faith, the power of practice, the power of the Buddha and the power of the Law. People possess the two powers of faith and practice, while the Gohonzon is imbued with the two powers of the Buddha and the Law. It is important to consider how these powers of faith, practice, the Buddha and the Law interrelate, and what sort of result they produce.

In his writing "On the Teachings Affirmed by All Buddhas Throughout Time" Nichiren Daishonin states, "When we perceive that our mind and the Buddha's life are one, we instantly become Buddhas.... When we awaken to the truth that our mind and the Buddha's mind are actually one, no evil karma will obstruct us at the final moment of life, and no illusions will hold us back among the sufferings of birth and death" (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 569–70). To perceive that our minds and the Buddha's mind are one means that the Buddha's mind is the object of devotion that embodies Myoho-renge-kyo, and one's own mind, as well, is the object of devotion that embodies these five characters of the Mystic Law. In other words our life itself is the Mystic Law of Myoho-renge-kyo. Though one's own mind and the Buddha's mind appear different, in that both are Myoho-renge-kyo, the Mystic Law embodied in the Gohonzon, they are essentially not different.

How, then, can we come to "perceive" that there is no

difference between our minds and the Buddha's mind? Only through our human powers of faith and practice. Even new practitioners, who have just taken faith and understand nothing about Buddhism, can naturally develop a state of fusion between their own mind and the Buddha's mind if they believe single-mindedly in the Gohonzon and exert their powers of faith and practice. The powers of the Buddha and the Law inherent in the Gohonzon will then be clearly manifest in their lives, producing immense benefit.

I often hear new believers complain that they have not yet received any benefit. Such people, I find, are preoccupied with obtaining benefit and are paying little attention to strengthening their powers of faith and practice. The Biblical statement "Knock, and the door will be opened for you" serves to illustrate the function of the four powers. For example, if one exerts a single degree of faith and practice, the powers of the Buddha and the Law will each manifest themselves to a single degree of magnitude. Likewise, one hundred times this exertion of the powers of faith and practice will bring forth one hundred times the powers of the Buddha and the Law. Exerting one's powers of faith and practice to a degree of 10,000 will cause the powers of the Buddha and Law to become manifest to a degree of 10,000. We should fix this principle in our minds and dedicate ourselves to faith and practice, purely and without reservation.

One thing to bear in mind, however, is the difference between the benefit of Shakyamuni's Buddhism and

Inconspicuous benefit is comparable to the growth of plants and trees. It is like the sprouting and growth of a seed planted in the earth. Because the seed of Myohorenge-kyo has the potential to grow into a great tree of benefit, it is only natural that months and years must pass before the new sprout becomes a full-grown tree. We can notice no difference in the size of the tree from one day to the next. Nevertheless, one, two, three, ten or fifteen years later, its growth is unmistakable. We should think of the benefit of the Mystic Law in the same way. This is what we call inconspicuous benefit.

benefit in the Buddhism of Sowing [the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin] in the Latter Day of the Law. What characterizes benefit in Shakyamuni's teaching is conspicuous benefit, while what distinguishes benefit in the Buddhism of sowing is called inconspicuous benefit. Conspicuous benefit is the kind of benefit that appears immediately and directly in a seemingly miraculous manner. Inconspicuous benefit appears naturally and gradually over time, without one's being aware of it. Of course, there is also inconspicuous benefit in Shakyamuni's Buddhism, but conspicuous benefit is the more prominent. Likewise, there is also conspicuous benefit in the Buddhism of Sowing, but of the two, inconspicuous benefit is the more important.

Inconspicuous benefit is comparable to the growth of plants and trees. It is like the sprouting and growth of a seed planted in the earth. Because the seed of Myohorenge-kyo has the potential to grow into a great tree of benefit, it is only natural that months and years must pass before the new sprout becomes a full-grown tree. We can notice no difference in the size of the tree from one day to the next. Nevertheless, one, two, three, ten or



President Toda, right, with Daisaku Ikeda.

fifteen years later, its growth is unmistakable. We should think of the benefit of the Mystic Law in the same way. This is what we call inconspicuous benefit.

If a single “worm” of doubt invades our faith, however, our power of practice will be eroded, causing the great tree of benefit to rot from within and eventually topple. We must therefore make continual efforts to challenge and overcome our doubts. Be aware that even a small doubt, left unresolved, can grow to inflict grave damage. If we think of the Gohonzon as the pure water of the Law, then its great enemy is the polluted water of doubt. If our power of faith is tainted by this polluted water, the Gohonzon of Myohorenge-kyo in our own hearts will be clouded over. We will then find it hard to fuse our lives with the pure life of Myohorenge-kyo that is the Gohonzon, and we will be unable to manifest the powers of the Buddha and the Law.

We must therefore arouse the great power of faith in the Gohonzon. The beneficent power of the Gohonzon is absolute; do not allow your conviction in this point to waver in the slightest. We should not allow even the tiniest doubt to persist unchallenged.

Moreover, even if our power of faith is strong, if we lack the power to put it into practice, we cannot bring forth the powers of the Buddha and the Law. For this reason we must also develop a strong power of practice. If, along with a strong power of faith, we exert a strong power of practice by chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo to the Gohonzon and teaching others, the powers of the Buddha and the Law will never fail to appear in our lives. □



Courtesy Sankyo Press

From right to left: Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda, SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck and SGI-USA Youth Division Senior Advisor Ed Feasel. Their dialogue was carried in the April issue of *Today* magazine.

CONVERSATIONS ON EDUCATION WITH FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

For the future of our children

A Mother's Wish,
a Mother's Glory

*Appreciation to the Mothers
Who Laid the Foundation for
SGI-USA's New Era*

Participants:

SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

Daisaku Ikeda

SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER

Matilda Buck

SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION SENIOR ADVISOR

Ed Feasel

IKEDA: At the request of *Todai* magazine's editorial staff, I will be having a series of dialogues with SGI members from around the world to discuss education. Today, we are holding the first in that series of discussions. Joining me are two friends from the United States: Mr. Ed Feasel, an individual of superb intellect who, undaunted by severe circumstances, graduated at the top of his class from Yale, one of America's leading universities; and Mrs. Matilda Buck, who is the SGI-USA's first non-Japanese women's division leader. Regarding Mrs. Buck's appointment, many of her seniors—pioneering leaders of the women's division who came to the United States from Japan and built the foundation for today's SGI-USA—are overjoyed at the news. It is just what they have been praying for and they feel that a wonderful era has arrived.

FEASEL: My mother is one of those Japanese pioneers, and she is very happy about Mrs. Buck's appointment. My mother married my father, who was working for the U.S. Navy in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, and then came to America with him. It was very hard for her, having arrived from Japan newly married and unfamiliar with the English language and American culture. It is easy to understand how Mrs. Buck's appointment symbolizes a new era for those "mothers of kosen-rufu" who overcame great adversity and kept working and struggling to spread this Buddhism for the happiness of American society.

BUCK: Thank you. It makes me feel all the more determined to work hard to live up to the high expectations everyone is placing in me. I

owe what I am today to the support of many people: my family, my fellow SGI members and to you, President Ikeda. To my mother I owe an especially deep debt of gratitude. My father died at a young age, and she raised me as a single parent under very difficult circumstances.

IKEDA: When did you lose your father?

BUCK: My father died nine months after I was born. My parents met when my father was staying at a medical care facility where my mother worked, receiving treatment for rheumatic heart disease. By then, my father's illness was already serious and the prognosis was bleak—the doctors said he did not have long to live. Nevertheless, the two fell deeply in love, and they decided to marry. His doctor and others were against it, but my mother married my father nevertheless, fully realizing that his time was limited.

IKEDA: I see. That speaks to the strength of the bond they shared.

BUCK: Yes, I really think so. Just as the doctor had predicted, my father passed away less than a year after I was born. Though my mother had been fully aware of this possibility, his death came as a shock to her. She never overcame her deep grief. At some point she began to rely on alcohol to deal with her pain.

Alcoholic parents often abandon or neglect their children, but not my mother. She maintained her sensitivity, her deep love and sense of responsibility as a mother. She would do anything she could possibly do for me.

On the other hand, to see my mother drinking and suffering was

frightening for me as a child. As I grew older it deeply affected how I viewed myself and the world. She worked very hard to make ends meet. Life was difficult; we lived in a series of tiny, bleak apartments. But wherever we were, she would use her wisdom and do whatever she could to make it a charming and cozy environment. I think this is why I grew up feeling embraced by her love and affection. My mother worked as a nursery school teacher until she was sixty—work that was very hard on her physically, especially as she grew older.

Victory for the Child Is Victory for the Parent

IKEDA: Your mother was a wonderful woman. She may have felt at times as if her sorrow would crush her. She may have felt like giving up on everything and laying down in defeat. But she did not fall; she could not fall because of her child, whom she loved. You must have been like a treasure left by her beloved husband. A mother's love is a magnificent thing. A mother's love is the strongest force in the world.

The important thing is whether you, Matilda, are happy or not. If you are happy, then your mother and father, too, will enjoy eternal happiness. That is because Buddhism teaches the principle that life itself permeates the entire universe. From this perspective, your father and mother are definitely with you. Buddhism teaches that the saddest of people can become the happiest. Your mother has won. And you, Matilda, are living proof of this. Victory for the child is victory for the parent. Today, as a leader of women

in America, you are giving hope and courage to many people. This in itself describes most eloquently the happiness and fortune enjoyed by your entire family.

BUCK: Thank you for these words, President Ikeda. I am very moved. I think there are many people in the world today who blame their parents for ruining their lives. If I had not encountered this faith, I, too, may have wound up resenting my mother and even living a destructive life.

But I did come across this Buddhism, and with your guidance and encouragement, I have learned the loftiest way of life. Because of this, I can, from the bottom of my heart, thank my mother for everything she has done for me.

IKEDA: Those who can appreciate their mothers are truly happy.

To Serve the People

IKEDA: Speaking of America, next year, on May 3, the Orange County campus of Soka University of America will open. The faculty will comprise top-notch scholars from all over the United States and around the world. And one of those esteemed individuals is Mr. Ed Feasel, who joins us today. Graduating with honors in economics from Yale University, which



Matilda's parents, Elsa and Eugene Richards, in 1942 on their wedding day.

stands at the pinnacle of American education, Ed went on to earn his Doctorate in Economics from the University of California at Berkeley. Afterward, while still in his twenties, he became an assistant professor at George Washington University. I am very happy to see such a distinguished and world-class scholar come to work for Soka University of America as a professor and dean of students. As the school's founder, I am truly appreciative.

FEASEL: That's really more praise than I deserve. I am the one who is at a loss to express my appreciation for this opportunity to work at the educational institution that, I feel, possesses the most important mission of any in the world. I am going to work to ensure that there will emerge from Soka University of America many leaders of the twenty-first century who have a truly global perspective.

I am determined to use whatever knowledge I have gained to develop able individuals — people who will use their knowledge not to exploit the people but to exhaustively dedicate themselves for the good of the people.

IKEDA: What you have just said, Ed, expresses the grand objective of Soka Education. It hinges on developing people who live not only for themselves, but who can take that extra step in the service of humanity.

FEASEL: This is the way of life I have learned from you, President Ikeda, and from my mother who struggled to raise me in the midst of many challenges and difficulties.

The year I was born, my family moved from Yokosuka, Japan to Chicago. But very soon after that, my father was sent to the distant battleground of Vietnam. I can imagine how lonely and helpless my mother felt, left alone in the still-unfamiliar land of America, unable to speak English well. To make ends meet, she took a job scraping paint from ships—very heavy labor for a woman her size to perform. She devoted herself to her work and to caring for me, her infant son, and awaited my father's return.

My father came back from Vietnam when I was five years old, and our family moved to San Diego. My father retired from the military and our family continued to live in

San Diego. Some time later, my younger brother was born, but he suffered from a severe impediment and was unable to move without help. A doctor told my mother that he would never live a normal life—that she'd better give him up to institutional care and forget about him. Nevertheless, my mother decided to take care of him herself.

In the meantime, our financial difficulties worsened; sometimes we even lacked money for food. So my mother went back to work, taking a full-time job as a maid. In spite of all this, I never heard her utter a single complaint. My mother's spirit was as strong as steel. The source of that strength was her faith.

When she finished work each day, she would go to Gakkai activities, giving her all for the sake of others. I grew up watching her live this way.

Never Abandon Your Dream!

IKEDA: Your mother is a wonderful person. Those who never give in to adversity are great. If you refuse to be beaten, you will eventually win. Winning means never being defeated.

When your mother was at work, was there someone who looked after your little brother?

FEASEL: There was only me. Though I wanted to go out and play with my friends in the neighborhood, I had to stay inside. But I used my imagination to find ways to entertain myself. To live up to the expectations of my mother who had been struggling so hard to support me and to bring some joy into her life, I made it my goal to attend a top-notch university. And to this



President Ikeda says, "A mother's love is the strongest force in the world," and "Victory for the child is victory for the parent."

end, I studied very hard. At the time, I simply wanted to be successful and wealthy so that I could buy my mother a house and enable her to live comfortably. The biggest turning point for my family and me came when I was in my third year of high school. That was in 1984, when my dream to enter a first-rate university was getting clearer and stronger. I had just begun to send out applications to leading schools around the country when my father lost his job as a security guard. We had no money in our checking account, and creditors were hounding us for payment. Attending college would cost money. My dream was shattered.

My father had taken great pride in being a provider for our family, so he was extremely distressed by this turn of events. To get us by, my mother began working lots of overtime hours.

One day, after my mother had left for work, I suddenly became aware of my father standing in my room. He said to me quietly, in a loving

voice, "There's no need to worry any more. I will take care of everything." Surprised, I looked around and saw that he was holding a bottle of sleeping pills. It was empty. I frantically called for an ambulance.

My father had tried to commit suicide, hoping that my mother and I could collect on his life insurance. His life was saved, but he had to remain in the hospital for a month. It was at that time that you, President Ikeda, came to San Diego.

IKEDA: I remember it well. That was on the occasion of the U.S.–Japan Joint Youth Division General Meeting held at the San Diego Sports Arena. It was a very dynamic meeting, which some twenty thousand youth attended.

FEASEL: I participated in the general meeting as a member of the Brass Band. I would go to school each day and then go to see my father in the hospital. On top of that, I threw all of my energy into band practice and Soka Group activities, staying late at



Catherine Kamey/CORBIS

President Ikeda says, "To what end do we live our lives? A life devoted to serving others is a life of the highest honor. Just what is the purpose of a university? Universities exist for the people."

could never have imagined. However, nothing ever comes of lamenting our fate. Only a strong-hearted person can achieve true happiness. There is no night that does not see the coming of dawn. The night is certainly dark, and that darkness deepens as the dawn approaches. That darkness might give one the feeling that dawn will never come, that the night will last forever. Nevertheless, the strength of a person with faith lies in believing that morning will definitely follow the night.

the community center every night in preparation for the meeting. In the midst of all this, Daniel Habuki, who is now the president of Soka University of America, reported to you about my situation. In response, you sent me a gift, a set of prayer beads, expressing your prayer for my success in applying for college. When I received it, my heart again began to glow with hope. A flame of courage was lit inside me. Your message said: "Don't give up! You will definitely win!"

From that point on, my mother and I began to pray all the more seriously. Crying, we chanted daimoku. Well, actually, I was the one who cried—my mother never cried. After my father got out of the hospital, he chanted with us and began taking steps to find a job. About one month after your visit to San Diego, we heard from a company my father

had interviewed with. He was hired! And that very same day, we also received word from Yale University that I had been accepted there on a full scholarship. The months leading up to that day had been hellish, but in the course of that one day our family's fortune blossomed. I really feel that our family changed its destiny on that day.

A Strong-Hearted Person Is a Happy Person.

IKEDA: You have really worked hard, refusing to give in to defeat. Because you have endured bitterness and persevered with a strong heart, your family has won. Life isn't all smooth going. At times we encounter pain and difficulty we

belief that morning would surely come was due to the encouragement you gave us, President Ikeda.

BUCK: Yes, you have certainly made us aware of how great a power we have hidden within us. You have always recognized the great potential in each of us, respected it, and done whatever you possibly could to develop and nurture it. Through your constant communication to us and the example you have set through your actions, you have empowered us to develop our lives. About six months ago, I was going through a tough period in which I was wondering how I could ever balance my time doing SGI-USA activities with my commitment to my family. I wrote to you, sharing my worries and pain. Then I received a card from you bearing your calligraphy that read, "The Buck Castle of Happiness on the Soka

Mountain of Fortune.”

When I had someone translate the meaning of the characters, I felt as though my eyes had suddenly opened. The movement for American kosen-rufu, the members’ happiness, my husband’s happiness, my children’s happiness and my grandchildren’s happiness are not separate in any way. Through my present actions for the sake of others I am building a castle of fortune for my entire family—a “Buck Castle.” The happiness of every member of my family, all of whom I love, is included entirely within that castle. Without this encouragement, I may not have had the confidence to accept the position of SGI-USA women’s division leader when I was asked to do so at the end of last year.

IKEDA: There is just one sun in the sky, but when that sun rises all things on earth receive its energy. Similarly, if you become a sun-like presence in your family, every member of your family will benefit from your light. Please cherish and take good care of your husband. He is a wonderful husband who is supporting your activities as the SGI-USA women’s division leader. The strongest and most beautiful of bonds is that between a wife and a husband who share the same ideals. Please continue always to enjoy your lives together in good health, regarding each other with warmth and affection.

The Ability to Make Friends With Anyone

IKEDA: Now that our readers understand a little more about the two of you, I’d like to move to our main

topic, which is education in America. But again, maybe you could shed light on the issue by sharing your own experiences. What was school like for you?

BUCK: What I remember most about school was the fact that I was always changing schools. We were always struggling financially, and for this reason among others we moved over and over again. As a result, I never stayed at any one school for more than two years. Though we lived mostly within the Los Angeles area, from the time I was in elementary school through high school I changed schools nine times. I was always the “new girl.”

IKEDA: Moving around so much, it must have been very hard for you to make friends. In Japan, students who move from one school to another are often bullied.

BUCK: Whenever I began to attend a new school, I was very apprehensive. What would I do, for instance, if I had no friends to sit with during lunch? The schools I attended were in different environments. I might move to a school in a very poor neighborhood, and then to a school in a fairly affluent area. But if I look back on it now, because I changed schools so many times, I became quite sociable—I gained the capacity to get along with all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. I think the confidence I have now that enables me to talk to anyone comes from that experience, and it has served me well.

IKEDA: It’s important to live in such a way as to take everything as a positive influence, moving us in a valu-

able direction. To this end, it’s crucial to develop a lofty state of life.

FEASEL: I attended schools in the same neighborhood from the time I was in kindergarten through high school. It was in a suburb of San Diego, close to the Mexican border. Most of the people there were of modest means. The majority of people were Hispanic, but many other races and ethnicities were represented. So, from the time I was a child, I had to learn to live with people whose backgrounds were different from my own.

IKEDA: It is a unique attribute of American society to cherish and respect diversity. This is also a core principle of Buddhism. A Japanese parent who once lived in Los Angeles and whose children attended school there shared the following: “I was worried that my daughter would be picked on because she is Japanese. But instead, the American students reached out to her, engaged her in conversation and soon became her friends. However, when we returned to Japan, she was treated differently because she had lived in another country, and it was hard for her to feel accepted.”

It’s a shame that Japan’s narrow “small-island mentality” is even seen in children.

BUCK: When I was in middle school, I attended a school in a pretty rough neighborhood. Influenced by my surroundings, I turned into kind of a rebel. Concerned about me, and in spite of our financial difficulties, my mother moved to a nicer neighborhood so I could change schools. Before the transfer, my grades were bad and I couldn’t get serious

about anything. But through the influence of my new friends, I became a better student.

Later, I attended the same high school in Los Angeles my mother had gone to. But by that time I had become aware of the opposite sex and again found it hard to concentrate on my studies. So my mother, with the help of an old family friend, arranged for me to attend a private boarding school for girls. That school was very strict and though I wanted to be distracted by boys, there were no boys to be distracted by. Instead, I met and was cared for by some excellent teachers and friends, and I devoted myself to my studies and to sports. Eventually, I even became the student body president.

As a result of all this, I was accepted at and attended UCLA. During this crucial time of my youth, I believe it was my mother who protected me from straying too far off course and enabled me to spend my time in a good supportive environment. It was a great strain on her financially and emotionally to make this possible for me. That was her way—no matter how troubled she was, she always tried her best for me.

A Mother Sheds Tears of Victory

IKEDA: She was a mother who thought seriously about her child's welfare. Nothing could have pleased her more than your growth. If it is for the sake of her child, a mother can summon power and ability no one ever thought she had. It is the same on either side of the Pacific.

Ed, would you share with us some memories of your years at Yale? In Japan it is said that American universities are very difficult to graduate from.

FEASEL: American universities are said to provide the highest quality educational content of any in the world. Students have to study very hard. Yale is a university that gathers some of the brightest students from around the world, and so the competition is intense. It's only by continuing to study with all your might that you can keep up. If you don't, you will soon be forced to drop out. I have never had to study as hard as I did while at Yale. But while struggling I would think of my mother and father who enabled me to attend college. Exhorting myself to try harder, I would throw my whole life into my studies. Eventually, graduation day came. I naturally asked both of my parents to attend, wanting somehow to repay even in some small way the debt of gratitude I owed them, especially my mother.

BUCK: Your parents must have been extremely proud to attend your graduation from Yale.

FEASEL: Yes, but my mother was not really sure where or what kind of school Yale was. When I was accepted and decided to attend, my mother must have thought, "Why does he want to take the trouble to go to school so far away?"

IKEDA: Your parents continued to live in San Diego the whole time you were at Yale?

FEASEL: Yes. Yale is near New York, so we were on opposite coasts. I went to meet them at the airport when they came. The plane they were supposed to be on arrived, but I waited for quite some time and still they did not emerge from the gate. "They missed the flight," I thought, extremely worried. About

forty-five minutes after their plane's arrival, an airport employee I had asked to look for them found them standing inside the gate.

IKEDA: I can imagine what a struggle it must have been for your parents to make such a trip. Everyone gets disoriented flying for the first time. By the way, how was the graduation ceremony?

FEASEL: Graduation at Yale is a grand affair that lasts three days. Because it is one of the leading universities in the United States, many prominent figures from around the world attend. My parents were simply astounded by the atmosphere.

On Day One of the graduation ceremonies, there were cultural and artistic presentations including a symphony orchestra. On Day Two, the several thousand graduating students gathered for a university-wide ceremony, which included speeches by noted guests.

On the third day, ceremonies were held separately for each college within the university. My parents seemed overwhelmed by a world that they had never before encountered. During the ceremonies, special graduation awards were announced. In front of the entire assembly and in the presence of my parents, who had come to share this moment with me, my name was called to receive an award for outstanding scholarship. I was extremely proud to show my parents such clear proof of my victory.

After the ceremony, I went over to my parents and saw that my father was crying. My father had always been the sentimental type, so I wasn't that surprised. But my mother standing next to him was crying, too. It was the first time I had

ever seen her cry. She had never shown a tear even under the most bitter and trying circumstances.

BUCK: What a beautiful image. These were your mother's tears of victory.

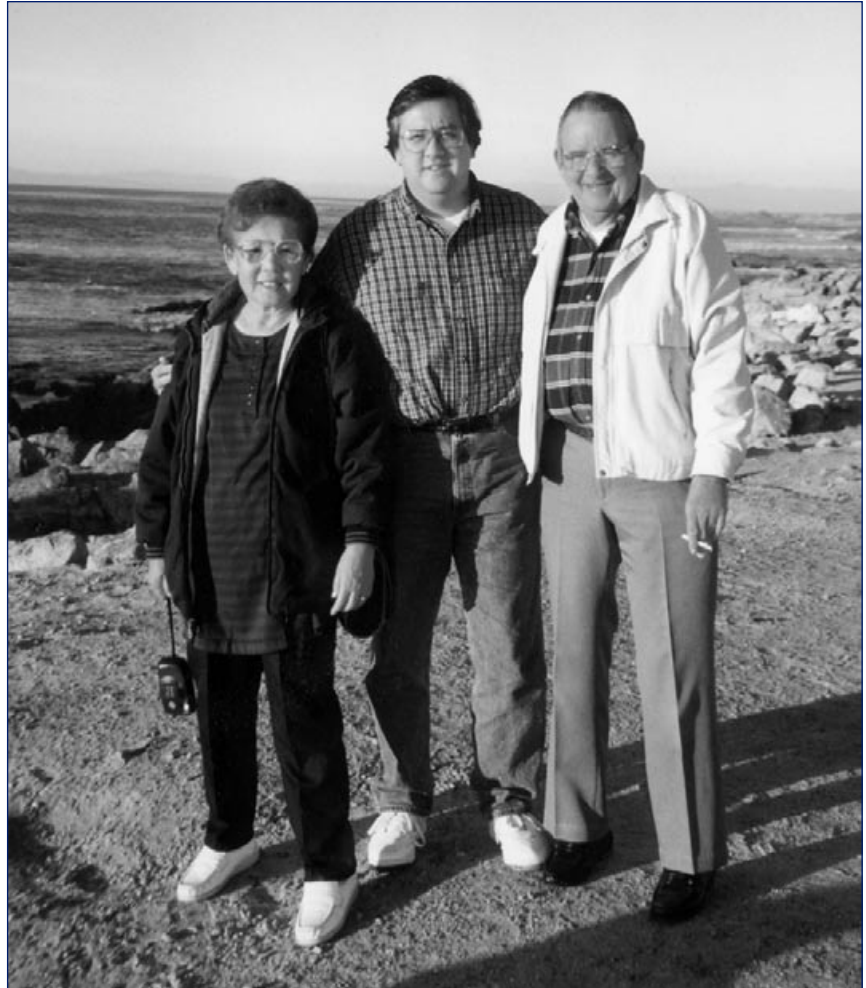
Universities Exist To Serve the People

FEASEL: My mother said to me: "I'm very happy! I'm really proud of you!" With these words, the three of us hugged. Surprised at seeing my mother's tears for the first time, I thought: "I've had a dream to become successful so that I could repay my mother for all of her hard work and struggles on my behalf. But that is not what is going to make her happy. It's not simply a matter of my becoming rich or buying her a beautiful house. It's a question of whether I can keep growing and developing myself, and whether I can use the ability I acquire to contribute to people's happiness. This is the way for me to repay the debt of gratitude I owe to my mother, who has devoted her life to helping people and who struggled to raise me."

At that moment I made up my mind. Rather than pursue a career in business, I would follow a course of humanistic education. Also, I would work to become someone who could play an important role in our Buddhist movement of peace, culture and education.

IKEDA: Your decision is praiseworthy. Your story is deeply moving.

To what end do we live our lives? A life devoted to serving others is a life of the highest honor. Just what is the purpose of a university? Universities



Ed with his parents, Tsuyako and Paul Feasel.

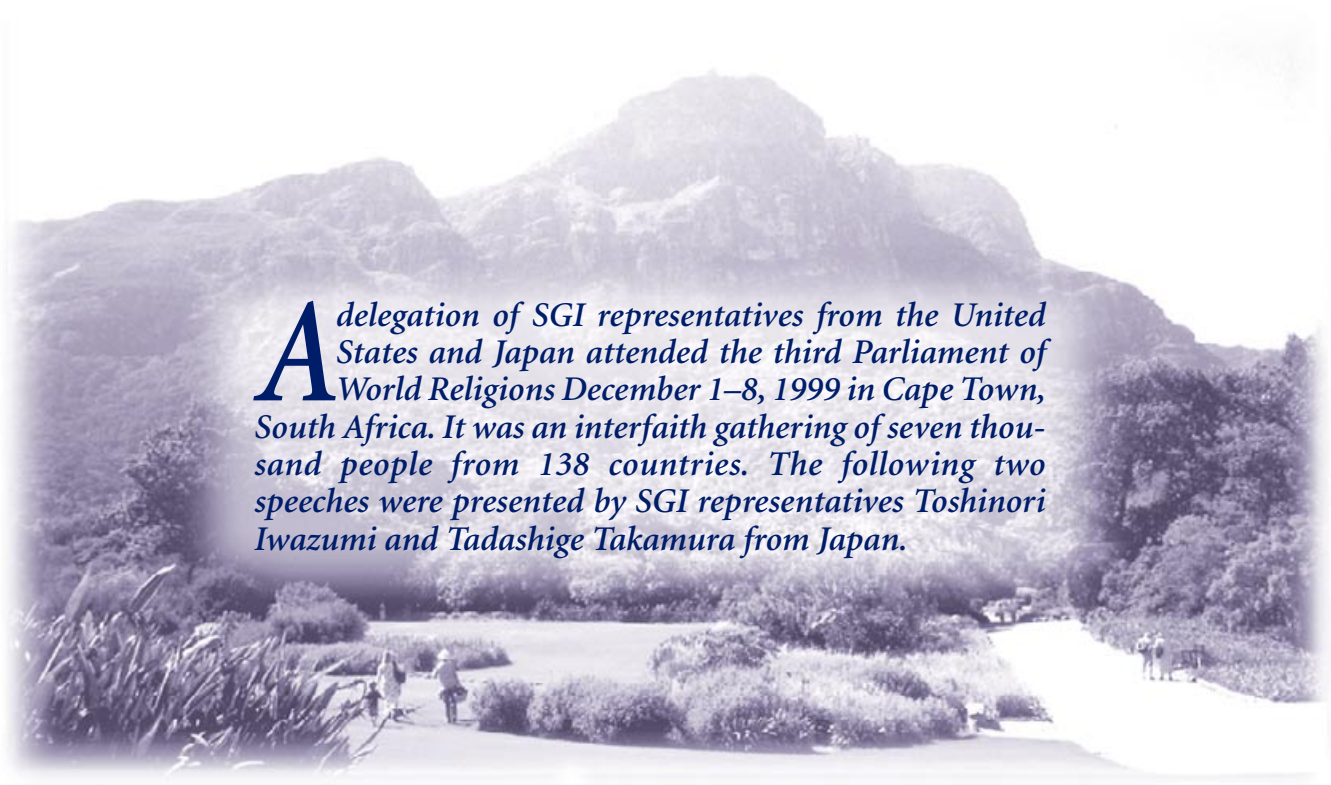
exist for the people.

It is my conviction that a university exists to serve the good of those ordinary people who could not attend college, though they may have wished to. Who could understand more deeply the hearts and minds of ordinary people who toil and are tossed about by society's harsh challenges than someone like Ed Feasel? For this reason, as the founder of Soka University, I am truly happy to see you on the faculty of Soka University of America.

Both of you, Matilda and Ed, have endured many painstaking struggles. But as leaders of the SGI-USA, you

are giving the light of hope to a great many people. All of your hardships, all of your struggles, must have been tests for you to challenge and overcome so that you could become genuine leaders of the twenty-first century. What has supported both of you along the way has been the deep and expansive love of your mothers. We speak of education, but education is rooted in love. From here on, let us together shine the light of education into the world of the twenty-first century. Let us set aflame, for the sake of humanity, the love our mothers have passed on to us!

To Be Continued



A delegation of SGI representatives from the United States and Japan attended the third Parliament of World Religions December 1–8, 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. It was an interfaith gathering of seven thousand people from 138 countries. The following two speeches were presented by SGI representatives Toshinori Iwazumi and Tadashige Takamura from Japan.

BUDDHIST VALUES AND A CULTURE OF PEACE

Toshinori Iwazumi, Vice President, Soka Gakkai (Japan)

How can Buddhist values contribute to building a robust culture of peace in the twenty-first century?

Before examining this question, I would like first to recall UNESCO's Declaration on the Role of Religion in the Promotion of a Culture of Peace, adopted in Barcelona five years ago in 1994. This important document gives voices to many of the key principles and commitments that must concern us all. Among them: "[T]o transform conflicts without using violence, and to prevent them through education and the pursuit of justice." And to realize "truly humane education for all... education for peace, freedom, and



Toshinori Iwazumi, Vice President,
Soka Gakkai

human rights..."

I believe that two key values of Buddhism are the emphasis on the sanctity of life and on the limitless

potential of the individual. From these, flow powerful commitments to peace and education. One scholar has in fact questioned whether or not Buddhism should be counted as a "religion." Rather, it should perhaps be thought of as a movement of popular education, awakening people to the true nature of their own lives and their own possibilities. The passages from the UNESCO documents I have quoted above point to the profound interconnection between peace and education. Preventing conflicts through education. Peace education.

In this vein, I think it is appropriate to ask what is "truly humane education"? I think that it is education that changes us deeply, that expands and

opens us up to entirely new perspectives on life. Education that makes us keenly aware of other people's experiences, their realities, their sufferings and their dreams. In contrast, education that merely piles information and facts onto our preexisting prejudices, can make us better informed brutes, but it cannot have the kind of profound humanizing effect that is at the heart of education.

In the parlance of the Soka Gakkai this process of becoming genuinely and fully human, of taking responsibility for the entirety of one's life, expanding one's horizons to be able to take an active interest and responsibility toward the human future—this dynamic process of inner-driven transformation is referred to as “human revolution.”

In this sense, I would like to take a few minutes to share some autobiographical material that I hope will shed light on my own humane education, my own learning about peace, and the role played by Buddhist values in this process.

I was born in Hiroshima in 1948. On August 6, 1945, my mother by mere coincidence happened to be out of town and so suffered no effects of the bombing. My father worked for the national railroad, and was in an office at the Hiroshima Main Station when the bomb hit. Of the three people in the room, one died instantly, another lost one eye, but my father was unhurt.

My aunt, however, was much closer to ground zero than my father, and was exposed to a massive dose of radiation. She managed to walk home, where her sister cared for her as best she could. She died in great pain, calling for water. The surviving sister shared these details with me on many occasions and this story was very

much part of my upbringing. My surviving aunt fashioned a doll in memory of her younger sister and slept with it every night until she herself passed away in January of this year.

The City of Hiroshima built temporary housing just a few hundred meters from the blast center. Because my mother was pregnant with me, my family was given priority for housing. I was born soon after my family moved into these quarters. As children, we used to play and dig in the rubble. It was not unusual for us to unearth human bones. There were people in the housing unit who bore the scars, keloids, from the bombing and a child who was born with microcephalia as a result of exposure to radiation while in the womb. Born with an extremely small head, this child did not live long.

When I was ten, my family joined the Soka Gakkai. I know that the Buddhist philosophy of life, which emphasizes self-empowerment and a vigorous spirit of challenging fate, of refusing to be defeated by circumstances—I know that all this played an important role in enabling my parents to create a new sense of hope out of their circumstances.

In September 1957, the Second President of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, issued a declaration calling for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. He denounced these weapons as a fundamental violation of the humankind's most fundamental right—the right to survival—and called on the young people of Japan to spread this message to the world. This declaration, which voices the practical implications and real-world responsibilities that stem from the Buddhist concept of reverence for the sanctity of life, is considered the starting point for the Soka Gakkai's peace movement.

One of the things that make an atomic bombing different from other forms of bombing is that the effects are on going. Everyone exposed to radiation must live with the fear and anxiety of not knowing when, or in what form, the after-effects are going to appear.

When I was still in high school, there was one young man, in his thirties if I remember who often encouraged the younger members of our organization. He himself was suffering from leukemia, most likely as a result of the bombing. I was deeply inspired by the passion with which he was determined to dedicate the remainder of his life—however long that might be—to the cause of peace. People such as this young man laid the foundations for the Soka Gakkai's movement for peace, education and culture in Hiroshima.

It is not enough, of course, merely to pray for peace. We must take concrete action. This was a sense that I brought with me when I moved to Tokyo to attend university. In 1970, the third president of the Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda, made a proposal to the youth membership that created a truly unique opportunity to do something concrete to create peace.

We began to collect record and set down the experiences of people whose lives had been affected by the war. The title of the series of publications that eventually emerged from this project is *To the Generations Who Do Not Know War*. This was a very profound learning experience for the several thousand young people who participated directly in collecting and editing these recollections. Often, we had to visit someone many times before we could gain their trust and they would start to open to us. We of course col-

lected the experiences of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We also gathered the experiences people who had been on Okinawa, where the local residents, nominally Japanese, had been abused and murdered in great numbers by the Japanese army.

We interviewed not only the victims, by also the perpetrators, those who committed terrible deeds in China, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Needless to say, many of these former soldiers were extremely reluctant to talk. They wanted, if possible, to forget what they had done. Those memories that could not be extinguished, they were clearly determined to take with them to the grave. It was very moving to see some of these people awoken to the idea that their most painful memories could be of use to future generations. That their private pain could have meaning as a larger good, as a warning against the kind of horror and folly that must never be repeated. I believe that this experience manifests the Buddhist principle of “turning poison into medicine” which states that even the most painful, negative experience can be transformed, as we transform ourselves and our attitudes, into some of profound and lasting value.

Eventually, the youth members of the Soka Gakkai published a total of eighty volumes of war recollections. In a related activity, the women of the organization collected and edited twenty volumes of women’s experiences.

For myself and for the many young people who participated in this endeavor, this was a profound learning experience. It brought home to us the cruel banality, the horror and stupidity of war. I think



The city of Hiroshima after the August 6, 1945 atomic bomb. Mr. Iwazumi was born a few years later and grew up amid the rubble and devastation of the attack.

Belman/CORBIS

that anyone who reads any of these publications—and some of them have been translated into English—will be forever immunized against the kind of pro-war, pro-violence messages that overflow the media and entertainment industry. We learned, in the depths of our beings, that war solves absolutely nothing, that it leaves only pain and scars that can never really be healed.

SGI President Ikeda has written words to the effect that to forget is an act of cruelty, but that to remember is an act of compassion.

I believe it was this conviction that inspired Mr. Ikeda to work with the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles to bring the exhibition “The Courage to Remember” to Japan. This was the first large-scale exhibition about the Holocaust to be held in Japan. To date it has been seen in a total of forty-six cities and been

seen by a total of 1.6 million Japanese citizens. I was deeply moved by the fact that Hiroshima was chosen as a venue for this exhibition. I feel that there is enormous value that can be created when people—who have experienced something beyond the power of words to express—can share their experiences and develop a sense of solidarity and mission to create a world in which others will not have to undergo what they have suffered.

The things that we learn in sharing with others our own secret pain, in a process that moves us from an isolated past into a shared, a common future—I believe that this kind of learning constitutes the essence of what UNESCO calls for as “peace education,” “truly humane education.” These are some of the values that I have learned from Buddhism that I believe can contribute to building a new and lasting culture of peace in the twenty-first century. □

BUDDHIST VALUES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Tadashige Takamura, Professor, Soka University

Ten years have now passed since the end of the Cold War. The Cold War was a system of massive, entrenched structural violence. Some have described this as a “pyramid of violence,” with nuclear weapons and the threat of global annihilation at the top, interpersonal and domestic violence at the bottom. Others have noted the irony that the Cold War military “aid” that fueled and sustained so many regional conflicts has dried up now that the objectives of that aid must be the development of the educational and health-care infrastructures. In many senses, Apartheid was a product of the Cold War and the people of South Africa were victims of that global conflict.

So, whatever difficulties confront us, I think we should keep in sight the fact that we have succeeded in stepping out from under the shadow of the massive structural violence of the Cold War. We must never let go of the hope, of the sense of possibility that derives from this fact. This is, I believe, the special responsibility of the world’s spiritual traditions. A faith commitment is just that—a faith in those things which as yet exist only as a possibility, coupled with the determined effort to take concrete steps towards making those better, happier, more positive possibilities a reality. I think that in a world such as ours, where there is such a profoundly confusing mixture of positive and negative trends,



Tadashige Takamura
Professor, Soka University

few things are more important than the work of enhancing people’s ability to envisage and sustain their vision of a better world. This ability is, I believe, crucial to conflict prevention and is, again, a responsibility shared by all faith traditions.

Before returning to what I feel are some of the special contributions that Buddhist values can make to conflict prevention, I would like to briefly review what I feel are some of the important forces shaping our world today. In other words, what forces have moved in to fill in this vacuum left by the collapse of the Cold War structures?

The first is globalization, the neo-liberal doctrine of free trade, open markets, with highly fluid flows of capital, information and labor across national boundaries.

This is a highly complex phenomenon, and it is literally redrawing the maps of the globe as we speak. I can’t attempt an in-depth analysis of globalization, but would like to just list

here a few of the positive and negative impacts globalization can have on people; how it can advance or hinder the interests of human development and human security.

On the positive side, globalization has generated massive new wealth. It presents important new opportunities for economic development and the alleviation of the crushing burden of poverty. For example, there is absolutely no reason why developing countries can’t “leapfrog” to environmentally clean technologies and renewable sources of energy. Likewise, new communications technologies have the potential to open up previously unimaginable educational opportunities. On the Internet, a lecture hall of twenty or thirty million is more than possible.

On the negative side, we see increasing disparity within countries, tensions with traditional values. For many people, integration into world markets means a new dependency, and vulnerability to their fluctuations. Many national governments feel that their ability to plot an independent economic course has been undermined by external market forces and their representatives in the IMF, who impose “one-size-fits-all” solutions on problems with unique local roots and implications.

Nor are these positive and negative aspects distributed equitably. The positive aspects are concen-



Mr. Takamura, second from left and Mr. Iwazumi, far right, with SGI members in Cape Town, South Africa.

Nancy Simms

trated among the global elites; the burdens are borne disproportionately by the already marginalized people both in the developed and developing world.

So we see an ironic continuity between the Cold War system and the forces of globalization to the extent that globalization embodies a strong element of structural violence.

The second force that has moved in to fill the vacuum left by the Cold War is that of nationalism.

With the restraint imposed by the Cold War removed, many long suppressed national aspirations have come to the surface. Minorities that have long suffered from discrimination and marginalization have sought to realize their dreams of equality and justice. They have done this by following the model offered by the Western nation-state: the acquisition of their own territorial state. Without digressing too far, I would like here to question the essential nature of the state. In its minimalist definition, to acquire a state means to control a territory and to gain a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within that territory. In reality, of course, it also means to accept a wide range of responsibilities for the rights and welfare of

traditional, violent modality of statehood that comes to the fore in so many so-called “ethnic conflicts,” as long-simmering feelings of frustration are exploited by opportunistic politicians who see those feelings as their potential power-base.

Nationalism provides, in miniature, the kind of simplified, dichotomous worldview that characterized the Cold War: us vs. them, good vs. evil, self vs. other. Nor are rising nationalist sentiments unrelated to globalization which has put increased stress on so many societies, making people more open to simplistic solutions that are based on blaming and demonizing others.

The fact is that, although the danger of inter-state wars has receded, the conflicts of the post-war period (most of them within states, between governments and non-state groups and actors) have caused the deaths of an estimated six million people.

Here also, we see there is profound structural violence inherent in nationalism, at least as it is understood and practiced now.

In an important sense, structural violence, which is bound up in the very fabric of societies, is a problem of the human heart.

That is why it is very appropriate

all the people living within that territory. But what I want to stress here is the centrality of violence in traditional understandings of the state. Traditionally, states are acquired and maintained by violence.

And it is this

that we should discuss it here, at this gathering of the world’s religious traditions. Religion has always sought to address the problems of the heart. I believe that it is particularly important that we all strive to address the problem of deep-rooted violence.

In recent years, South Africa has provided an inspiring example of a society seeking to deal courageously with the particularly vicious form of entrenched structural violence of Apartheid. I think that there is much that the world can learn from the dearly bought lessons of our host country.

Now I would like to look at some of the contributions that the Buddhist values and perspectives can offer toward the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

As I have attempted to outline above, the question of identity is at the heart of much of the conflict that plagues our world today. In other words, if we define ourselves by who we are not, by a potentially violent contradistinction to the Other, we are likely to lock ourselves into a cycle of conflict.

Also, people who feel that their sense of self, their traditional values and identity, are threatened by the homogenizing forces of globalization, may easily turn to radical nationalist ideology. Conversely, different groups within a country may develop a sense of their own unique history and identity, creating a dichotomous worldview in which the full humanity of other groups is denied. The politics of identity can play an important role in dehumanizing others and justifying violence.

How does Buddhism view identity, and how can the Buddhist understanding of identity contribute to the peaceful and creative resolution of conflict?

Buddhism takes a very flexible view of identity. In reality, we each live a in multi-layered, and constantly evolving scheme of identity and self-definition. For example, I am an Asian, Japanese (a category of identity that did not exist 150 years ago), a man, an academic... The significance of each of these layers of identity is something that takes shape in a process of dialogue and interaction with others, with you, here, in this moment. Buddhism acknowledges this reality; it undermines any attempt to fix or reify the incessant flux of life.

Buddhism is a teaching of inner diversity. It apprehends each human being as an immensely diverse entity, manifesting good and evil, creativity and destructiveness, love and hate, in a moment-by-moment interaction with our surroundings.

What we experience as personality, or identity, are in fact profoundly engraved tendencies or patterns of behavior. The technical term is karma. But this is not fixed or immutable. Likewise, what we know as national character or culture is the sum or accrual of these individual tendencies, reinforced through a shared history. But again, these group identities are not fixed, eternal or unchanging. They are relative, contingent and evolving.

And they are undergirded by our most fundamental identity—that is, our genuine humanity. The technical term is Buddha nature, which might be termed our inherent capacity to sense our oneness with the entirety of being.

Another aspect of the Buddhist outlook that I believe can contribute to conflict resolution is that it is focused firmly on the present and the future. A thorough airing of historical realities, acknowledgment



Holocaust monument in Warsaw, Poland. One of the concrete ways the SGI has facilitated understanding between peoples is by sponsoring the exhibition “The Courage to Remember” which toured forty-six cities in Japan.

Ira Nowinski/CORBIS

and acceptance of those realities, is absolutely necessary. But what is more important is the recognition that we must live together now and into the future.

Returning to the question of nationalism mentioned earlier, even if a group of people wins independence and no longer has to share a country with others, we all still have to share this same, limited, shrinking Earth. So the future that we all will share should always be our proper focus.

In this sense, the concept of restorative justice, with its essentially present and future orientation, is crucial.

Thus we see that Buddhism does, like many of the great religious traditions, posit the existence of universal values that can serve as the basis for the identity of all people, enabling them to overcome their more superficial differences.

This may strike some people as alarming, especially in light of what I have just spoken about with regard to globalization, which many people perceive as the imposition of culturally specific values as if they were universal.

Buddhism regards the universal as something immanent in each individual. It has no independent existence apart from the specific, diverse realities of the individual. The universal can only become manifest through the specific lived realities of unique individuals. It cannot be imposed from without.

Ultimately, Buddhism views all existence as interdependent and interpenetrating. Ultimately, self and other are ontologically necessary to each other. You are necessary in order for me to experience the fullness of my own being, and vice versa. When people can awaken to the reality of our interdependence, we can move beyond a negative stance of tolerance to active appreciation of difference. It is even possible, in this view, to understand conflict as proof of our connectedness, that we share something profound with others. What we share most intensely is a common interest in bringing forth the creative possibilities inherent in this special form of connectedness we are experiencing as “conflict.”

What are some of the concrete methodologies that arise from this worldview?

The first is an emphasis on dialogue. The truths gained through dialogue are always warm, living human truths; they are never mere cold, objective facts. As the SGI members in the UK describe the objective of our movement: trust through friendship: peace through trust. I believe that this simple for-

mula can take a long way toward the prevention of conflict.

The president of the SGI and founder of Soka University, Daisaku Ikeda, has been relentless in his pursuit of dialogue for just this reason. Even at the height of the Cold War, he met the leaders of both China and the Soviet Union. When questioned as to why the leader of a religious organization would travel to countries whose policies deny religion, his response was disarmingly simple: there are people there. Both China and the Soviet Union are inhabited by people, people with whom we share a common humanity. Through frank, open exchange, it should be possible to create trust and, eventually, some kind of breakthrough. And I personally believe that Mr. Ikeda's efforts in the field of behind-the-scenes citizen's diplomacy were among those, undertaken by many people of good-will worldwide, that contributed to reducing Cold War tensions.

Interactions with other cultures and traditions can provide opportunities for us to discover the relativity of our identity, and to start to perceive and awaken to the universally human in others.

Cross-cultural encounters, however, must be structured in such a way as to generate real understanding. To give an extreme example, colonialism is a form of cultural encounter predicated on structural violence. The world will continue to struggle to overcome the negative heritage of colonialism for some years to come.

Writing on the issues of peace, Mr. Ikeda has proposed that the following principles guide cultural exchanges and interactions.

1. Gradualism. The experience

should not be overwhelming to either party, but should be gradual enough so that ideas and influences can be absorbed and incorporated into existing ideational and value systems.

2. Mutuality. Both parties should approach the interaction with a sense of learning from each other. It should never be a one-way street. This means that exchanges must be rooted in a sense of fundamental respect and equality. We must all open ourselves to the fact that we can learn from other cultures and traditions. The arrogant assumption that one has something to teach but nothing to learn must be abandoned.

Finally, as Director of the Soka University Peace Research Institute, I would like to share with you some of our concrete activities to promote intercultural exchange and understanding.

Soka University has one of the then largest international exchange programs in Japan. At present we have agreements with sixty-one universities in thirty-eight countries. A total of 201 students from other countries are presently studying at the Tokyo Campus and 120 students from Soka University are studying overseas, including five in Africa. The experience of exposure to other cultures and ways of life has an especially profound and long-lasting impact on young people.

I believe that Japan as a whole has a regrettable tendency to rank cultures, to feel that we have the most to learn from European culture, much less from Asia and Africa. Obviously, this is a serious error. To encourage greater interaction with scholars from throughout the region, Soka University has, since 1986, sponsored a biannual Pacific Basic Symposium.

At the most recent one, held in at Thammasat University in Bangkok in 1998, scholars participated from a total of twenty-four countries, including China, Russia, South Korea and the ASEAN countries. Scholars are, of course, only a limited group, but exchanges among them often pave the way for broader interactions between cultures and countries.

We are especially proud of our exchanges with Korea, a country with which Japan has a long history of conflict. Despite the profound cultural debt Japan owes Korea, Japan has repeatedly attacked and invaded Korea. The colonial occupation that lasted from 1910 to 1945 left deep scars on Korea and a deep-rooted distrust and animosity toward Japan. It is a truism that most wars and conflicts occur between neighboring countries. To supplant mistrust with mutual understanding, Soka University has developed an extensive exchange program with Kyung Hee University. At the Seoul International Conference of NGOs this past October, we sponsored a conference that we hope will lead to the eventual creation of a Northeast Asia Regional Peace Forum.

In this paper, I have sought to outline some of the basic principles and outlooks of Buddhism that I think can help to prevent conflicts by uprooting the mistrust, misunderstanding and animosity that underlie them. I have also sought to introduce some of the activities that we have undertaken to put these principles into practice.

I look forward to further exchanges with you as we each explore the values that our different traditions can bring to the question of resolving and preventing conflicts and creating the foundations for lasting peace in the 21st century. □



Pediatrician Learns To Face Reality



By Marie-Claude Angelique, France

My father was in the military, so I spent part of my childhood in Africa, where everything seemed to be beautiful and peaceful. I was told there that wisdom developed with age and that our mission in society was to take responsibility for our community and guide our juniors toward the same goal. To my great disappointment, when I was 14, in 1961, my family had to move back to Paris.



Marie-Claude Angelique

In Paris, my life changed drastically. I had to have knowledge and be competent and productive, showing concrete results. As my mother plunged into the hell of severe mental illness, my father found himself alone in taking care of his eight children. In order not to cause my father further worries, I decided to help him as much as I could and study hard. I had a passion for science and math, but didn't want to become a calculating "robot" like my friends. I found myself naturally drawn to the medical field, in spite of the lengthy and costly study involved.

I was soon shocked and disappointed by a world of doctors who lacked compassion toward patients and medical students who were more worried about excelling and profit-making than easing others' sufferings. I was trying to help other students in their studies and reassure them, but the truth is that I was suffering inside and crying before and after class. I was going to the hospital in the morning, to the university in the afternoon, to work at night and on the weekends, and I was always on duty in pediatrics, the emergency room or the intensive care unit. By the time I graduated from medical school, I was falling apart.

Unable to cope with society, I soon escaped to Zaire to co-manage a pediatrics unit. After a period of two years which was extremely rewarding, I returned to Paris with a growing interest in humanitarian medicine and decided to equip myself with further specialization in tropical medicine, public health and research. Unable to face staying in one place and revolted by a society that I found heartless, I also became a member of the board of direc-

tors of an NGO whose motto was: "Let doctors, agronomists and engineers be where life is." Based on health education programs and primary health care systems, our team developed solutions according to people's needs: digging wells, creating water supply and sanitation systems, planting trees, implementing farming methods, establishing local schools and promoting craft industries. This experience was the realization of my childhood dream: becoming a human being by helping others.

In 1985, soon after I was introduced to Nichiren Buddhism, I qualified as a pediatrician. Buddhism helped me understand that I could be happy, as I was, where I was. I surprised my friends and relatives by settling down and starting my own medical practice in Paris. At the same time, my mother and two sisters also became members of the SGI. Faced with financial challenges and the need to be there for each of my patients, I had to look reality squarely in the face. I couldn't escape my own suffering and decided to take on this challenge, to become truly happy in this situation.

Today, I feel I have won over myself. I am happy to be alive. I am able to teach each child how to take care of his or her health, and bring comfort and warmth to parents. I can freely share my hopes with my colleagues. Finally, I have been able to realize what really seemed impossible before now: the life force and the wisdom I have accumulated through my daily practice enable me to speak out in front of others, confidently and in any situation, to correct erroneous knowledge and protect the dignity of life.

My goal is to find the best way to realize my childhood dream: To improve health conditions for all—especially children and women—so that they can live full and creative lives, in the South by improving access to health care for those in need, and in the North by protecting and defending the dignity of life, and by helping develop responses to human suffering that go beyond the merely medical. ▣

Courtesy SGI Quarterly



MY STORY — SAIREN-BO

By Fay Hovey, Maui, Hawaii

The study material for June appeared in last month's issue. It is a letter written by Nichiren Daishonin titled "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" and sent to Sairen-bo Nichijo, a former priest of the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism. The following story is a fictionalized first-person account of Sairen-bo.

The Daishonin had been living in exile on Sado Island since October 10, 1271, after government soldiers failed in their attempt to execute him on the beach at Tatsunokuchi. For reasons that are unclear, Sairen-bo was also living in exile on Sado Island. Details about Sairen-bo are scarce, but it is known that he was originally from Kyoto, and that he had studied at Mount Hiei, the seat of the Tendai School. He was also present at the Tsukahara Debate, held in front of Sammai-do, the Daishonin's dwelling at Tsukahara, on the sixteenth and seventeenth days of the first month in 1272. In this debate the Daishonin was the clear victor over the Pure Land, True Word sects and other priests from Sado and from various provinces of northern Japan. A number of people converted to his teachings at this time, among them Sairen-bo.

Near the quarters where I lived in exile on the windswept, miserable island of Sado there was a narrow road. It wasn't much of a road; it was more a footpath for there was hardly a reason to go anywhere unless one felt like risking his life for the trouble of a visit. Near a small log bridge over the small stream at the foot of a hillside, I spied a smaller path, hidden in the weeds, one that disappeared into the forest rather like my life had done. Without so much as a horse or an assistant to go with me, I had reflected long and hard about the reducing of my circumstances. How had it come to pass that I, a priest of one of the most venerable of all temples was striding about in disgrace on some obscure island?

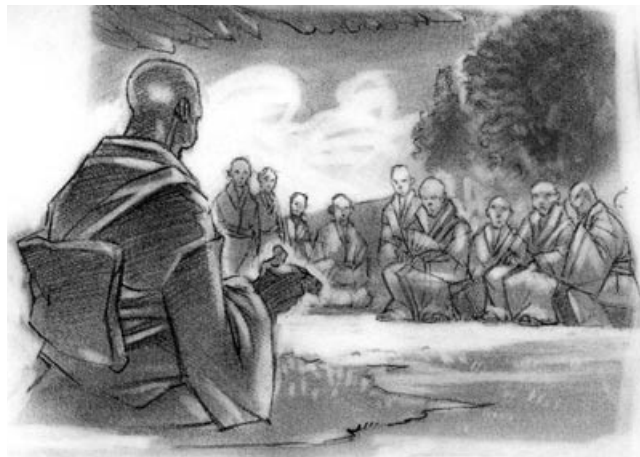
I saw it in my mind as I walked: Enryaku-ji, that vast complex of buildings fixed on the promontories and recesses of Mt. Hiei. What was I doing here, with mud on my sandals? I thought of its quiet verandas, peaceful gardens and meditation halls — my small but comfortable room and study there, and all of the measured activities of priesthood. I was an avid student and could be found amidst the stacks of scrolls poring over texts long after most priests had tired of such things

and had moved on to the more luxurious attractions and privileges of their stations.

Exile. A common enough thing in our times. If the regent at Kamakura didn't like what someone had to say, well, then: ship them off somewhere well away from the centers of power and influence. What I disliked most about being banished is the feeling of having been completely forgotten. Erased. And of course, there was boredom. Re-reading what few documents I brought with me. Writing letters that might not ever be delivered. Imagining what was going on in Kyoto, eagerly gleaning news from whatever hapless messenger ventured near. This was the restlessness in me that drove me to tramping the woods and shorelines daily. One day, even though I knew it would put me in the greatest danger, I ventured onto that small path I'd seen which led to the old cemetery at Tsukahara.

I had begun by walking partway up the hill then turning back. Once, I actually saw the young priest Nikko who had accompanied the notorious Nichiren. I saw him in the wood gathering branches into a large bundle. His back was turned from me and I stepped quickly behind a tree. He worked quietly, occasionally whistling. Soon, he was finished, the bundle hoisted upon his back, making his way up the hill to the broken-down shrine that was the abode of the most hated priest in Japan. Nichiren. A man who called himself "the pillar of Japan" who had captured the hearts of some of the fiercest and renowned Eastern samurai. A tough breed they were and hard to convince. How had he gotten to them? Now, he was a man who wouldn't go away. He'd been banished before and pardoned. He returned and continued to lecture and remonstrate with the government. That he dared to question the prevailing beliefs of the time was considered sheer madness by many, or at the very least, foolish. I was intrigued by the idea that I was in exile on Sado at the same time with so infamous a man and that he had once studied for a time at Enryaku-ji before my time.

I walked up that hillside many times and could never quite bring myself to go all the way to his door. I was of the Tendai school, proud with a long lineage of teachings going back many centuries. What could I learn from such a man? If I were caught anywhere near him, I might be executed myself! So it was with another irresistible impulse that I would sit on a small stone fence on the opposite side of the field where I could observe them from afar. Saw the wisps of smoke



from the fire. Occasional laughter, coughing, the wind blowing cold across the drear landscape.

"Why do you sit here in the cold, priest?" a strong voice startled me from behind. It was Nichiren's attendant. "We have seen you come and go for some time now — there's not much in the way of entertainment here, so we have been watching for you and guessing when you will have enough courage to introduce yourself to us properly!"

"I am Sairen-Bo, Tendai priest from Mt. Hiei. I am an exile like you." I offered in a startled voice. "Forgive me for not venturing closer, I have been most rude."

"Well, I don't think a cup of hot tea will hurt you much. Will you join us?" and he held his hand and arm out wide as he gestured towards the shrine and walked by me with his bundle. As we approached the small building that looked more like a shed than a shrine, I heard a man's voice say, "So, you've decided to visit at last!" and there he was: a vigorous and forceful personage, his eyes looking sharply into mine. "I know, I know!" he laughed heartily. "You're surprised I don't have three heads and horns! I'm sorry to disappoint you! I am Nichiren, a simple priest born in Awa province. There is no harm here with just two of us fending off the weather and the wild beasts on two and four feet. Come sit by our fire and warm yourself!"

I ducked under the low doorway and knelt hesitantly on the dirt floor. I looked around and saw how desperate and drab their surroundings were. There were cracks in the walls, very little in the way of comfort. Yet, there was a feeling of such lively curiosity and good humor in both of their faces. I realized it had been a long time since I'd looked into a happy face. Even I had become grim in my banishment. Nichiren's eyebrows



Illustrations by Ed Lee

were raised in question. “Well, then, here is some tea. Let us talk about you and where you come from, sir. I can see by your face you have a lot of questions. But first, tell me your story; then, I will tell you mine.

We spoke for hours. I’d forgotten how good it felt to discuss religious matters, and with someone so learned and astute! His grasp of the essential nature of things astonished me. I knew he was only giving me a glimpse of his knowledge, for the time being he was “sizing me up” instead of the other way around. Before dusk gathered in the trees, I prepared to leave for home while there was still light. “Next time you visit, come at night, where no one can see you. You come here at great peril to yourself for I am reviled by all. You have a good mind and Nikko here, well, he has heard all of my arguments already, eh? He would be happy for me to have someone else to needle!” he joked.

Once I was safely back in my quarters that evening, I felt more stimulated and alive than I had in months. “What are you doing?” I thought to myself. There is nothing to be gained politically by associating with him! What chance is there of his ideas being sanctioned by the government?” Before I finally fell asleep, I remembered that he hadn’t asked me if I would visit again — he assumed I would. Except for moonlit nights, my feet would have to learn to see in the dark.

I was there when he debated numerous priests that had come to confront him! Can you imagine it? Proud men, with their assistants and fine robes. Sitting upon their portable chairs, secure in their positions and favor. Imagine Nichiren there, in simple garments, in front of that dilapidated building. On every question, he bested them! They could not prove themselves right. His knowledge was comprehensive and his understand-

ing was penetrating. But it was his speech, his confidence and his expression that sent them staggering away, heads shaking in exasperation. “The voice does the Buddha’s work,” he had said to me once. The next evening I made my way over the darkened track to see him. Together we chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo then sat by their small fire quietly. “You have something on your mind tonight, Sairen-bo. Speak it now, for who knows what will happen now that I have sent these priests away in confusion. There are none more vengeful or spiteful than priests who have been discovered false!” he said sternly.

“I must tell you what is in my heart, sir,” I began. “I have been thinking about this for a time. It is firm in my mind and must be acknowledged as such. I am ready to renounce everything I have embraced until the day I walked into this hut. If you will have me, consider me for a disciple, I could wish for nothing more in this life.” I bowed low and waited.

“Surely, there must be some profound reason for our relationship,” he said softly. “Is there not a mystic bond between us?”

“I can hardly hope to measure up to the others, sir, but I would be most pleased and honored to be considered your disciple,” I pushed on respectfully.

“I wonder if you and I have not been pledged to each other as teacher and disciple in countless *kalpas* past,” he ventured. “You and I have been born together here in this defiled age as teacher and disciple solely because of some bond of karma we share from the past. How delightful!”

“So am I to understand that you have accepted me?” I said.

“Sairen-bo, you have always been my disciple!” he exclaimed. “Let us promise that whoever is pardoned from exile first will pray for other to be soon released. We have much work to do!”

In this simple and warm-hearted way, I was accepted as his follower. The Lotus Sutra says “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddhist lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers” (LS7, 140). I had to be banished in exile in order to meet him.

Eventually, we were both pardoned. First my mentor. Then, myself, somewhat later, whereupon I returned to my native Kyoto a new man, forever changed. □

DIALOGUE

ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

49

Kosen-rufu Is the Ultimate Path in Life

This is the forty-ninth 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 February 1999 issue of the Soka Gakkai study journal, *Daibyakurenge*.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds symbolizes the compassion of Buddhism, the spirit to lead all living beings to enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra is a vibrant teaching about creating value in one's life and in

society. In this second discussion on the "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds" (twenty-fifth) chapter, the participants discuss how religion can and should contribute to the betterment of the individual's life. They point out that religions lacking the power to help people improve their lives tend to become subservient to authority. They also address the importance of basing one's prayer on accomplishing kosen-rufu — the establishment of a peaceful world through spreading Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

At that time the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent immediately rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, pressed his palms together and, facing the Buddha, spoke these words: “World-Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds — why is he called Perceiver of the World’s Sounds?”

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent: “Good man, suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various trials and suffering. If they hear of this bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds 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)¹

DAISAKU IKEDA: Incidentally, do you suppose Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds is a woman or a man?

HARUO SUDA: Outwardly, there is every indication that this bodhisattva is a woman. There are even statues of the bodhisattva holding a baby.

TAKANORI ENDO: But there aren’t many references to female Buddhas or bodhisattvas in the sutras. They are usually male. That’s because ancient India was a male-dominated society.

Also, if you closely examine an image of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, you will find that it depicts facial hair, a masculine characteristic. Furthermore, the bodhisattva’s name in Sanskrit, Avalokitesvara, is a male name.

SUDA: Some argue that in exhibiting both female and male qualities the bodhisattva transcends sexuality.

KATSUJI SAITO: According to the Bud-

dhologist Dr. Yutaka Iwamoto, who taught at Soka University in Tokyo, while Perceiver of the World’s Sounds was originally a goddess, the bodhisattva took on a male form when inducted into Buddhism.

IKEDA: That seems to be the case. I guess that settles it! The original Indian goddess was probably connected with the idea of a Great Mother or Earth Goddess.

SAITO: So it appears.

IKEDA: Just as Mother Earth sustains, nourishes and fosters all living beings, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds represents the compassion to lead all people to happiness.

SAITO: That’s right. Scholars tracing the bodhisattva’s origins suggest connections with the Persian goddess Anahita, and with fertility and water deities.

SUDA: The origins of life can certainly be traced to water as well as to the earth.

ENDO: Come to think of it, there are statues of Perceiver of the World’s Sounds that depict the bodhisattva holding a water jar.

IKEDA: This bodhisattva is said to freely manifest “thirty-three bodies (forms)” or states of existence. This is analogous to the way that water naturally assumes any shape. Like water, life is not static; it is essentially “non-substantial.”²

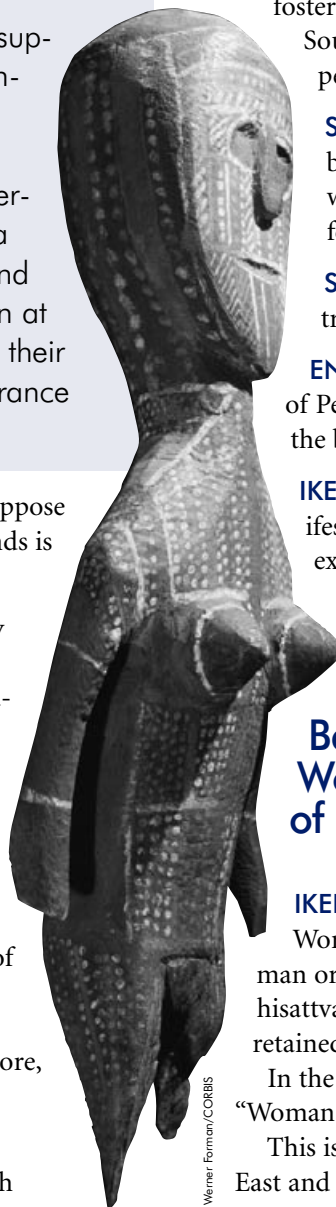
Belief in Perceiver of the World’s Sounds and the Cult of Mary

IKEDA: So Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds can take the form of either a man or a woman. Moreover, the secret of the bodhisattva’s popularity lies in the fact that it has retained the original characteristics of a goddess.

In the conclusion of Faust, Goethe says: “Woman, eternally, / shows us the way.”³

This is a principle of humanity common to both East and West.

SUDA: It seems to me that worship of the Virgin Mary in Christianity has much in common with faith in Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.



Werner Forman/CORBIS

Aboriginal carving of an “Earth Mother.”

IKEDA: People tend to pray to Mary about their immediate hopes and aspirations.

SUDA: Yes, they pray to Mary for many things in life, such as recovery from illness, easy childbirth and a peaceful death.

ENDO: While belief in Jesus is the main pillar of Christianity, it might be that many Christians find Mary more approachable.

SUDA: Some say that Mary is like a bridge between the absolute world of divinity and the world of human beings. It is believed that no matter how great a sin one has committed, if one offers sincere prayer to Mary, then Mary will intercede with God on one's behalf without passing judgment.

SAITO: She is like a gentle mother who stands by her delinquent child as the child apologizes to its father for misbehaving.

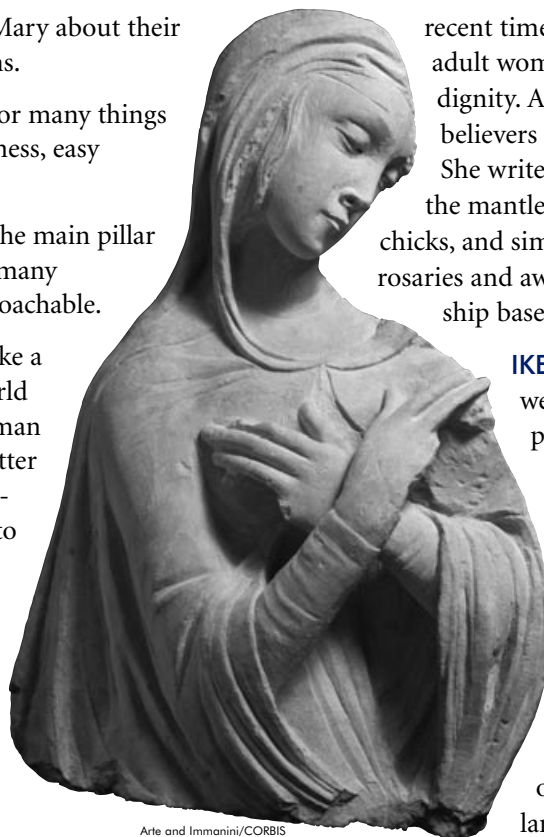
IKEDA: Mothers are great. Children feel absolutely secure when embraced by their mother. Fathers, on the other hand, are no match for mothers, as their embrace sometimes leads to more tears.

Scholars of religion suggest that faith in Mary reflects belief in the Earth Goddess. However, according to Jungian research in the area of depth psychology, in addition to the positive aspects of giving birth, nourishing and embracing, the Great Mother also tends to hold her children too tightly, and sometimes devours them. This latter aspect might be comparable to the function of the demon goddess Kishimojin (Mother of Demon Children) in Buddhism who killed the babies of others to feed her own children.

Though Goethe alludes to an eternal benevolent femininity, it can be represented in ways that are exact opposites, such as in the form of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds, or in the Mother of Demon Children, who both appear in the Lotus Sutra.

SUDA: Dependency on a “comfortable” way of faith is nothing more than infantile regression.

One researcher on the cult of Mary has pointed out that past images of Mary as a fragile girl have in more



Arte and Immanini/CORBIS

Fragment of a sculpture of the Virgin Mary.

recent times been replaced by images of an adult woman exuding self-confidence and dignity. At the same time, the scholar notes, believers have regressed to a childlike state. She writes: “They gather together within the mantle of the holy mother like baby chicks, and simply intone prayers with their rosaries and await a miracle, creating a relationship based solely on sentimentality.”⁴

IKEDA: When Christians in Japan went underground [as a result of persecution during much of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries], it is said that they would conceal their faith in Mary by praying to Perceiver of the World's Sounds as a kind of surrogate. The compound proper name “Mary Perceiver of the World's Sounds” (Maria Kannon) that came into use in Japan as a result of this dramatically shows the similarity of belief in Perceiver of the World's Sounds to the cult of Mary.

In any event, history seems to show that both faith in Perceiver of the World's Sounds and faith in Mary developed and spread not because the clergy promoted them, but as a result of the people's own desire.

SAITO: Concerning the inclusion of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds in the Lotus Sutra, there seems to have been a very popular Indian goddess from whom Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds is thought to have been derived.

IKEDA: It's interesting that a goddess that people at the time believed in and treasured was actively inducted into and brought to life in the Lotus Sutra. That in itself is an expression of the compassion to perceive the world's sounds — to know the hearts and minds of the people. Buddhism does not exist apart from the realities of the age and the people.

SAITO: I think that the clear promise of benefit in the present life in the “Perceiver of the World's Sounds” chapter conveys this same spirit.

IKEDA: Reality is reality, and theory is theory. Life is reality. The focus of Buddhism is on reality; we prac-

tice faith to win in reality.

The *saha* world is itself the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. To escape from reality is not the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra teaches how to make our reality ideal. Buddhism is about winning in life.

Some might think it shallow to speak of attaining benefit in the present life, but I believe a religion that does not enable people to transform their lives is powerless. The Mystic Law exists so that we may enjoy “peace and security in the present existence” and “good circumstances in future existences.” (cf. LS5, 99) Creating value in daily life is the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

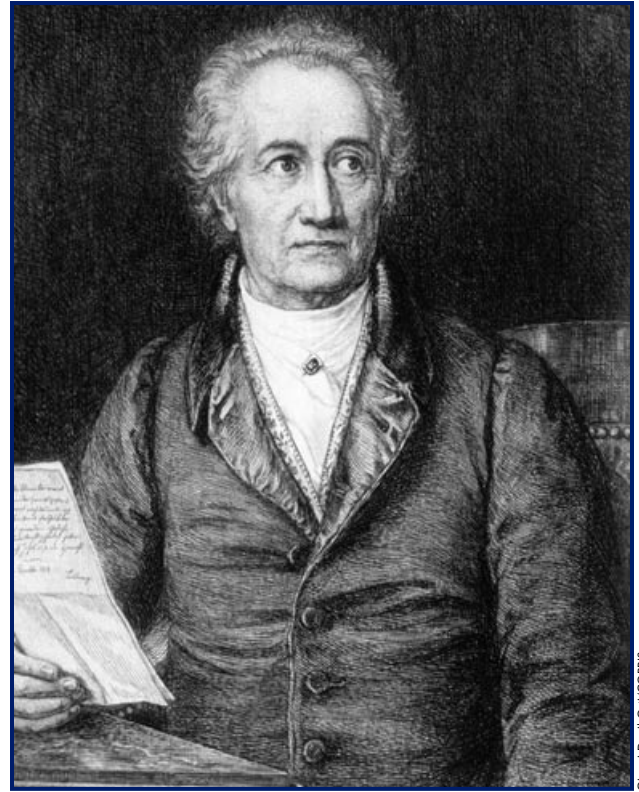
A World Religion Must Enable People to Gain Benefit in the Present

ENDO: Professor Jan Van Bragt of Nanzan University in Japan, argues that a true world religion must serve society’s needs, have the ability to influence society, contribute to world peace, be thoroughly humanistic, and respond to people’s expectations for attaining benefit in this lifetime.

IKEDA: Reality is what matters. Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed: “Religion which takes no count of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion.”⁵ A religion that cannot respond to the problems and worries that people are facing right now, he declared, is a religion only in name.

The fact is that many Japanese religions craftily take advantage of people’s religious ignorance and have managed to endure promising benefit in the present life. Their approach might be compared to luring children with candy. From the early days, the Soka Gakkai has been criticized as preaching benefit in the present in much the same way as these other schools. But the Lotus Sutra, humankind’s supreme spiritual legacy, authoritatively teaches the gains to be had in this lifetime from Buddhist practice. It does so because the most important function of religion is to enable people to be truly happy.

The Soka Gakkai has fought against all manner of human suffering, giving hope to those struggling with illness, financial problems, domestic discord and so on. This itself is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. We have been the greatest ally of the suffering and the poor. I take great pride in this.



Portrait print of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who said, “Woman, eternally, / shows us the way.”

Religion has no meaning if it avoids the serious question of how to encourage those who are suffering and how to help them out of it. I discussed this point from various angles with Dr. Bryan Wilson of the University of Oxford.

[Dr. Wilson was the first president of the International Religious Society Association. His discussions with President Ikeda are collected in the volume Human Values in a Changing World.]

Prayer Is Sublime Proof of One’s Humanity

SAITO: Suppose a child becomes deathly ill. In addition to seeking the help of a physician, the parents would surely pray wholeheartedly for their child to recover. I’m certain that even if they didn’t practice a particular religion, they would offer some kind of prayer. Prayer is not to be taken lightly. It is a natural human response.

SUDA: I think it would be cold and inhumane to dismiss the desire to pray.

IKEDA: Prayer is unique to human beings. Animals do not have the ability to pray. It is sublime proof of our humanity.

In ancient times, people stood in awe of the immensity and boundlessness of nature. It may be that they deeply revered what they saw as a great presence that was beyond their human intelligence to fathom, and that from this the desire to pray naturally emerged.

When people face a crisis, such as, for instance, any of the seven disasters⁶ described in the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter, they desperately wish to be protected. Prayer is the crystallization of those earnest feelings. This is what gave birth to religion.

ENDO: Religion did not come before prayer; prayer in fact came first.

IKEDA: How do we have our prayers answered? Buddhism clarifies this in terms of the law of life. It expounds the Mystic Law, the key that causes the gears of the microcosm—the self—to mesh perfectly with the macrocosm—the universe.

Worries Inspired by Children

SAITO: Along those lines, the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter says:

If a woman wishes to give birth to a male child, she should offer obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds and then she will bear a son blessed with merit, virtue, and wisdom. And if she wishes to bear a daughter, she will bear one with all the marks of comeliness, one who in the past planted the roots of virtue and is loved and respected by many persons. (LS25, 300)

IKEDA: This is saying that the prayers of parents definitely affect their child’s birth. Through the faith of parents, children will develop outstanding attributes.

Many parents worry over their children. Nichiren Daishonin in fact teaches that children may either be a blessing or a bane, saying: “There is a sutra passage in one of the sutras that says that children are one’s enemies” (WND, 1043); and “There is also a sutra passage that says that children are a treasure” (WND, 1044).

While people without children may long to have them, I hope they will remember that they will suffer unless their children are good. I would also like to stress the importance of treating our fellow members with the same concern we would our own children, for more noble than the connection of blood is the connection between people brought together by lofty ideals and the fostering of spiritual heirs.

People who suffer because of their children can use that obstacle to strengthen their faith. It could even be argued that this is the reason that children cause their parents to worry. Children will become happy without fail when their parents attain Buddhahood.

SUDA: I see.

IKEDA: While the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter speaks of the benefit of “offering obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds,” this of course means praying and making offerings to the Gohonzon. As evidence of this, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds presents the offerings made to him to the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures.

ENDO: Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent makes an offering of a necklace adorned with numerous precious gems to Perceiver of the World’s Sounds. But Perceiver of the World’s Sounds declines to accept it.

After Shakyamuni entertains Perceiver of the World’s Sounds to accept the gift, the bodhisattva complies. He then divides the necklace into two parts, which he presents to Shakyamuni and the tower of the Buddha Many Treasures. (cf. LS25, 303)

SUDA: In terms of the implicit meaning of the sutra, “Shakyamuni and the tower of the Buddha Many Treasures” represent the Mystic Law, the Gohonzon. In other words, this teaches that we should make the Mystic Law, not Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, our foundation.

ENDO: I would really like for the many people who place their faith in Perceiver of the World’s Sounds to pay attention to this passage.

SAITO: In “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” the Daishonin says:

If one chants Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, then the power of the words Namu Amida Butsu, the power of the mantras invoking Mahavairochana, the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s

Sounds, and the power of all the Buddhas, all the sutras, and all the bodhisattvas will without exception vanish before the power of Myoho-rence-kyo.

Unless these other sutras manage to borrow the power of Myoho-rence-kyo, they will all become worthless things. (WND, 732-33)

The beneficial power of Perceiver of the World's Sounds is actually the power of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

IKEDA: To embrace the Gohonzon is to embrace the entire universe. It is to tap the source of the power of the universe. One who does so is worthy of utmost respect. Such a person is hundreds, thousands, tens or hundreds of thousands of times more noble than the founders of the various religious schools who are revered as gods and Buddhas. People don't realize this.

It is vital that we treat our fellow members who are exerting themselves for kosen-rufu with the highest respect and honor. This is the fundamental spirit of the SGI. As long as we uphold this spirit, we will never become deadlocked.

Distracted While Chanting?

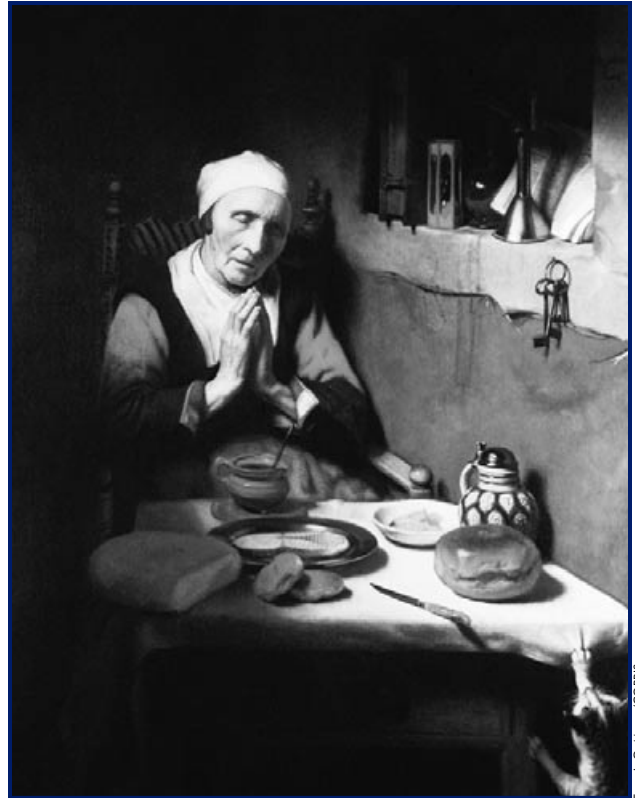
ENDO: With regard to prayer, people frequently bring up the problem of extraneous thoughts occurring to them while they are chanting.

IKEDA: There is nothing wrong with having an active mind while chanting. This is a natural human tendency. The important thing is to face the Gohonzon just as we are, without affectation.

Having extraneous thoughts is an inherent part of our lives in that we are entities of the principle of three thousand realms in a single life moment. Therefore, through daimoku we can turn even those thoughts into benefit.

There are no rules governing how we should pray. There's no need to be something we aren't. Even if we were to try to control our thoughts by making our prayer rigid and forced, our minds would still tend to wander. As we deepen our faith, we also strengthen our ability to concentrate.

Actually, since the thoughts or ideas that come to mind as we chant represent issues that concern us at



"Prayer Without End" by Nicolaes Maes. In a crisis, even non-religious people will pray to something. Prayer is an instinctual human response.

that moment, we should not consider them extraneous. Instead, we should pray earnestly about each one, whatever it may be. Rather than chant only about large issues, we should pray specifically about every issue we face, winning over each one and strengthening our foundation as we go.

There is of course no need to be tense or nervous when praying. What matters is that we are completely ourselves.

ENDO: People also wonder whether it is okay to chant for many things at the same time, or if they should concentrate on one issue at a time.

IKEDA: There's no limit to how many things we can pray about. It just means that the more desires we have, the more sincere and abundant our prayer will be. It's just like if you want to do a lot of shopping, you need a lot of money. Buddhism is reason.

SAITO: It occurs to me that questions such as this one might arise from the misconception that the Gohonzon "hears" our prayers and then solves them supernaturally.

IKEDA: Who answers our prayers? We do — through faith and effort. No one does it for us.

Returning to the shopping analogy, it is the same as using our own money when we go shopping. Having our own money is a prerequisite. The “currency” of prayer is none other than our practice of faith.

Unanswered Prayers

SUDA: Some people have expressed concern because some of their prayers have not been answered.

IKEDA: We are practicing a faith in which “no prayer goes unanswered.” We must first and foremost be convinced of this. There will be times, however, when our prayers seem to be answered and times when they do not. As long as we continue to pray, in the end everything will go in the best possible direction. This will be clear to us when we look back later.

More than anything, it is the struggle we go through to have our prayers answered that makes us stronger. If we were to immediately get everything we prayed for, we would become spoiled and decadent. We would lead indolent lives, devoid of any hard work or struggle. As a result, we would become shallow human beings. What, then, would be the point of faith?

Life is a series of events and problems. We face all manner of troubles. This is the way life goes. But it is this variety that enables us to lead a fulfilled and joyful existence, to grow, and to develop an expansive and strong state of life.

ENDO: Certainly, if all SGI members were to pray to win the lottery, it would be impossible for everyone to have their prayer answered!

IKEDA: If everything that we prayed for came true instantly, it would be no different than magic. This goes against reason. You can’t make steamed rice by simply turning on the rice cooker if you haven’t put in any rice.

Buddhism is common sense. It teaches the correct path in which our faith is expressed in how we live. There



“There’s no limit to how many things we can pray about. It just means the more sincere and abundant our prayer will be. It’s just like if you want to do a lot of shopping, you need a lot of money. Buddhism is reason.”

is no such thing as faith that ignores reality. Our desires will not be realized without making any real effort.

A Religion That Cannot Reply to People’s Prayers Is Useless

ENDO: Religions that promise immediate benefit are often criticized as inferior. Along those lines, I certainly feel that religions that make people dependent ought to be refuted.

SUDA: Faith that seeks selfish gain by invoking some sort of mysterious force could well be described as magic.

SAITO: On one side, there are religions that preach only inner fulfillment; on the other, there are those that promise mysterious benefit in the present life without any real effort. Both of these depart from the reality of human life, the reality of the oneness of body and mind. On that level, they are similar.

ENDO: One is abstract, the other, preposterous.

SUDA: I think we could also say that one lacks compassion, and the other lacks wisdom.

IKEDA: True religion is found in neither way of

thought. True religion does not depart from reality; it reveals the fundamental law based on which people can improve their lives in reality. First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi termed this “value creation.” In refuting a view on religion articulated by an eminent scientist⁷ of the day, Mr. Makiguchi declared that a religion that does not produce value in response to prayer is useless.⁸

This scholar had argued that while people “sense the divine in wondrous laws of nature,” things that cannot be understood through the natural sciences ought to be left unknown. And he asserted that it therefore “defies good reason to pray to the gods for personal gain.”

SUDA: That’s a typical criticism.

IKEDA: By contrast, President Makiguchi asserted that a religion that is not concerned with creating value in human life is useless. To ignore the reality of life is to ignore the human being.

Wondrous phenomena are not limited to the realm of nature. Mr. Makiguchi believed that human life itself and day-to-day occurrences are also wondrous, and that one ought to seek the wondrous power of life force that enables people to create value and realize victory. He stated that the natural sciences alone cannot lead people to happiness, and that what is needed is a “science of value.” His insight penetrates the basic flaw of modern civilization.

SAITO: President Makiguchi also opposed the idea that “the sacred” is exclusive to religion. He argued that religion that exists merely for the sake of religion has no meaning.

Concerning such values as “the sacred” and “inner peace”: these accord with the value of “gain,” or benefit, where the individual is concerned and the value of “good”—moral and ethical value—with respect to society. Mr. Makiguchi posed the question: “What is the significance of a religion if not to help people become happy and improve the world? Isn’t the act of helping people become happy the value of gain? Isn’t improving the world the value of good?”¹⁰

IKEDA: In short, it is hypocrisy to avoid the actual struggle of helping people become happy and improving the world, while preaching the “sacred” as though it existed on another lofty dimension.

Helping people become happy and improving the world—this is *kosen-rufu*. This great struggle to grapple with reality is itself value creation and true reli-

gion. The sacred exists only in the midst of such struggle. Isn’t peace also a form of benefit in this life?

There is profound meaning in the term “world” of “Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.” We cannot separate ourselves from reality. The “world” is society. We are engaged in a struggle to create a happy society. “Sounds,” on the other hand, means the cries of individual living beings, their personal desire for happiness. It is Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, in other words, the Lotus Sutra, that unifies these two goals of social prosperity and individual happiness.

ENDO: Certainly, those who care only about their own happiness become egotistic. By contrast, an exclusive preoccupation with the demands of society at the expense of the individual readily lends itself to totalitarianism and nationalism. The balancing of these two is most difficult.

Balancing the Individual and Society, Freedom and Equality

SUDA: When Vice-Chancellor Vrajendra Mehta of the University of Delhi visited Japan [in January 1999] to present you with an honorary doctorate in literature, President Ikeda, I recall that in his remarks the Indian educator emphasized the Middle Way.

IKEDA: That’s right. He is a great philosopher and a distinguished political scientist. He remarked:

The traditional way of thinking in the modern West has swung to the extremes of individualism and collectivism. This has unfortunately resulted in loss of the self.

In contrast to these two “isms,” Gandhi and other Indian thinkers have tried to respond by returning to traditions that have existed from ancient times. This is the thought of the Dharma, which views all things as mutually related, and the thought of nirvana, which is the ultimate transcendent ideal.

Similarly, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda emphasized that individuals create value through their relationship with society.

From the standpoint of the philosophy of value creation, individual happiness and social prosperity are definitely not opposed. The two actually are closely



Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

“If everything that we prayed for came true instantly, it would be no different than magic. This goes against reason.”

related, like the rotation and revolution of the earth. It is through exerting oneself for the well-being of society that one becomes happy. And society must strive to bring happiness to each person.

SUDA: It’s a case of “one for all, and all for one.”

IKEDA: Dr. Mehta also said:

The universe is held together by organic relations. By this I mean the relations between man and nature, man and man, and man and the cosmos. This is not the relation between “part” and “whole.” Man and nature and the universe—each of these is itself a “totality.” It is something irreplaceable that has a purpose.

What a profound view of life! To live based on the Law or Dharma, the correct path in life, means to advance along the Middle Way.

ENDO: This surely does not mean taking the path of least resistance.

IKEDA: It means to find and stay on the right path—to hit the mark or target. Never to stray from the correct path as human being, to live in a manner that is always on course and accords with the law of life—that’s what is meant by the Middle Way. It is humanism.

Dr. Mehta characterized the nineteenth century as a “century in pursuit of freedom,” and the twentieth century as a “century in pursuit of equality.” And he said that the twenty-first century must be a “century which pursues justice.”

Freedom and equality, individualism and collectivism—it is justice that balances these opposing forces. It is the Dharma. It is the Middle Way. This is how we must usher in the “third civilization.”

ENDO: This is a clear manifesto for the twenty-first century.

IKEDA: Returning to the earlier topic of prayer, following the Middle Way is to steadfastly advance along the correct path in which “daily life equals faith” and “faith manifests itself in one’s efforts.” It is neither abstract “placebo faith” nor effortless “magical faith.”

SAITO: We need to continue chanting and taking action until our prayers are realized. Then, in the end, we will attain a state of ultimate fulfillment. Life is about such struggle.

IKEDA: Whether our prayers are answered depends on our faith. The depth of our karma also affects the result of our prayer. Sometimes it just takes time. Whether and when our prayers are answered can have a variety of meanings. But there is no doubt about the fact that our life begins to change in a favorable direction from the very moment we begin to pray.

SUDA: Is this true even of self-centered prayer?

IKEDA: It is human nature to think of oneself. The important thing is that we go to the Gohonzon just as we are. If we go out of our way to put on an air of nobility, as if all our concerns are lofty ones, then we are presenting a “false self.” The Gohonzon does not respond to lies.

When we chant daimoku about our greatest worries and our deepest wishes, our state of life improves, and we gradually develop the mind to pray not just for ourselves, but for the happiness of our friends and for kosen-rufu. Also, I think it is vital to challenge ourselves to pray for such lofty goals. It is all up to us—we are free to pray about anything we wish.

Enemies on Every Side

IKEDA: Each day, I pray only for the attainment of kosen-rufu and for the health, longevity, prosperity and happiness of all SGI members. I believe that this is my fundamental responsibility and mission.

To be the one bearing all the responsibility is no easy task. I will never forget the words of Madame Deng Yingchao (wife of the late Chinese premier Zhou Enlai): “We had enemies on every side. That was the situation every single day. It was like that for years, for decades. We really fought hard.”

It is the same with the Soka Gakkai. We have been surrounded by enemies. Politicians, priests, the media, traitorous former members — all have united their forces with the aim of stamping out the people’s advance and attacking me personally. They have resorted to all kinds of base ploys.

Alone, I have fought and surmounted these attacks, and protected all the members. I have not let down my guard for a single moment. I could not afford to. As a result, the Soka Gakkai has developed into a dignified international organization. I have prayed single-mindedly to the Gohonzon to open a boundless, hope-filled path toward the spread of this Buddhism and a peaceful world. It is my wish that all leaders will have this same spirit, without which our organization will succumb to bureaucratism.

Leaders must work wholeheartedly with the prayer and determination to help each and every member in their areas to become happy without fail. To wage a genuine struggle, we must abandon our egos. To win or lose, to live or die — everything is a decisive battle. Terrible things can happen when people take their responsibilities lightly.

One month before his death, Professor Yudo Takada, the founder of my alma mater, Fuji College (formerly Taisei Gakuin), said: “Education means imparting life to students.” What noble words! He firmly believed that education meant devoting oneself completely to one’s students. What distinguishes a truly humane educator is the ability to treasure, love and work hard on behalf of one’s students, as though they were one’s own children.

The same applies to leaders of kosen-rufu. In this world, only the SGI is working to achieve a peaceful world through the spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The SGI is the sole body of people dedicated to the sublime goal of fulfilling the Buddha’s will.

In a sense, the course or “orbit” along which the SGI is advancing kosen-rufu is itself the Dharma. As we live in accord with this Dharma, or Law, we can accomplish our own human revolution and attain enlightenment. The relation between our individual enlightenment and the propagation of Buddhism is like that of a planet’s rotation on its axis, and revolution in its orbit around the sun. Those with a self-centered practice may be compared to a planet that only rotates on its axis and does not revolve around the sun. While such people might appear to enjoy good circumstances, they actually wind up falling out of rhythm and becoming lonely and isolated. Instead of being “self”-centered, we should center on the Dharma, or the Law. This is what is meant by the phrase ‘Rely on the Law and not upon persons’ (WND, 105).

Taking Action for Kosen-rufu Allows our Lives to Blossom

IKEDA: Our life is like a flower. It is an entity of Myoho-enge-kyo. Only by taking action for kosen-rufu can we cause this lotus flower to blossom. To just pray without taking action for kosen-rufu is like trying to raise a flower on water without sunlight. Under such circumstances, there is no true blossoming of the self.

When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu, we are protected without fail. We must not separate ourselves from our friends and comrades in the SGI. The SGI itself is a “castle of peace and tranquillity,” a “treasure land.” The degree to which the SGI has served to protect us is truly remarkable.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda used to say, “The Soka Gakkai organization is more precious to me than my own life.” Those who treat the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu lightly only invite the same treatment by King Brahma (Jpn Bonten), Lord Shakra (Jpn Taishaku) and all the Buddhist gods. They have no time for such people.

At any rate, the ordinary members of the SGI who are painstakingly carrying out activities for kosen-rufu are treasures more precious than any celebrity.

ENDO: President Ikeda, I recall the episode involving King Ashoka (r.c. 268–232 b.c.e.) that you brought up in your discussion with visiting scholars from the University of Delhi.

Ashoka at one time placed offerings before *stupas*

erected in tribute to the Buddha's disciples. He made offerings and prayed at the *stupas* honoring Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Ananda and others. But before the *stupa* to Bakkula he made only a small offering. Thinking this peculiar, an attendant inquired: "This person is equally a disciple of the Buddha. Why do you make such a distinction?"

The king replied: "It is because while it seems that he wholeheartedly exerted himself in his practice, he did not expound the Law to others and did not contribute to society." The king took as a standard for Buddhist practitioners those who exert themselves for the widespread propagation of Buddhism and for the good of society.

SUDA: When Professor Seba Singh Rana, a leading authority on King Ashoka, heard you relate this story, he remarked: "If people simply keep knowledge to themselves, not sharing it or putting it to use for the benefit of others, it turns into 'poison.'" His words impressed me deeply.

ENDO: There have recently been numerous news reports of poisoning incidents in Japan. I think this is indicative of a society that lacks compassion.

IKEDA: Poison symbolizes a cold and hellish heart. People whose lives are dominated by the worlds of Hell and Hunger resent and envy the happiness of others, and are consumed by the desire to cause others to fall into the state of Hell.

By contrast, those who dwell in the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood are overwhelmed by the desire to help others become happy. The SGI is a compassionate group whose members are dedicated to



"Someone who has a self-centered practice is like a planet that rotates on its axis and does not revolve around the sun."

Joe McDonald/CORBIS

becoming happy themselves and helping others do the same. Kosen-rufu is a movement to expand this "life current" of compassion — the very thing that society needs most — and with it to nourish the world.

Even if it seems that our individual impact is very small, by moving we can create waves. The continuous flow of one wave after another is itself kosen-rufu.

ENDO: I think that this is the means for "detoxifying" a society that is poisoned with mercilessness and brutality.

Seeing Through the "Poison" of Nationalism

SAITO: This conversation calls to mind the words of a scholar who had investigated the history of persecution of the Jewish people.

How was it possible that a person such as Adolf Hitler could become the supreme leader of a country of such rich cultural heritage as Germany? How could people have been so totally taken in by the ridiculous idea that the Jewish people were the fundamental source of all evil and misery, and that it was only natural that they be slaughtered?

The scholar writes:

Many answers have been given and perhaps many are needed, for no single theory can satisfactorily explain Hitler's phenomenal success with the German people. They were mesmerized by his voice, and they responded to his message. Was it because their moral sense, at least with regard to the Jews, had become atrophied under the effect of generations of virulent anti-Semitism? Had the German people already become mithridatized by anti-Semitic poison, so that they had become immune even to Hitler's deadly brand?¹¹

Her remarks drive home just how dangerous and frightening it is if people are "mithridatized"—desensitized to such poison.

IKEDA: It's the same in Japan. People are losing their sense of human rights. There is a nationalism growing that has no qualms about making the people victims of the state. It is a dangerous situation. We therefore have no alternative but to stand up.

ENDO: Although Japan's constitution is founded upon the ideal of creating peace through soft power, this ideal is now being trampled upon.

SUDA: Justifications for Japan's past war of aggression in Asia are being advanced with tremendous vigor. Most alarming is the prominence of such propaganda in media that appeals to members of the younger generation.

SAITO: At the same time, the spirit of resistance has all but disappeared, resulting in an atmosphere where people think it is best simply to leave everything up to those in power. This certainly goes for the media. And the abject tendency of the public to follow the prevailing current without question is truly pathetic.

Japanese Religion Is a Slave to Power

From "The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings"

Five important points on the "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter:

Point Five, concerning the thirty-three bodies

that Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds manifests in order to benefit living beings.

"The Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings" says: "The number thirty stands for the doctrine of three thousand realms. The three bodies stand for the doctrine of the three truths.

Again, regarding the thirty-three bodies, if one is endowed with the three bodies in each of the Ten Worlds, this constitutes thirty bodies, and if the original three bodies are then added in, we have a total of thirty-three bodies.

Essentially, the number "three" stands for the three categories of action, namely, the actions of body, mouth and mind, while the number "ten"¹² stands for the Ten Worlds. The number "three" also stands for the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance. The word "bodies" refers to the bodies of all living beings.

Now when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are receiving the benefits of the thirty-three bodies. (GZ, 777)

IKEDA: The fundamental reason the spirit of the Japanese to oppose authority is so weak is that religion in the country has long been spineless. This is what the leading thinker and educator Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) argued in his work, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*.

Mr. Endo, didn't you attend Keio University [which Fukuzawa founded]?

ENDO: Yes. I recall that in this work he harshly denounced priests as "slaves of the government."

IKEDA: He writes:

Religion works within the hearts of men. It is something absolutely free and independent, not controlled in any way by others or dependent upon their powers. But while this is the way religion ought to be, such has not been the case here in Japan. . . .

. . . Buddhism, too, has belonged to the ruling class, and has depended upon the patronage of the ruling class, ever since its introduction. . . . The worst of them [Buddhist monks] even felt proud when the government made them peers. . . .

Buddhism has flourished, true. But its teaching

has been entirely absorbed by political authority. What shines throughout the world is not the radiance of Buddha’s teachings but the glory of Buddhism’s political authority. . . .

Thus we can say that the Buddhist monks were slaves of the government. More recently, the government has passed a law which permits Buddhist priests throughout the country to eat meat and get married. The fact that prior to this law these priests were unable to eat meat or get married was not because they were keeping some kind of religious precept. Rather, they refrained from these things because they did not have the government’s permission. From this, then, we can conclude that the monks have been slaves of the government; indeed, we can even conclude that at present there is no real religion in Japan.¹⁵

SAITO: Religion, which ought to become a mainstay of people’s spiritual independence, has long been in such a deplorable state that it is quite natural the Japanese people’s spirit to fight authority remains weak.

IKEDA: For precisely this reason, the Soka Gakkai movement in Japan is a cultural, human and spiritual revolution on the most fundamental level.

Nichiren Daishonin, while enduring a barrage of attacks from priests who had become “slaves to power,” calmly described the sovereign of Japan as a “ruler of this little island country” (WND, 765). In society, everything has its limits. Buddhism is unlimited. The Daishonin knew that even the most powerful person is no match for the Mystic Law, and that the powerful therefore ought to humbly seek the true teaching.

A little earlier we talked about President Makiguchi’s theory of value. Mr. Makiguchi’s decree that “religion is worthy of the name only if it can lead people to happiness and improve society” is linked directly with Nichiren Daishonin. Our movement is continually tapping the wellspring of religion to send a fresh spiritual current into society. It is ever engaged with society. This is also the spirit of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, who has the ability to manifest any form he chooses.

[The sutra describes him as assuming thirty-three bodies to preach the Law and lead people to happiness. These bodies include the forms of a Buddha, a pratyekabuddha, a voice-hearer, King Brahma, Lord Shakra, the heavenly



Stupa in Sanchi, India. King Ashoka placed offerings before stupas paying tribute to the Buddha’s disciples.

being Freedom, the heavenly being Great Freedom, a great general of heaven, Vaishravana, a petty king, a rich man, a householder, a chief minister, a Brahman, a monk, a nun, a layman believer, a laywoman believer, the wife of a rich man, of a householder, of a chief minister or of a Brahman, a young boy or a young girl, a heavenly being, a dragon, a yaksha, a gandharva, an asura, a garuda, a kinnara, a mahoraga, a human or a nonhuman being and a vajra-bearing god (cf. LS25, 301–302).]

SAITO: He can manifest all forms, including even those that are not mentioned in the sutra.

IKEDA: This indicates the importance of respecting all individuals, whatever their station. That person may be the embodiment of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. There are occasions when that person may fulfill the function of a Buddha or bodhisattva. We must never judge a person based on status, line of work or appearance.

“Politics Without Religion Is Dead”

SUDA: The Lotus Sutra is a teaching that is directed toward society.

IKEDA: It is indeed. From the fundamental level of religion, the Lotus Sutra constantly purifies, refreshes and revitalizes society.

With regard to the relationship of religion and politics, Dr. N. Radhakrishnan¹⁴ related to me [in 1994] that Gandhi once said: “Politics that is bereft of religion is dead and lifeless!” Gandhi also said: “It is a noose that will hang the nation.”¹⁵

SAITO: I completely agree.

IKEDA: While Yukichi Fukuzawa said that Japanese religion is a “slave of the government,” Gandhi, by contrast, called for transforming politics by infusing it, through religious spirituality, with moral compassion.

In Japan, the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Prince Shotoku (572–622) includes the exhortation to “devoutly revere the three treasures.”¹⁶ There was thus the idea that the political authorities, too, should behave in accord with universal truth.

Some religions collaborate with power and become its slaves. There are also those that isolate themselves from society, turning a blind eye to politics. But this only passively supports the growth of pernicious power, ultimately allowing it to thrive. There is also a third path in which religion neither unites with power and assists it, nor abets power through a hands-off approach. This is the path of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land, which Nichiren Daishonin espoused.

It aims, from the standpoint of the eternal truth of the correct teaching, to engage in and revolutionize reality. This is the sole noble path by which religion can avoid becoming a slave to power. Yet for precisely this reason, it is a path occasioned by persecution and difficulties, which means it is the genuine article.

Establishing Ethics in Economics

SAITO: We have already discussed the principle in the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter of attaining benefit in the present. An abstract religious view that rejects the creation of value in daily life will not become a vibrant force in society.

Conversely, an easygoing teaching of immediate gain will neither help people open up their inner lives nor give them the ability to transform society even at great personal sacrifice. These are opposite extremes, and I think that both would be very convenient for those in power.

IKEDA: In Japan, not only have priests become “slaves to power,” but so have most intellectuals, leading members of the business world and ordinary citizens. By rights, the powerful and society’s leaders should serve as the “hands and feet” of the people. They are a means for the people’s happiness; they are public servants. However, this concept has been turned on its head.

ENDO: While such people may call themselves public servants, “public” here does not mean the people, but the state or the present system. The idea that public servants are supposed to serve not the people but the system is frightening.

SUDA: I guess that nothing will change in Japan unless the basic tenet of democracy that “the state is a means which has the people’s happiness as its end” is really driven home to the Japanese people.

IKEDA: People who are without the invisible authority of the spiritual realm (i.e., religion) readily adhere to visible authority (i.e., the political and social hierarchy).

The Buddhism of value-creation that seeks to breathe life into society is not limited to politics. Just as Perceiver of the World’s Sounds can manifest all manner of forms, the stage on which we carry out our Buddhist activities encompasses all spheres of society, including, for example, economics.

Gandhi espoused an “economics of justice,” saying:

An economics that inculcates mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest.¹⁷

The worship of wealth makes the strong arrogant and the weak servile, corrupting the spirit of both. The essence of economics lies in fostering the wisdom to bring happiness to all people, particularly the destitute. This is what is meant by an “economics of justice.” It accords with the true meaning of “economics,”

which (in Japanese) is a contraction of a phrase literally meaning to “govern society and save the people.”

SAITO: Professor Amartya Sen of Cambridge University’s Trinity College in England, who received an honorary doctorate from the University of Delhi at the same time as you, President Ikeda, is also an advocate of ethics in economics.

IKEDA: Professor Sen was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Economics. He was born in the village where the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) ran an academy, and he was in fact given his name by Tagore.

SAITO: When he was nine, Professor Sen experienced the Great Bengal Famine [of 1943], in which approximately three million people died of starvation. He explains that this experience inspired him to study economics so he could help the poor. He has consistently advocated ethical standards in economics.

IKEDA: How noble!

In his theory of value, President Makiguchi included gain among the three major values of beauty, gain and good. He clearly stated that gain that does not serve to benefit the public interest is evil and anti-value.

Without a system of values to guide economic activity, economics becomes devoted to nothing more than money-making for the sake of making money and economic growth for the sake of economic growth. There is the danger that such a situation will spin out of control.



The constitution of Prince Shotoku indicates that political authorities should behave in accord with universal truth.

ENDO: Japan’s bubble economy [in the late 1980s] would be a classic example of this.

IKEDA: President Makiguchi’s theory of value could therefore be said to aspire toward an economics of justice.

SUDA: These days in Japan all one hears people talking about is “restoring prosperity.” It’s as though people think that returning to economic expansion will solve all the country’s problems.

While economic growth is of course very important, nothing would be more wasteful than for Japanese society to simply pursue past dreams of economic prosperity without changing its underlying values.

SAITO: It would mean that the country had

not learned anything from the bursting of the economic bubble, which resulted in such turmoil that it has been dubbed “the second defeat in war.”

The Daishonin’s Buddhism Is Based on Making a Vow

From the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”

Part One: The Essential Passage in Each of the Twenty-eight Chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

Chapter Twenty-five: “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.”

“He views living beings with compassionate eyes. / The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable” (LS25, 306).

This passage indicates that, because both the objective and subjective aspects of the Dharma-realm are the Mystic Law, the Buddha looks with compassion on all living beings equally, as though each were his only child. The blessings and wisdom of both the objective world and subjective beings are immeasurable. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has these two aspects of blessings and wisdom. (GZ, 792)

IKEDA: The kosen-rufu movement in Japan is an effort to transform this land that is devoid of philosophy and culture into one that is rich with humanism. If the struggle for kosen-rufu is forgotten, then even the Daishonin's Buddhism will become no better than the selfish religions that have heretofore prevailed.

SUDA: The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is a case in point.

IKEDA: It is when we take action for kosen-rufu with a selfless spirit that the microcosm of our lives fuses with the macrocosm of the universe and our prayers are answered. The Daishonin says, "It could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered" (WND, 345). So the issue becomes whether one is a "practitioner" of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin's teaching is about making a vow. In our present situation we need to pledge to the Gohonzon: "I will advance kosen-rufu to the best of my ability! I will realize victory without fail!" Our prayer starts from this vow.

In explaining the origins of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, the sutra says, "His vast oath is deep as the ocean" (LS25, 303), meaning that his pledge to spread Buddhism is profound. It further states that, as a result of this oath, "The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable" (LS25, 306).

Nichiren Daishonin says regarding this passage, "The blessings and wisdom of both the objective and subjective worlds are immeasurable. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has these two aspects of blessings and wisdom" (GZ, 792). In other words, both we and our immediate environment gain tremendous good fortune and wisdom.

Some people tend to be wise while others possess good fortune. Everyone is of course unique, but if we have wisdom yet lack good fortune then our efforts will come to nothing; we will be unable to create happiness for ourselves. If, on the other hand, we have good fortune but no wisdom, then we will find it difficult to earn the trust of others and will not be able to

help those around us become happy. A supreme life is one that encompasses both good fortune and wisdom.

To walk the essential path of humanism throughout life, the path of kosen-rufu, is to lead an unsurpassed existence. Therefore, we need to forge ahead on this path without retreating a single step. There is no need to hold back.

All leaders should take their places in the vanguard of our movement, working with the persistence of beavers and engaging in dialogue with the fortitude of lion kings, while putting their whole lives into creating a history of the victory of kosen-rufu. To the extent that we do so, our own eternal journey over the three existences will shine with brilliance.

To be continued

1. Editor's note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.

2. Non-substantiality: Along with the truth of temporary existence and the truth of the Middle Way, one of the three truths formulated by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China to clarify the essential nature of phenomena. The truth of non-substantiality is that phenomena have no absolute or fixed existence of their own.

3. *Goethe's Collected Works*, vol. 2, Faust I & II, ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins (Cambridge, MA: Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers Boston, Inc., 1983), p. 305.

4. Setsuko Takeshita, *Seibo Maria* (Holy Mother Mary) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998), p. 113.

5. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 26 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967), p. 557.

6. The seven disasters: fire, flood, rakshasa demons, attack by swords and staves, attack by yaksha and other demons, imprisonment and attack by bandits.

7. Dr. Jun Ishihara (1881–1947): A professor of physics who taught at Tohoku University, Japan.

8. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummmeisha, 1988), vol. 9, p. 88.

9. Mr. Makiguchi posited the existence of three basic values: beauty, gain, and good.

10. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu*, vol. 5, p. 356.

11. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 22.

12. In writing Chinese and Japanese numbers, the character meaning "ten" represents multiples of ten. Therefore, the number "33" is written with the characters for "3," "10," and "3," in that order.

13. Yukichi Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, trans. David A. Dilworth & G. Cameron Hurst (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973), pp. 146–48.

14. Dr. N. Radhakrishnan: Director of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti.

15. *Haribhau Upadhaya, Bapu Monogatari* (The Story of Bapu), translated from Hindi by Hakobu Ikeda (Tokyo: Kodansha Shuppan Sabisu Senta, 1998), p. 22.

16. The three treasures: The Buddha, the Dharma (i.e., his Law and teaching) and the samgha (the Buddhist order or community).

17. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 66 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1976), p. 168.



Seikyo Press

SGI President Ikeda meets with India President Narayanan and First Lady Usha Narayanan October 22, 1997 in New Delhi. They exchanged views on topics such as India fifty years after independence. The meeting was covered by national TV and other media.

Recollections of MY MEETINGS with LEADING WORLD FIGURES

By SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

President Kocheril Raman Narayanan of India

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. President Ikeda is the founder of Soka University and the Soka school system.

I seem to have a mysterious affinity with President Kocheril Raman Narayanan of India. When I visited Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in February 1979, Mr. Narayanan, then vice-chancellor of the prestigious institution, greeted me warmly.

He said to me with a friendly smile, "Please be professor for a day." When I replied, "No. Please allow me to be student for a day," his smile broke

into laughter. His personal warmth and openheartedness shone from his smile.

Four young women who were studying Japanese language at the university sang with beautiful pronunciation the well-loved Japanese songs—"Sakura Sakura" (Cherry Blossoms) and "Haru ga Kita" (Spring Has Come) as the audience clapped in time with the music. When I made the suggestion to the teaching staff that the girls be given the highest marks for their Japanese, Vice Chancellor Narayanan and the students applauded enthusiastically.

One student raised his hand and said he had a question for me. He explained that he was studying for his doctoral degree, and his subject of research was the Soka Gakkai. Mr. Narayanan quipped that I was being studied and asked me to assist the student.

I was immediately impressed by Mr. Narayanan's character, kindness and quick intelligence. He had only recently taken the post of vice-chancellor. Up to that time, he had been a diplomat, serving as India's ambassador to such countries as Thailand, Turkey and China. Just after he married, early in his diplomatic career, he did a stint of duty at the Indian Embassy in Tokyo.

"In fact," he mentioned the second time we met in December 1995, "my eldest daughter was born in Tokyo." That conversation took place sixteen years after our first encounter at Jawaharlal Nehru University. I received word from him: "I am coming to Japan, and I'd like to see you." We met in Tokyo. At that time, he was vice-president of India.

He shared a story about Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru: "My daughter was eight years old. She had won first prize in a poetry contest, and was to receive her award directly from Prime Minister Nehru. But just then I received notice that I was to be transferred overseas, and since my daughter would be coming with me, she would miss the award ceremonies.

"We visited the prime minister's residence just before we left, and before the award ceremony was to be held. Prime Minister Nehru remarked he had seen the poem, saying to my daughter, 'Very good! Very good! I've already read it in the magazine!' There were many students at his residence that day, and he called

my daughter up to stand beside him and recite her poem to those present. It was like her own private award ceremony."

Mr. Narayanan told me: "The thing I found most impressive about the prime minister was his humanity."

There are those who lead by force and those who lead by their humanity. Prime Minister Nehru, a direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, knew the subtlest workings of the human heart.

President Narayanan has described himself as "one who has sprung from the grass-roots of our society and grown up in the dust and heat of this sacred land."¹ He was born in 1921 in a small village in the southernmost state of Kerala. He was from the most downtrodden class that for centuries had been oppressed and discriminated against and treated as if they were less than human.

Mr. Narayanan was the fourth of seven children in a family that was destitute and starving. They had no bathing facilities in their home and he had to walk seven kilometers to

and from school each day. During the rainy season, the mud came up to his ankles. On those long walks, he was always reading. He couldn't afford to buy books, so he would devour newspapers or books he came upon, taking careful notes.

Appreciating how fond he was of study, Mr. Narayanan's elder siblings gave up their schooling so that he might have the chance to get an education. But still the family often could not afford to pay his tuition. He was forced to stand outside the classroom, but he refused to let this humiliation defeat him. He would simply strain to hear every word of instruction going on inside. He recalls with a smile that it was "good training." A diplomat must be thick-skinned, and being forced to stand outside in front of his classmates when he was young was a useful exercise.

He's a person of great inner strength. He's even cheerful when recounting stories of his hardships.

Apparently he rarely speaks about his childhood, but his feelings for the exploited and underprivileged burn with volcanic force within his breast. After our meeting in Tokyo, he attended an international conference in Hiroshima, where he shared his heartfelt sentiments. "What humanity needs most," he declared, "is



India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964)

Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS

sympathy for the suffering of others. We need to care for others as if they were ourselves, so that when we witness some cruel act or tragic occurrence, wherever it may have taken place, we think, 'That could have been me.' We need education that fosters in people such compassion." In his speech, he also quoted Gandhi's ambition "to wipe every tear from every eye." All leaders, he insists, must regard the suffering of any person as

their own suffering. I am reminded of the determination of my own mentor Josei Toda "to eradicate all misery from the face of the earth."

Mahatma Gandhi abhorred the system that defined a certain group of people as "untouchable." He denounced it as a creation of the devil. He loved these people at the very lowest rung of society, renaming them the Harijan, or "Children of God." Gandhi said that while he did not particularly wish to be reborn, if he were, he would choose to be reborn as an untouchable so that he might share the pain, sadness and insult they bear.

The young Mr. Narayanan was able to continue his studies with the assistance of the Harijan Scholarship that Gandhi had established. He worked and worked and finally graduated from university at the top of his class. He did brilliantly in school, but career success did not follow easily, perhaps because of his caste.

He left his hometown to become a journalist. One of the highlights of this period of his life was an opportunity to interview Gandhi. He was nervous and excited when he arrived. His timing was bad: Gandhi was right in the middle of lunch; most of India's top leaders were in the room with him. In addition, Gandhi was observing a day of silence as part of his religious practice. Yet Gandhi gladly responded to the inexperienced young journalist's questions, jotting his replies down on paper.

When Mr. Narayanan completed his interview and



An everyday scene in Jaipur, India. A country of great spiritual richness, India will play an increasingly important role in world affairs.

Bob Kinn/CORBIS

was about to leave the room, one of those in attendance called out to him. Gandhi had instructed that he be given a meal before he left. Mr. Narayanan was astonished by this compassion. Surely Gandhi had felt bad that he was eating his lunch while this thin, hungry young man had asked questions. That kindness, that consideration for others, impressed the twenty-four-year-old Mr. Narayanan even more than Gandhi's thoughtful replies to his interview questions. No doubt because he had suffered much indignity in his childhood, the young journalist was deeply sensitive to others' feelings. He would never forget Gandhi's kindness.

Who could have ever imagined that a half-century later, that young man would become the president of India? In July 1997, in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, he became the republic's tenth president. Gandhi had once expressed the wish that the president of independent India be selected from among the most oppressed and discriminated class; now his wish had come true. From the standpoints of learning, character and experience, there was no better choice. Mr. Narayanan won ninety-five percent of the votes cast.

Three months after he had taken office, I visited him at the presidential offices in New Delhi. "Thank you for coming," he said. He welcomed me with the same warmth as always, hurrying over to shake my hand.

President Narayanan's term in office lasts until 2002. I



Catherine Karnow/CORBIS

Indian elephants playing in a river in Kaziranga National Park.

shared with him my conviction that in the twenty-first century, India, a country of great spiritual richness, will play an increasingly important role in world affairs. I believe, I said, that from the broad perspective we will see the emergence of a triumvirate of pivotal nations: the United States, China and India. When the world was dominated by two powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, we had the Cold War. When there are two centers of power, they inevitably polarize into opposition. But we are entering an age of three centers of power, which will lead the world toward harmony and stability.

When I referred to the ancient Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* to support my case, the learned Dr. Narayanan said he knew the work well. He smiled and said, “I agree with your vision, President Ikeda.”

I praised him for the profound content of his speeches. “The truth is,” he said, “I sometimes borrow from your writings for ideas.”

“I know you’re just joking,” I said, “but thank you for the kind words.”

“No, it’s true!” he insisted. I couldn’t help but recall

our friendly repartee at Jawaharlal Nehru University so many years before.

Whenever I meet Mr. Narayanan, our conversation turns to young people. Most likely because the Indian president wishes to pay back the support and encouragement he received from Gandhi and Nehru, he is always concerned about the education and development of the youth. In his inauguration speech, he said that it is inevitable that India’s youth should show “indifference” and become “cynical” when they are confronted with the corruption of the nation’s leaders. He vigorously urged all to remember that, unless they set an example for the youth, India’s future will be in jeopardy.

And in that same speech, he again recalled the fervent wish of Mahatma Gandhi to “wipe every tear from every eye.” For President Narayanan, a leader is a person who is willing to give his or her life for the sake of the poor, the oppressed and the exploited. □

1. Presidential inauguration speech delivered on July 25, 1997.

(Continued from inside front cover)

- ❖ Work together with other religions to resolve issues affecting humanity
- ❖ Respect cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange
- ❖ Encourage the protection of nature and the environment

What We Do...

The principle activity for SGI-USA members is the neighborhood discussion meeting. These informal gatherings, held in members' homes, bring people together to practice Buddhism, to study Buddhist principles and discuss how they can best be applied to the challenges of daily life.

In addition, through youth activities, educational seminars and exhibits, we address urgent issues facing individuals and humanity. Non-sectarian activities have included:

Victory Over Violence: A grass-roots campaign to raise awareness about violence, its causes, and solutions. The program is expanding to schools and community organizations.

Religious Tolerance Through Dialogue: SGI-USA sponsors and participates in a number of local and national inter-religious conferences and symposia, including the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies (SBCS).

Education for a Culture of Peace: SGI-USA traveling exhibits are recognized for their ability to inform and to evoke a sense of responsibility toward important issues facing our planet. These have recently included exhibits on global children's rights, the environmental crisis, nuclear disarmament, and on the life of the great scientist and pacifist Linus Pauling.

The Earth Charter: SGI-USA members have sponsored more than thirty conferences involving some 1,800 participants to educate the American people about the international Earth Charter project, and participates in the Earth Charter USA Network, the project's national coordinating group.

Friendship Through Knowledge: An SGI-USA educational project that collected and shipped more than 14,000 books to schools and colleges in Ghana.

A Modern Heritage...

The founding Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, was a Buddhist and an educator who asserted that the purpose of education should be development of people's ability to create "value" (i.e.,

improvement, beauty and social good) in their daily lives. The word *soka* means value creation. In pre-war Japan, where education focused on the training of workers and soldiers for the nation's growing military-industrial machine, Makiguchi's humane, student-focused views often brought him into conflict with the authorities. Arrested with other top Soka Gakkai leaders during World War II as a "thought criminal" for his unyielding opposition to Japanese militarism and government oppression of religion, Makiguchi died in prison of malnutrition and mistreatment at the age of 73 in November 1944.

Makiguchi's close disciple, Josei Toda, survived the ordeal and was released from prison in July 1945, just weeks before the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Determined to rebuild the Soka Gakkai, Toda developed its membership from less than 3,000 families when he assumed the presidency in 1951 to more than 750,000 before his death in 1958. The Soka Gakkai's remarkable early growth stemmed from its commitment to helping people overcome suffering in the postwar chaos. Toda confirmed the Soka Gakkai's pacifist stance in 1957 by taking a strong, pioneering, public position against the use of nuclear weapons.

On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Within six months, he established chapters in the United States and South America, followed a year later by organizations in nine European countries. He continues to provide leadership for the global SGI organization, which now includes members in half the countries of the world. Mr. Ikeda has founded a number of educational and cultural institutions, including Soka University, which seek to foster the values of peace, culture and education.

For more information visit our web site at www.sgi-usa.org

SGI-Affiliated Institutions

The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century
www.brc21.org

Toda Peace Institute for Global Peace and Policy
Research www.toda.org

Soka University of America www.soka.edu

Soka University of Japan www.soka.ac.jp

Institute of Oriental Philosophy

Pacific Basin Research Center www.ap.harvard.edu

Tokyo Fuji Art Museum

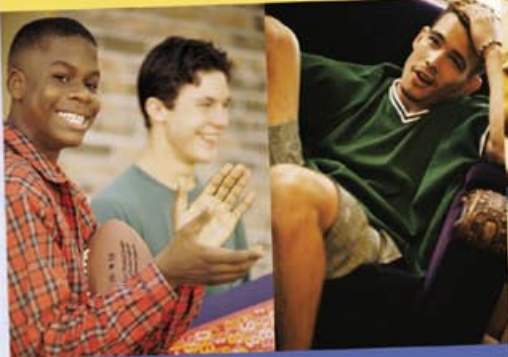
The Min-on Concert Association www.min-on.or.jp

NEW FROM MIDDLEWAY PRESS

The Way of Youth

Buddhist Common
Sense for Handling
Life's Questions

Daisaku Ikeda
Foreword by Duncan Sheik



Based on the popular "Discussions on Youth" series in the World Tribune, *The Way of Youth* brings together President Ikeda's responses to the questions of today's young people. Edited for a general audience, the book offers insights into a variety of issues of concern to today's young people, including how to build confidence and character, learning to live with and respect both yourself and others, finding true happiness, dealing with peer pressure and how to contribute to a positive, free and peaceful society. The book is sure to appeal to teens and their parents of all faiths.

"The book is an outstanding guide to humanity. I recommend it to all who desire to seek self-improvement."

— Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and Founding Director of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence

"Mr. Ikeda gives young people a way to function in the real world."

— Marion Collins, Principal, Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies

"This book was written with the hope that young people can perhaps benefit from the advice of someone like me, who has had a bit more experience than they have. Instead of sermons delivered by persons who claim to

have some superior kind of understanding, I hope readers will accept what I have written as advice from someone who has walked a little farther along the road of life."

— From the author's preface



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JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

JUNE 2000



RECOLLECTIONS OF PRESIDENT KOCHERIL RAMAN NARAYANAN OF INDIA

India, a country of great spiritual richness, will play an increasingly important role in world affairs.

CONVERSATIONS ON EDUCATION WITH FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

SGI President Ikeda, SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck, SGI-USA Youth Division Senior Advisor Ed Feasel

THE WISDOM OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century

SGI AT WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

Buddhist Values and Conflict Resolution, Buddhist Values and A Culture of Peace



What Is the SGI & 'Living Buddhism' Magazine?

Building a Culture of Peace...

Living Buddhism is the monthly journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist association that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the teachings of the Nichiren school of Buddhism. With seventy-one centers throughout the United States, SGI-USA is affiliated with the worldwide SGI organization, which has twelve million members in 148 countries, with its headquarters in Tokyo, Japan. Our members reflect a broad range of ethnic and social backgrounds, representing the diversity of our American society.

An Ancient Tradition...

The origins of SGI-USA's philosophy can be traced to the teachings of the Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in India. Born Gautama Siddhartha, he abandoned his sheltered, princely life and sought instead to understand the inescapable sufferings all people share — birth, aging, sickness and death — and the means by which these sufferings could be overcome. He achieved at age 32 an awakening to the nature of life and the solution to these sufferings, and then traveled throughout India for 50 years, sharing the wisdom he had discovered. Shakyamuni's intuitive realization of a universal Law (Skt: *Dharma*) eternally permeating all life is most succinctly articulated in the Lotus Sutra, widely considered his most definitive teaching. Here the existence of the innate and universal reality, an essential enlightened nature, is revealed as being inherent in all life. The Lotus Sutra affirms that the realities of daily living provide both motivation and opportunity for spiritual transformation.

One of the most significant proponents of the Lotus Sutra was the 13th-century Japanese reformer, Nichiren Daishonin, who, the late religious scholar Masaharu Anesaki wrote, "stands almost a unique figure in the history of Buddhism, not alone because of his persistence through hardship and persecution ... [but also as] an eloquent speaker, a powerful writer, and a man of tender heart."

In one of his earliest writings, Nichiren Daishonin

declares both the purpose of his teaching and its conclusion: "If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and attain supreme enlightenment in this lifetime, you must awaken to the mystic truth which has always been within your life."

Nichiren taught all the workings of the universe embody a single principle or Law, a "mystic truth," which he expressed as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He set forth a Buddhist practice of chanting this phrase to place one's life into harmony with that universal principle. In this way, he taught, people can unlock boundless hidden potential and transform the inevitable sufferings of life into sources of growth and fulfillment.

What We Believe...

Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International, writes, "Our task is to establish a firm inner world, a robust sense of self that will not be swayed or shaken by the most trying circumstances or pressing adversity. Only when efforts to reform society have as their point of departure the reformation of the inner life — human revolution — will they lead us with certainty to a world of lasting peace and true human security."

Our Buddhist philosophy is expressed in the concept of "human revolution," a process of inner transformation arrived at through Buddhist practice. It is a process by which we develop character; cultivate wisdom, courage, and compassion; and come to live and act for the happiness of others and the betterment of society as well as for personal fulfillment.

The SGI Charter, adopted in 1995, voices our beliefs and aims. These are to:

- ❖ Promote an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism
- ❖ Contribute to peace, culture and education within society
- ❖ Safeguard fundamental human rights and eliminate discrimination
- ❖ Respect and protect freedom of religion and religious expression

(Continued on inside back cover)