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"As people see the transience of the world around them, they come to realize the shallowness of letting their self-worth rise and fall with the ups and downs of circumstance, and seek to expand their knowledge of themselves and the universe. [Nichiren] Daishonin also points out that we are all capable of extending our love and care to others despite our baser instincts." Page 5

## 3 General Director's Message

People of Creativity and Diversity

7

## 5 Buddhist Concepts for Today's Living (15)

How to Live as Humans:  
The Six Paths and the Four Noble Worlds

## 7 The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

Letter to Misawa

15

## 15 Conversations on Education With Friends From Around the World

For the Future of Our Children (2)

## 23 Making Peace: International Civility and the Question of Culture

The Concept of Civil Society

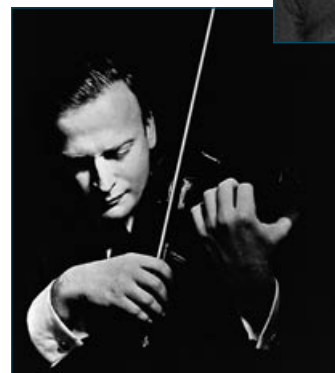
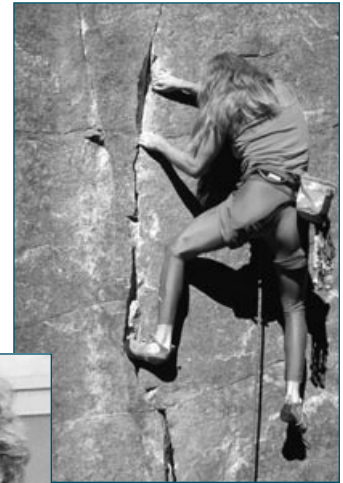
23

## 33 Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra #50

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

33

COVER: Photo of Portage Glacier, Alaska by Gregory Nakasuji. SGI-USA members held a culture festival in Anchorage May 26–28 to commemorate the seventeenth anniversary of a visit by SGI President Ikeda. Mayor Rick Mystrom proclaimed May 27 as SGI-USA "Victory Over Violence Day." Page 3.



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## To Our Readers

As the new managing editor, I pledge to make *Living Buddhism* a truly respected Buddhist journal, striving to continually improve its content and design.

We will publish:

- Articles that raise the life-condition of our readers
- Articles that enhance the appreciation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI's movement for the happiness and peace of society.

In his writing "The Person and the Law" Nichiren Daishonin states: "Since the Law is wonderful, the person is worthy of respect; since the person is worthy of respect, the land is sacred." (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1097) Since *Living Buddhism* deals with the great Law, it should earn the respect of its readers and be a great factor in the advancement of kosen-rufu in the United States and the world.

"Cherish your visions and your dreams as they are the children of your soul, the blue prints of your ultimate accomplishments." – Napoleon Hill

I would like to cultivate many dreams for *Living Buddhism* together with all SGI-USA members and translate them into reality one by one.

*Ted Morino*

*Editor in Chief/Managing Editor*



Gregory Nakasui

## Living BUDDHISM

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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-rence-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-rence-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-rence-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; *rence* (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-rence-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.

# A Report from Alaska

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

*Greetings to all the readers of Living Buddhism.*

**A**s SGI-USA General Director, I have the good fortune to travel the country meeting people who are doing their utmost to improve their communities and help other members.

In June 1983, SGI President Ikeda visited Alaska. Since then, the Alaskan members commemorate his visit each year and refresh their determination toward the future. I was in Alaska for the June celebration.

When I think of Alaska, I envision ice, snow and glaciers, so I was amazed at Alaska's natural unfrozen beauty. June for most Americans is the beginning of summer. But in Alaska, June is still springtime. The temperature was very mild, and I saw beautiful green sprouts emerging from the snow and ice. It was such a beautiful and dramatic sight, and I thought that even here, in this land so close to the Arctic Circle, we can see the drama of new life emerging from barren circumstances. Even here, winter gives way to spring.

I also admired the tenacious efforts of the SGI members here who have continued to commemorate President Ikeda's visit for more than seventeen years. I could see the sprouts of fortune emerging as a result of



Gregory Nakasujii

their persistent efforts. Despite their physical distance from the main body of the SGI-USA members in the other forty-nine states, they are just as close to President Ikeda's heart.

I clearly observed the principle that unseen virtuous

efforts bring visible reward. Through persistent efforts, even the most difficult circumstances will produce benefit and result. This principle reflects the inherent vitality of nature, a principle that is at the core of our Buddhist practice.

In our American organization, many pioneers have struggled for forty-plus years, cherishing the dream of sharing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the United States. In particular, during the past decade, those of you who struggled to take responsibility within our organization must have experienced a difficult time in one way or another. But with the patient and consistent leadership of General Director Fred Zaitso and Women's Leader Wendy Clark, we established a new foundation of growth and progress. And today we can see sprouts and blossoms of development all over the country.

"Unseen virtue brings about visible reward": This is true not only in the life of the individual, where benefit will naturally bloom, but also in our organiza-

*Through persistent efforts, even the MOST difficult circumstances will produce BENEFIT AND RESULT. This PRINCIPLE reflects the inherent vitality of nature, a principle that is at the core of our Buddhist practice.*

tion where, due to our consistent and tenacious efforts, we enjoy prosperity and harmony. At the same time, the principle of cause and effect is very strict. If any part of our organization is neither prosperous nor harmonious, I hope we can reflect on the unseen and behind-the-scenes actions each of us needs to take to ensure that each member is practicing joyfully and receiving benefit.

**D**uring my trip to Alaska, I also met with the city manager of Seward. He shared with me the story of how Alaska came to be acquired by the United States.

The city of Seward was named after the United States Secretary of State William Seward, who is perhaps best remembered as the secretary of state under Abraham Lincoln. He was one of Lincoln's most trusted advisors during the Civil War.

After Lincoln's death, Seward continued to serve as secretary of state. Toward the end of his career, he negotiated the purchase of Alaska, his last act of public renown. In 1867, William Seward purchased 586,412 square miles from Russia for \$7.2 million. Though this worked out to be unbelievably inexpensive, this purchase was widely ridiculed in the government and in the press and was referred to at the time as "Seward's Folly."

The territory was considered an economic liability by the Russians, and most U.S. political and social leaders were focused on the immediate day-to-day concerns of reconstructing the union after the devastation of the Civil War. Alaska was regarded as too remote to be governed, and nobody understood how the purchase of this ice-cold and desolate land could be of any value to the United States.

Of course, today we realize that Alaska is one of the most naturally rich and beautiful parts of our nation.

This "icebox" is actually a tremendous jewel. For each penny that Seward spent, millions of dollars have returned. The land is rich in copper, gold, oil and most of all, people. And for environmentalists, the land is a paradise of beauty and untouched terrain. People come from all over the world to admire it.

To people whose vision was entirely focused on the problems of their day, Alaska was a huge liability. To those focused on its unseen and unrealized potential, however, it was a diamond in the rough. It is entirely a matter of perspective and vision. When you have the eyes to see and the ability to create value, any circumstances can be the ground from which the greatest benefit springs.

This story of the acquisition of Alaska was another reminder of the struggles that pioneers—people with a unique vision—go through. True pioneers, true visionaries, are often misunderstood and ridiculed. But such people don't live for praise or honor; they live for the sake of the generations to come. Some people in our lives—in our families or in our communities—may not understand what we are trying to do, but we should be confident we are acting for the sake of the people of the next century and will all indeed be honored as visionaries and heroes.

Therefore, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of you. Because of your consistent efforts, all over the United States, our SGI organization is showing dynamic progress, and the blossoms of benefit and joy can be seen everywhere. Because of your efforts, spring has come to the SGI-USA.



Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director

*Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (15)*

## *How To Live as Humans:* **THE SIX PATHS and** **THE FOUR NOBLE WORLDS**

What separates humans from animals is less distinct than we might expect. The examination of human nature not only holds interest for philosophers, but concerns all of us directly. How should humans live? If we trace our lineage in the context of life's evolution on the Earth, we find that our species is a comparatively recent phenomenon. The Earth is about four and a half billion years old. The origin of the ancestral stock of the African apes and humans, although uncertain, seems to be no earlier than thirteen million years ago. The Neanderthals, an early relative of modern human beings, are believed to have lived about 100,000 to 30,000 years ago.<sup>1</sup> Although scientific investigation has not yet pinned down the moment of divergence between humans and apes, it is clear that we have a far longer history as animals than as humans.

In the course of evolution, *Homo Sapiens* have developed the ability to reason as this name “man the wise” indicates. Animals live predominantly according to instinct. As a result, their influence cannot exceed what is prescribed by their natures. Through our intelligence, however, humans can exercise good or bad influence far beyond what seem to be our natural limits. A shark may bite a surfer's leg dangling beneath the surface, but it cannot make a bomb capable of annihilating all life on the planet. Perhaps due to our long history as animals, we amplify—ironically through intelligence—our animalistic impulses to seek selfish pleasure and thus destroy what we fear and bring harm not only upon ourselves, but also upon many other species.

From various perspectives, Buddhism throws light on the workings of human nature. One Buddhist concept that does so is the Ten Worlds, originally described as distinct realms into which people are born according to their past

actions (karma). From the lowest, they are the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, animals, asura (warlike demons from Indian mythology), human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, however, the Ten Worlds are viewed as various states of being we experience from moment to moment, rather than distinct physical realms or categories. The Ten Worlds, therefore, may be understood as the following states: (1) Hell—intense suffering and despair, (2) Hunger—insatiable desire, (3) Animality—selfish stupidity, (4) Anger—arrogance and belligerence, (5) Humanity—temporary balance and tranquility, (6) Heaven—passing joy and pleasure, (7) Learning, (8) Self-realization, (9) Bodhisattva—altruism, and (10) Buddhahood—supreme happiness characterized by compassion and wisdom.

Buddhism classifies those Ten Worlds into two categories. The six lower states are called “the six paths,” and the four higher states “the four noble worlds.” Such distinction is made because those who dwell in the six paths are controlled by their environment or physical condition; they experience any of those six states at any moment in response to changing circumstances. People of the four noble worlds, on the other hand, are self-aware, striving to improve themselves regardless of external conditions. The Daishonin succinctly explains the six paths as follows: “Rage is the world of hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asura, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 358, “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”). Common to all six is that they are passive states. It may be said that animals like dogs and cats manifest those states whenever they have an appropriate stimulus. Those of the six paths are slaves

to their desires and environment though at times they may seem carefree, doing whatever is pleasurable. Simply put, those of the six paths are trapped in the dungeon of desires and external circumstances, and have locked the gate to true happiness from the inside through ignorance of their higher potential.<sup>2</sup>

**O**n the contrary, the four noble worlds only emerge when we make deliberate efforts to develop ourselves beyond our natural tendencies. Buddhism, in this sense, defines our humanity in our active will for self-reflection and self-improvement. Regarding those four higher states, the Daishonin comments as follows: “The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world? Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him. Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate. But since you possess the other nine worlds, you should believe that you have Buddhahood as well” (WND, 358, “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”). Here “the worlds of the two vehicles” refers to the states of learning and self-realization. As people see the transience of the world around them, they come to realize the shallowness of letting their self-worth rise and fall with the ups and downs of circumstance, and seek to expand their knowledge of themselves and the universe. The Daishonin also points out that we are all capable of extending our love and care to others despite our baser instincts. Regarding the state of Buddhahood, the Daishonin urges us to overcome our disbelief and reveal this supreme state of happiness through faith. What characterizes people of the four noble worlds is their awareness of the slavish reality of the six paths and their conscious efforts to free themselves from the shackles of selfish desire and attachment.

In one sense, Shakyamuni and other Buddhist teachers expounded their teachings so that people might escape the entrapment of the six paths and pursue more humane ways of living. In early monastic Buddhism, practitioners were encouraged to establish the states of learning and self-realization. Mahayana Buddhism stressed the altruistic state of a bodhisattva. The Lotus Sutra, the supreme teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, illuminates the path of Buddhahood. In this regard, Buddhism teaches us the importance of transforming the animalistic, passive conditions of the six paths into

the self-aware, humane states of the four noble worlds.

The necessity to transcend our animalistic nature is stressed not only in Buddhism, but also in many intellectual traditions of the West. For example, in medieval and Renaissance Europe, the human existence was divided into the four categories of the mineral, vegetable, sensual and rational.<sup>3</sup> The man of stone is a man of despair and sloth. He exists but has no will to act; his existence is living death. The vegetable man only lives; he is a man of gluttony who eats, drinks and procreates. The sensual man, like many animals, lives and feels; he seeks pleasure and avoids pain. The rational man, unlike the previous three, lives, perceives and understands; he knows, chooses and acts. An image of the rational is a man at his book, trying to expand his awareness and understanding. As in the Buddhist concept of the Ten Worlds, Renaissance philosophy characterizes humans by their active will to challenge themselves.

In reality, however, it is easy for us to fall into the lifestyle of the six paths where we mistake pleasure for supreme happiness and fail to challenge our weaknesses. This may be the result of our long history as animals. But if we truly wish to experience the profound sense of fulfillment as human beings, we must, as taught by the wisdom of both East and West, challenge ourselves to manifest the higher states, especially those of bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

Plato quotes his teacher Socrates: “I only wish that ordinary people had an unlimited capacity for doing harm; then they might have an unlimited power for doing good, which would be a splendid thing, if it were so.”<sup>4</sup> The ominous first half of his wish has come true with the arrival of the nuclear age. The fulfillment of the rest of Socrates’ wish, it seems, depends greatly upon how willing we are to challenge ourselves to live as humanly and humanely as possible in the twenty-first century. □

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

1. “Human Evolution.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. CD-ROM. 1999.
2. The six paths were traditionally viewed as the realms in which deluded common mortals repeatedly transmigrate. This is commonly known as “the transmigration through the six paths.”
3. “Great Chain of Being.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. CD-ROM. 1999. See also *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* by C. S. Lewis, Cambridge University Press, 1964. pp. 146-165.
4. Plato. *Crito*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961. p. 29.

## Study Material for August

# Letter to Misawa



*(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 894-95; Goshō Zenshu, pp. 1487-88)*

The following is an excerpt from a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to one of his followers, which is known today as “Letter to Misawa.” This is the study material for August study meetings in the SGI-USA.

**A**lthough people study Buddhism, it is difficult for them to practice it correctly either because of the ignorance of their minds, or because, even though wise, they fail to realize that they are being misled by their teachers.

Moreover, even though one may encounter a wise teacher and the true sutra and thereby embrace the correct teaching, when one resolves to break free from the sufferings of birth and death and attain Buddhahood,<sup>1</sup> one will inevitably encounter seven grave matters known as the three obstacles and four devils,<sup>2</sup> just as surely as a shadow follows the body and clouds accompany rain. Even if you should manage to overcome the first six, if you are defeated by the seventh, you will not be able to become a Buddha.

Let us leave the first six for now. The seventh is caused by the devil king of the sixth heaven.<sup>3</sup> When an ordinary person of the latter age is ready to attain Buddhahood, having realized the essence of all the sacred teachings of the Buddha’s lifetime and understood the heart of the important teaching set forth in Great Concentration and Insight,<sup>4</sup> this devil is greatly surprised. He says to himself, “This is most vexing. If I allow this person to remain in my domain, he not only will free himself from the sufferings of birth and death, but will lead others to enlightenment as well. Moreover, he will take over my realm and change it into a pure land. What shall I do?” The devil king then summons all his underlings from the three-fold world of desire, form, and formlessness<sup>5</sup> and tells them: “Each of you now must go and harass that votary, according to your respective skills. If you should fail to make him abandon his Buddhist practice, then enter into the minds of his disciples, lay supporters, and the people of his land and thus try to persuade or threaten him. If these attempts are also unsuccessful, I myself will go down and possess the mind and body of his sovereign to persecute that votary. Together, how can we fail to prevent him from attaining Buddhahood?”

I, Nichiren, have long been aware of all this and therefore know how difficult it is for an ordinary person of the latter age to become a Buddha in this lifetime.

## Background

**W**ritten in the fourth year of Kenji (1278), this letter is also referred to as “Before and after Sado” because it makes a clear distinction between the teachings the Daishonin expounded before his exile to Sado Island and those he revealed during and after his Sado exile. He compares the former to the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, which Shakyamuni preached as an expedient to lead his disciples to the Lotus Sutra. Concerning his true teaching, the Daishonin says, “I secretly conveyed my teaching to my disciples from the province of Sado.” Quoting the Buddha’s words, he refers to that teaching simply as “this great Law.” This teaching is explained more precisely in two of his most important

writings, “The Opening of the Eyes” and “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind.”

The recipient of this letter is generally believed to be Misawa Kojiro, a lay follower of the Daishonin who was the lord of Misawa in Fuji District of Suruga Province, though some consider it to have been given to Kojiro’s grandson, Masahiro.

Misawa appears to have kept his distance from the Daishonin for fear of antagonizing and arousing the suspicions of the Kamakura shogunate. But the Daishonin expresses understanding of his position as the lord of a manor responsible for a fief, family, and retainers, and kindly encourages him. (From *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 898)

## Commentary

### Overcoming “the three obstacles and the four devils”

**A**fter thanking the letter’s recipient for various offerings, Nichiren Daishonin explains why it is difficult to bring forth one’s supreme potential of Buddhahood. In this letter the Daishonin gives two reasons. First, people fail to practice Buddhism correctly either because of “the ignorance of their minds” or “being misled by their teachers.” Second, even if people encounter true Buddhism and its correct teacher, they are often prevented from attaining enlightenment by “the three obstacles and the four devils.” The “three obstacles and the four devils” describe an array of potential negative influences that can hamper one’s Buddhist practice and prevent one from attaining Buddhahood. Put another way, however, while these stumbling blocks prevent some people from revealing their Buddhahood, for others they function as an impetus or stimulus. By struggling against them, people can bring forth their enlightened potential, thus attaining Buddhahood. If “ignorance,” “misleading teachers” and “the three obstacles and four devils” function to prevent people from attaining Buddhahood, then working to overcome ignorance, seeking a correct teacher and struggling against the three obstacles and four devils are certainly the way to attain Buddhahood. Exerting ourselves sincerely in the faith, practice and study of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the surest and most direct way to accomplish this.

### Overcoming Ignorance and Finding the Right Teacher

**W**hen the Daishonin refers to “the ignorance of their minds,” he does not simply mean people’s ignorance of Buddhism. Of course, it is important to study Buddhism, especially the Daishonin’s writings, so that we may deepen and strengthen our faith through understanding. But amassing knowledge of Buddhism alone is not protection against the kind of “ignorance” the Daishonin refers to here. Even the most erudite Buddhist scholars may fall victim to emotionalism or be guided by pettiness if they are not aware of and able to bring forth the real potential for Buddhahood that all people possess. This ignorance of the mind, then, actually refers to a lack of faith in the real essence of Buddhism.

To find a correct teacher of Buddhism, one must be able to determine who is practicing Buddhism most diligently and sincerely, in exact accord with its teachings. If our judgment in this regard is swayed by someone’s status, position or appearance, then we are succumbing to “ignorance.” Nichiren Daishonin set the example of what it means to be a practitioner and a teacher of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha’s highest teaching, and more specifically of the Mystic Law contained in the sutra. The Daishonin’s example as a votary of the essence of Buddhism is clearly set forth in his writings. Today it is those who carry out faith, prac-

tice and study exactly as Nichiren Daishonin teaches—being diligent in one's own practice while striving to teach others and to spread the humane ideals of Buddhism to society—who can be called correct teachers of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin writes, "Even if the votary of the Lotus Sutra were an ape rather than a man, they (the Buddhist gods) should address him as the votary of the Lotus Sutra, and rush forward to fulfill the vow they made before the Buddha." Votary in this sense means "one who truly practices." In other words, it is not appearance or status or title, but whether one is truly practicing and realizing the power of Buddhism in one's life that qualifies one as a teacher of Buddhism. And just as one should not discriminate against a teacher because of his or her position or status, neither should a teacher discriminate against practitioners.

The Daishonin does not discuss the problems stemming from ignorance or following a wrong teacher in this letter, but they are nonetheless important in that they can prevent us from revealing our own Buddha nature and thus becoming truly happy.

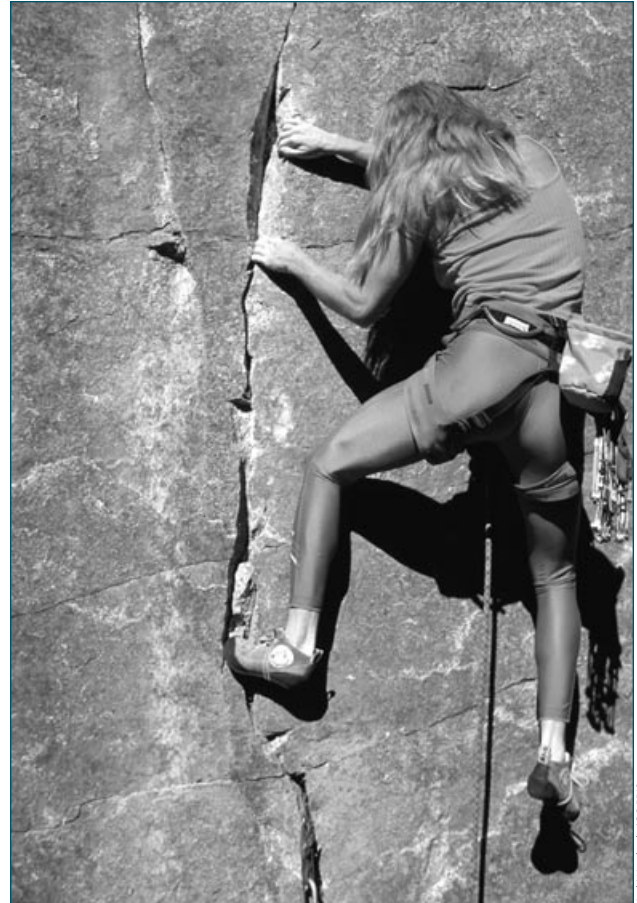
One who purports to be a teacher of Buddhism while discriminating against practitioners due to status, position or wealth, does not qualify as a teacher at all.

## The Three Obstacles

As the Daishonin reminds us in this letter, we "will inevitably encounter . . . the three obstacles and four devils" as we make significant progress in our practice. It is not a matter of if, but when. What matters is our readiness to face and win over those hindrances that lie in our path on the way to absolute happiness. The "three obstacles" are various workings that prevent us from practicing Buddhism; they arise from earthly desires, karma and retribution, respectively.

The Daishonin explains: "The obstacle of earthly desires is the impediments to one's practice that arise from greed, anger, foolishness, and the like" (WND, 501). Some may quit their Buddhist practice because they place the fulfillment of immediate desires above Buddhism, which leads to ultimate enlightenment. In other words, they are more concerned with short-term gain than the truly rewarding growth and benefit that is possible through persevering in Buddhist practice. With such an attitude, even a relatively minor difficulty may cause one to quit. Others may renounce their faith because of emotionalism—likes or dislikes as mentioned above. Such individuals typically find reason to resent a fellow practitioner, and abandon their faith in order to avoid or to spite that person. These are examples of the "obstacle of earthly desires."

Regarding the obstacle of karma, the Daishonin states



Overcoming life's obstacles is like rock-climbing. It takes courage and tenacity.

that it is "the hindrances presented by one's wife or children" (WND, 501). The obstacle of karma refers to our fundamental karmic orientations that make us go astray from the correct path of Buddhism. As the Daishonin's example suggests, some may give up their practice simply to appease family members or loved ones who may themselves fear or resent that person's Buddhist practice, the time it requires, or the criticism it might invite from the wider community.

The obstacle of retribution refers to the hostile circumstances into which one is born as karmic retribution for actions against the Mystic Law in past lifetimes; it refers especially to obstacles caused by authority figures. If those born into a society or community that harbors enmity toward Buddhism allow their circumstances to quash their Buddhist practice, then they are succumbing to the obstacle of retribution. In this regard, the Daishonin states: "The obstacle of retribution is the hindrances caused by one's sovereign or parents" (WND, 501).

## The Four Devils

The “four devils” refers to various negative workings of life and the universe—not to actual demonic beings. These workings torment the body and mind of a Buddhist practitioner. The Sanskrit word for devil, Mara, was translated into Chinese variously as “robber of life,” “killer,” and “destroyer.” As those translations indicate, “devils” in Buddhism may be thought of as metaphors for functions destructive to the lives of the Buddhist practitioners in particular and people in general. In one sense, this is similar to Christianity in that it identifies Satan with forces destructive to life and as “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8: 44).

Specifically the “four devils” refers to the hindrance of earthly desires, the hindrance of the five components, the hindrance of death, and the hindrance of the devil king. The hindrance of earthly desires indicates the function of people’s baser desires and impulses to weaken their resolve to seek Buddhism and thus corrupt their lives.

The “five components” are five physical and mental elements that constitute our existence—they indicate the physical and spiritual makeup of the human being. Our physical or physiological component is called “form,” and our mental functions include the compounds of “perception,” “conception,” “volition” and “consciousness.” Buddhism explains that those five components unite temporarily and give rise to an individual living being. We may interpret the hindrance of the five components as disharmony among those five components that creates physical and mental suffering, stifling the purity of one’s condition and obscuring one’s innate wisdom.

The hindrance of death refers to anything that functions to cause the death of a Buddhist practitioner, and thereby prevent that person’s Buddhist practice. However, we can define it more broadly to include fear or apprehension over the possibility of one’s own death, or discouragement and doubt brought about by the death of a fellow practitioner. If we fear or are discouraged by death, and as a consequence become confused and backslide in faith, we are succumbing to the hindrance of death.

## Seeing the “devil king” Within

In this letter, the Daishonin explains the workings of the last and most powerful hindrance, the “devil king.” Buddhist scripture frequently refers to such beings as demons, devils, benevolent deities and gods. The Daishonin’s Buddhism interprets these as represent-



Illustration of Satan addressing the infernal assembly

ing the workings of life and the universe. In this regard, the Daishonin states in “The Treatment of Illness”:

The heart of the Lotus school is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage of perfect enlightenment. The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Brahma and Shakra<sup>6</sup>, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven. The benevolent deities hate evildoers, and evil demons hate good people. (WND, 1113)

Here the Daishonin teaches that good and evil—life-affirming and life-negating functions—are inherent in all people, including Buddhas. Ignorant of this, some people allow their inherent life-negating nature to go unchecked and bring misery upon themselves and others. Buddhas, however, are fully aware of their own potentials—both good and evil.

Instead of succumbing to destructive desires, Buddhas’ lives are rooted firmly in their life-affirming nature, specifically the supreme state of life called Buddhahood

that is rich with compassion and wisdom. Once this state is attained, however, it does not simply persist of its own accord. One does not become or remain a Buddha through inattentiveness or inaction. As the Daishonin explains, even within the lives of Buddhas “the fundamental darkness” still exists. This tells us something important about our Buddhist practice: Buddhas are those who are aware of their innate fundamental darkness and always strive to challenge their weaknesses. Put another way, to reveal our innate Buddhahood and make it our foundation we need to see and strive against our innate life-negating nature. Just as a body builder cannot remain a body builder without continuing to work out, or as a scholar cannot remain a scholar without continuing to study, a Buddha cannot remain a Buddha without continual effort and vigilance to challenge and win over his or her own weakness and ignorance.

The “fundamental darkness” that the Daishonin mentions is our ignorance of or disbelief in the Buddhahood within our lives as well as the lives of all people. While ignorant of this supreme universal potential, people tend toward despair rather than hope, cruelty instead of compassion, foolishness rather than wisdom, and cowardice instead of courage. People who are steeped in their fundamental darkness are essentially insecure about themselves, so they are inclined to slight others and ignore or even derive satisfaction from others’ misery. Out of insecurity comes arrogance. Great insecurity can give rise to an irrepressible urge to control others. An intense desire for control typifies those who act as “the devil king.”

It should be noted in the devil king’s monologue that his vexation stems from his potential loss of control over his “domain.” He fears people learning of their true potential and becoming self-reliant. Self-aware and self-empowered people will make “the devil king” feel even more deeply his misery that stems from his disbelief in the supreme potential of Buddhahood. They will remind him of his real weakness, which he covers over with self-importance. This is why the devil king says to himself: “This is most vexing. If I allow this person to remain in my domain, he not only will free himself from the sufferings of birth and death, but will lead others to enlightenment as well. Moreover, he will take over my realm and change it into a pure land. What shall I do?”

The important thing to keep in mind is that this “devil king” lurks in the innermost depths of everyone’s life. When this potential is unchecked and becomes dominant, we truly become “little devils.” It is therefore important to always be vigilant toward our innate fun-



Surfing a big wave takes commitment and strength but is ultimately enjoyable. So it is with the ups and downs of life.

Rick Doyle/CORBIS

damental darkness and not succumb to it. To fight “the devil king” within, we need to develop our confidence in the existence of Buddhahood both in our lives and those of others. This is why the Daishonin states: “The sharp sword to cut through the fundamental darkness is faith alone” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 751).

## To Challenge Injustice Outside is to Reveal Buddhahood Inside

The “devil king” is sometimes referred to as “the devil of the sixth heaven” because he is said to dwell in the highest of the six heavens of the world of desire. In ancient Indian Buddhist cosmology, this highest heaven in the world of desire was associated with the desire to exploit others for one’s own pleasure. In this sense, the “devil king” symbolizes our tendency to view other human beings as means to gratify our own wants and wishes. When people are dehumanized and reduced to means for some end, profound suffering can result—war being one of the most hideous examples. This is why the Daishonin was relentless in speaking out against the corrupt religious authority of his day who tried to obscure the fundamentally self-empowering truth of Buddhism contained in the Lotus Sutra. The eminent priests grew concerned about the spread of the Daishonin’s teaching and induced the government to persecute him, which ultimately led to a failed attempt to execute him and then to his exile to Sado Island in 1271.

Since the “fundamental darkness” finds expression in the desire to control others for selfish gratification, those in positions of influence may be especially susceptible to the working of the “devil king.” In this regard, the



Annie Griffiths Bell/CORBIS

Sand dunes in Death Valley, California. Nichiren Daishonin teaches that one of the obstacles we must overcome to attain Buddhahood is the fear of death.

Daishonin has the metaphorical devil king say before his underlings: “Each of you now must go and harass that votary, according to your respective skills. If you should fail to make him abandon his Buddhist practice, then enter into the minds of his disciples, lay supporters, and the people of his land and thus try to persuade or threaten him. If these attempts are also unsuccessful, I myself will go down and possess the mind and body of his sovereign to persecute that votary. Together, how can we fail to prevent him from attaining Buddhahood?”

### Subservience as the Flip-Side of Arrogance

It is, however, important to note that the “fundamental darkness” can sometimes manifest itself as self-disparagement and servile obedience to external authority. On the surface, the domineering autocrat and the cowardly sycophant seem to represent opposite extremes: wanting to control and wanting to be controlled. However, both of these tendencies stem from lack of confidence and belief in the supreme potential we

hold within. People who believe they cannot change for the better - who deny their own potential—act in one of two ways. First, they may give up their power, feeling no hope of controlling their destiny and thus assigning that control to others. Second, they may become arrogant. Because they inwardly do not believe they can improve, they try to justify themselves as they are to convince themselves and others of their greatness. By trying to gain power over others, they avoid looking at their own shortcomings, which they despise. They interpret others’ deference toward them as affirming their own greatness. Actually, the creation of any tyranny or authoritarian system requires the existence of both types of people. We might say that the tendencies of those who have succumbed to their inner “devil king” are different only in the direction of manifestation—controlling or servile. What they have in common at their root is a deep insecurity and lack of confidence. Whether tyrants or obsequious subjects—both have essentially chosen their “fundamental darkness” over their “fundamentally enlightened nature.” Neither are ever truly free.

As the Daishonin allegorically alludes to in this letter, the prominent priests and government officials of his day had allowed their fundamental darkness to dominate their lives and thus exploited people while persecuting the Daishonin and his fellow practitioners. Furthermore, the majority of the people had chosen the path of spiritual subservience to these authorities. Under such circumstances, despite severe persecutions, the Daishonin ceaselessly spread his message about the universality of Buddhahood, proving himself to be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. In this regard, the Daishonin states: “[Despite the personal interference of the devil king of the sixth heaven] it is because the heavenly deities came to my aid that I survived even at Tatsunokuchi, and also emerged safely from other great persecutions. By now, the devil king must be discouraged” (GZ, 843).

## Action Vanquishes Fundamental Darkness

Through his own example, the Daishonin teaches us the importance of speaking the truth of Buddhism while challenging injustice in order to reveal our innate Buddhahood. Our lives are intrinsically endowed with both “fundamental darkness” and “fundamental enlightenment.” If we simply do nothing, we will be overcome by fundamental darkness. To reveal our fundamental nature of enlightenment, we need to reaffirm continuously the existence of Buddhahood within ourselves and others.

For purposes of clarification, we might describe this as comprising four categories of activity: The first is striving to recognize, tap and bring forth our own enlightened nature by praying earnestly and consistently to the Gohonzon. This includes always working to improve our daily practice of Gongyo and Daimoku, setting clear goals in our lives, and praying to achieve them.

The second is making efforts to help others do the same thing. This means to share the great benefit and power of the Daishonin’s Buddhism with others so that they too may accumulate good fortune and experience personal growth. It also means to support the activities of the SGI to share the humane, non-violent ideals of Buddhism with society and the world at large.

The third is looking within our lives to identify the causes of our suffering. We need to recognize the weaknesses or habits that hold us back in our daily lives and in our faith—the weaknesses that spring from our fundamental darkness—and work to gain control over them. To this end, we try to expose ourselves to good influences and learn from good examples, which may

include our efforts in study and seeking advice from those with more experience in faith and practice.

And the fourth is challenging and working to transform the fundamental darkness in others—speaking with courage and conviction to convince people not to give up their power, not to become slaves to authority, while at the same time exposing the function of the “devil king” within unjust authority. Specifically, we stand on the side of ordinary people who are trying to improve their lives through Buddhist practice and point out the errors of any person or power that aims to stifle or usurp their right to do so. This is the essence of the “Soka Spirit.”

These four kinds of activity are listed here not to imply any specific order or approach. They may overlap and any one can involve elements of the others. This example is intended to express our need to develop the positive aspects—the fundamental enlightenment—within self and other, and to challenge and overcome the negativity—the fundamental darkness—within self and other.

When we exert ourselves in these areas, we become aware of our own fundamental darkness so that we may challenge it. By doing so we manifest and solidify our innate fundamental nature of enlightenment. In this letter, the Daishonin says: “I, Nichiren, have long been aware of all this.” This is noteworthy. Because the Daishonin was keenly aware of his own fundamental darkness and its function in others, he was able to perceive the nature of persecution and overcome it. Here the Daishonin teaches us that as long as our faith in our fundamental nature of enlightenment is solid and we are vigilant against our fundamental darkness, we can transmute the workings of “the devil king” both inside and outside.

## Challenge Difficulties With Courage

In this letter, the Daishonin states: “When one resolves to break free from the sufferings of birth and death and attain Buddhahood, one will inevitably encounter seven grave matters known as the three obstacles and four devils, just as surely as a shadow follows the body and clouds accompany rain.” If we adopt the Daishonin’s perspective on life’s hardships, whatever seems to hold back our Buddhist practice and our lives in general will be transformed into an opportunity to demonstrate our supreme potential. In a different letter, “The Three and Four Devils,” the Daishonin emphasizes challenging difficulties with courage and optimism instead of succumbing to fear and despair:

“You should not have the slightest fear in your heart. It is lack of courage that prevents one from attaining Buddhahood, although one may have professed faith in

the Lotus Sutra many times since innumerable kalpas ago....Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (WND, 637).

Life’s hardships can cause despair and suffering; however, they can also be a source of hope and happiness. The Daishonin teaches that it is up to us to decide what we make of our lives and that courageous faith ultimately enables us to defeat “the three obstacles and the four devils” and realize genuine happiness.

The Daishonin’s allegorical devil king, despite all his malice and evil, knows one important truth. He knows that even one person truly awakened can reclaim the devil’s entire domain and lead many others to the same state of spiritual freedom. Recognizing this “power of one person” may be an important lesson we can learn from the “devil king.” □

By the SGI-USA Study Department

1. Also referred to by the word enlightenment. The supreme state of life in Buddhism, characterized by boundless wisdom and compas-

sion. In this state one is awakened to the eternal and ultimate truth that is the reality of all things. Buddhahood is regarded as the goal of Buddhist practice and the highest of the Ten Worlds.

2. Various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. Three obstacles are: (1) the obstacle of earthly desires; (2) the obstacle of karma, which may also refer to opposition from one’s spouse or children; and (3) the obstacle of retribution, also obstacles caused by one’s superiors, such as rulers or parents. The four devils are: (1) the hindrance of the five components; (2) the hindrance of earthly desires; (3) the hindrance of death, because untimely death obstructs one’s practice of Buddhism or because the premature death of another practitioner causes doubts; and (4) the hindrance of the devil king.

3. The king of devils, who dwells in the highest of the six heavens of the world of desire. He works to obstruct Buddhist practice and delights in sapping the life force of other beings. He is also regarded as the manifestation of the fundamental darkness inherent in life. Also called the heavenly devil.

4. One of T’ien-t’ai’s three major works. This work clarifies the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life based on the Lotus Sutra. And it elucidates the method of meditation for observing one’s mind and realizing the principle within oneself.

5. The world of unenlightened beings who transmigrate within the six paths of existence (i.e., the lower six states of the Ten Worlds, which are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity and Heaven). They are: (1) the world of desire, ruled by various desires; (2) the world of form, whose inhabitants are free from all desires, cravings, and appetites but, still having material form, are subject to certain material restrictions; and (3) the world of formlessness, where the beings are free from both desires and material restrictions.

6. Shakra: Also known as Indra. Together with Brahma, one of the two principal tutelary gods of Buddhism.



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Courtesy Seikyo 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 (2)*

### Nurturing a Dream, Living a Vow

In the United States, truancy is becoming more of a problem, as is the occurrence of violence and crime among increasingly younger children. On both sides of the Pacific, a single word of encouragement from a parent or teacher can instill hope and point out the correct direction for a child to follow. In

this second of three installments, SGI President Ikeda discusses these and other topics with SGI-USA Women's Division Leader Matilda Buck and Ed Feasel, senior advisor to the SGI-USA youth division and dean of students at the soon-to-be-open Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America.

## Unaware of Her Daughter's Problem

**IKEDA:** Today in Japan, many parents worry over the growing problem of truancy. The number of students who stop attending school is increasing. How is it in America?

**BUCK:** It's a problem. Actually, it's a problem that has affected my own family—my own daughter missed school for a time.

In the beginning, I was completely unaware of it. She never gave me any indication; she never said, "I don't want to go to school." She would get up each morning and leave the house with all her schoolbooks, as if on the way to class. One day, I got a call from the school, "Your daughter has been missing her classes for several weeks," the person said. "What?" I thought. "There must be some mistake!" My mind went blank and I missed most of what the person on the phone was saying. I hung up and tried to imagine where she could possibly be. But I couldn't think clearly. My first reaction was simply denial. I had no choice but to wait for my daughter to come home.

When she did return, she might have sensed that there was something amiss because she quickly headed straight for her room. When I stopped her and tried to talk to her, she just said, "It's my business. Leave me alone!" and shut herself in her room.

**FEASEL:** It must have been quite a shock.

**BUCK:** Yes it was. My daughter was already a senior in high school, and the next thing I was concerned with was sending her to college. But because of her attendance problem, the principal told us, "Under the present circumstances, it will be

impossible for your daughter to graduate." How could it be? I thought.

I felt hopeless. My husband and I talked to our daughter about it, but she came back with a dismissive answer, "I don't care about school any more. It doesn't matter if I graduate."

I felt my heart and stomach sink. This couldn't be happening to us. After all the effort I've put into raising her! I was miserable and blameful. First I blamed her, then I blamed myself. I must have failed her somehow.

At the end of my rope, I went to talk to a senior in faith. "Your daughter is suffering, not just misbehaving" he told me. "But you don't understand how she feels. You are simply concerned with how it makes you look. Until you truly feel her suffering, you will have a hard time changing this." Ordinarily, this should have been enough to get me to open my eyes. But instead I reacted a bit negatively, thinking, "That person doesn't know a thing about me! He doesn't know how hard I've tried."

But when I finally pulled myself together, I became determined to chant daimoku seriously about this situation. From that point on, I challenged myself to chant for five hours each day until the problem was solved.

**IKEDA:** Why did your daughter stop going to school?

**BUCK:** I spoke with her teachers and found out that although she was receiving passing grades, she wasn't really engaged in her classes. She wasn't being bullied or suffering in her relationships with friends. Apparently, some close friends who were ditching class had influenced her, and she just started tagging along. But I was sure that this was only part of the reason; I wondered what the real underlying cause could have been.

One day as I was chanting

daimoku, I had a realization. What I realized was that it had been quite some time since I had seen my daughter smile. Perhaps she had lost hope for her life. I reflected deeply on myself and my tendency to be so caught up in the matters at hand that I failed to notice this until now. I was so focused on the externals that I did not perceive what was in my daughter's heart.

From that point on, my prayer changed. Rather than chanting simply to solve the problem of my daughter missing school, I began to pray with the determination, "I want my daughter to be happy." A short time later, my daughter began attending school again.

## Nothing Is So Noble as a Mother's Love

**FEASEL:** Something must have changed in the way your daughter was feeling.

**BUCK:** Yes that is what I was thinking at the time, too. She was going to school and she was communicating. I was relieved. As a result, I may have slackened a bit in my determination. One day I decided to finish chanting daimoku earlier than usual and lay down for a while on the couch to relax a little. As soon as I did, the phone rang.

It was the high school attendance officer. "Your daughter has been absent from school for the last ten days." No! It couldn't be! I thought everything was getting better. She left every morning with her books. I began to feel very angry. I had been chanting hours and hours for her—how could this be? I felt like Shariputra who had his eye stepped on by a beggar after presenting it to him as alms.<sup>1</sup> I felt such betrayal and

disappointment. I really felt like giving up. But unlike Shariputra in the story, who abandoned his bodhisattva practice, I wasn't giving up my faith. I believed that this was a test for me. I thought, "If I give up now, what will become of my daughter?"

So I planted myself back in front of the Gohonzon and began to chant. As I did so, I started to get a clear sense of my daughter's suffering—how she did want to succeed, but lacked confidence and would sabotage any gains she made. That realization made it easier to chant for her again.

**IKEDA:** There is nothing so noble and so profound as a mother's love for her child. Avoiding school might begin with just a vague impulse on the child's part. But as each day goes by, it becomes even harder to return to school, to the point where, in some cases, he or she can't go back at all. The child suffers as much as the parents, and wants to do something about it. But at that age, young people will tend to resist if directly approached on such matters. They cannot straightforwardly express their feelings, either. It is a mother's love that can grasp her child's suffering and offer great comfort. Even if it takes time, a mother's caring will definitely reach her child. Isn't the most important thing to remain willing to trust our children?

**BUCK:** Yes, I really think that's true. Even after that, my daughter continued to miss school. But I did not give up. One day after I got home from a meeting, I heard my daughter sobbing in her room. She was saying in a tearful voice to someone on the phone, "What will I do if I can't graduate?" She seemed to be talking to a friend from school. Though she had defiantly told my husband and me that she didn't care whether she



Matilda's daughter, Amanda Railla, with her children, Griffin and Miranda Byk.

graduated from high school, this was not how she really felt. Later when I said to her, "So you're suffering over this too . . ." she didn't answer. Nevertheless, I felt that for the first time in quite a while, our hearts connected. It was from this point on that my daughter really started to change. She decided on her own to return to school. Though she had been told she couldn't graduate, she took it upon herself to negotiate with her teachers. She was told that if she could submit all of her class assignments, she would graduate.

As I watched her trying so hard to catch up, my heart went out to her. I matched her effort with my daimoku.

Her efforts bore fruit, and my daughter was able to graduate. It was the happiest moment imaginable for all of us. I believe the daimoku I chanted for her during that time is still affecting our lives today. She has

developed herself into a happy and contributing person. She is the best mother I know; she is totally in tune with the hearts of her children.

### ***The Child Possesses the Power to Progress: Education Brings Forth that Power***

**IKEDA:** She had someone who deeply cared about her, and this must have been what opened your daughter's heart. That awareness became a great support, giving her the courage to take a fresh step forward. First we must try to discern what the child is suffering from. Then, it is crucial to point out the correct direction he or she should take in life. Suppose a plane bound for Europe takes off instead in the direction of Japan. Unless it adjusts

its course, it will never arrive in Europe, but instead will wander aimlessly among the clouds. This is unhappiness. Children have the power to take off into the skies of life. We might say that the love of the parents and education serve to bring forth their power and provide it with a direction. Many young people get to the point where they don't know where to apply their energies, and suffer as a result. If that condition worsens, it can even drive them to violence and crime.

**FEASEL:** I agree. It has been reported that absentee rates for students in some cities in the United States between the first and twelfth grades are nearly ten percent. In some places it is much higher.

Because this number is so large, movements have emerged in some areas that seek to hold parents strictly responsible for their children's truancy. While each state in the U.S. has laws providing for compulsory education, some states have laws allowing imprisonment for parents of children who fail to attend school.

**IKEDA:** Imprisonment? That's quite harsh, isn't it!

**FEASEL:** Yes, it is. Of course, most of these laws were established as long as 100 years ago. Their original intent was to guard against parents keeping their children from attending school and instead making them work during the day. Today, such harsh sanctions are rarely if ever imposed. However, as the problem of truancy becomes worse, stricter punishment for parents is being considered in some areas in extreme cases.

**BUCK:** But I think that such a "solution" would cause even more suffering for both the child and the parents.

## **"Victory Over Violence"—SGI-USA Youth Aim for a Non-Violent Society**

**FEASEL:** In the United States, in addition to truancy, there is growing concern over the problem of violent crimes occurring among increasingly younger children. It seems that the atmosphere of violence already prevalent in our society is expanding even among its youngest members.

We of the SGI-USA youth division have been exerting ourselves to counter this trend. Since last year we have been promoting a dialogue aimed at creating a non-violent society. As part of our campaign called "Victory Over Violence" we have initiated a petition drive, produced videos and hosted seminars exploring the history of non-violence as exemplified and practiced by such leaders of humanity as Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Last year, we also staged a grand youth culture festival focusing in Los Angeles on the theme of non-violence. The individuals who attended the festival gave very high praise for the efforts that the youth made. For instance, Norma Foster, President of the Los Angeles Interfaith Council for the United Nations said after the performance: "I have met many of the leaders that were part of the era these young people relived for us today. Their performance really drove home the shame of that era. But the way they dealt with it helped me deal with it too. I go away with far more hope and promise for the future. There were seven hundred hearts up there, but they all stood out as individuals. That's what was so wonderful. You knew they were

going to walk away as seven hundred emissaries who are going to change the world."

**BUCK:** The women's division members of SGI-USA also strongly support these activities that promote non-violence. Recently in the news was the case of a six-year-old boy who shot and killed a girl in his first-grade class. I think this news was heard not only throughout America, but also across the globe. The fact that gun violence has spread to children this young is distressing not only to those with young children, but to many people. The high school my daughter attended was equipped with a metal detector at the entrance to prevent students from bringing guns and knives on campus. More and more schools have full-time school police officers assigned to the campus. Many are surrounded by high fences to protect students from being victimized by criminal elements in the neighborhood. For this reason, people have found the youth division's "Victory Over Violence" campaign very encouraging and have high hopes for its success.

**IKEDA:** The incident in which the six-year-old boy shot his classmate was reported widely in Japan as well. In Japan, too, knife attacks among teenagers have been an ongoing problem.

School is a place for nurturing the hopes and dreams of young people. When children are instead injured or killed there, it is an immense tragedy. Parents must face the serious problem of how to protect their children from violence. To go a step further, I think it is important that voices be raised calling for a change in society as a whole. In this sense, I believe that the "Victory Over Violence" movement that the SGI-

USA youth are promoting has a very important mission. To rescue children from the quagmire of violence and create an environment in which they can feel genuinely secure and at ease is the responsibility of adults.

**FEASEL:** When we began our campaign, it was the members of the junior high and high school divisions who showed the most interest. They are the ones who are really taking the initiative in this campaign. They have suffered from the effects of violence much more than I had imagined. They are troubled by the violence they often encounter at school.

This is why they have been so greatly encouraged by the “Victory Over Violence” campaign. I, too, experienced violence when I was in junior high school, so I can understand how they feel.

**BUCK:** Really? Could you tell us what happened?

**FEASEL:** Well, the junior high school I attended was pretty rough. The atmosphere there affected me, too, and I got into some trouble. I remember one time, when I was walking down a hallway with four of my friends, all of a sudden we were surrounded by about twenty guys. They locked the doors to the hallway and began attacking us. One of them even started hitting us with his belt. Fortunately, we were able to escape without serious injury. That was when I began to think seriously about how to change my lifestyle.

Fortunately, there was one individual who would become a great influence on my life and help me change things. That person was Mrs. Ochoa, my guidance counselor. Many schools in the United States employ guidance counselors—individuals with training in child psychology

with whom students can discuss their problems and goals and seek advice. One day, Mrs. Ochoa asked me if I would like to attend the local high school’s graduation awards ceremony. In our school district, it was common to allow a select group of junior high school students to sit in on the high school awards ceremony.

**IKEDA:** The necessity of school counselors is now becoming recognized in Japan, and many schools are moving toward implementing such a system. The practice of sending middle school students to observe high school graduations is a very interesting one. In Japan, middle school students sometimes take field trips to their local high school, but they rarely attend the graduation. At the Soka schools, however, students are as often as possible given opportunities to attend events at Soka University. I think that such an experience must be very helpful in instilling in the students a dream for their future.

**FEASEL:** I agree. Mrs. Ochoa must have been thinking deeply about how she could introduce me to a new environment—a “New World” that would have been hard for me to imagine amid my current circumstances. I was not initially included in the group that was to attend the awards ceremony. However, Mrs. Ochoa got the idea to arrange for me to participate.

At the ceremony, there was a presentation of various awards and scholarships to students of outstanding academic achievement. Among them was a young man whose name was called again and again. Thinking that he must be an excellent student, I watched him closely as he walked proudly to the stage. The emcee then introduced him, declaring, “And he will be



EDWARD CLARK

Matilda Buck, SGI-USA Women’s Leader

attending Harvard University!” At first, I couldn’t believe my ears. Most of the kids in our neighborhood were from poor families, and no one I knew seemed to be academically gifted. But here was a young man from our town going to a top school like Harvard! I was actually more shocked than impressed.

**BUCK:** This must have been an important experience for you.

**FEASEL:** It was. Mrs. Ochoa smiled happily as she watched me out of the corner of her eye. As we walked back from the ceremony, I kept thinking of that student as he stood on the stage. I looked up to thank Mrs. Ochoa, but just as I was about to do so, she slowed her pace, turned toward me and said, “Next, it’s going to be your turn.” “Work hard, and you too can definitely do it!”

**IKEDA:** A single word at the right moment can be so important. That one word can change a person's life. This must be the experience that led you to attend Yale University, which you discussed with us last time.

**FEASEL:** Yes it was. I was very moved to hear these totally unexpected words from my counselor. I did not really believe them at the time, but it made me very happy to learn of the high expectations she had for me. It was starting to get dark, but Mrs. Ochoa's gentle smile on that occasion will remain etched in my memory forever. I made up my mind to challenge myself to work hard as she had encouraged me to do. Hope began to emerge within me. Mrs. Ochoa had given me a tremendous dream. It was the first time I truly felt hopeful about my future. My lifestyle changed abruptly from that point on and I began to study hard.

## **Responding to His Counselor's Encouragement: His Dream Realized at his own Graduation**

**IKEDA:** What a wonderful counselor! How gratifying to have someone during your youth, when it is so easy to be distracted, to show you the right way ahead! One sincere word can unlock tremendous power in a person's life. On another dimension, our SGI has been working to develop, step by step, a network of encouragement. What is important is neither money nor power; it is simply our earnest intent and actions to save another person from suffering. Buddhism teaches this most noble way of life. Only honesty and

*One Sincere Word Can Unlock Tremendous Power in a Person's Life. On Another Dimension, Our SGI Has Been Working to Develop, Step By Step, a Network of Encouragement.*

sincerity can truly move people's hearts. When we speak to others and act with such sincerity, something will definitely remain with them—something that will definitely blossom and bear fruit with time.

**FEASEL:** I really don't know how my life would have gone if I hadn't met Mrs. Ochoa. She gave me lots of emotional support during my high school years as well. There was a deep bond that existed between us. When I entered high school, she was transferred to the same school. As I mentioned previously, during my high school years my family faced one period of hardship after another, which included financial difficulty and my father's illness. I don't know how many times I thought, "There's just no use." On such occasions, I would always head for Mrs. Ochoa's office. There were times when, feeling depressed and hopeless, I would be in tears as I talked with her. She would listen intently to every word and then tell me with a smile, "You

have a very important dream, don't you? You mustn't give up!"

"Yes! I do have a dream!" I would remind myself, and suddenly things would become very clear. I regained the determination I had made on that day after attending the awards ceremony, which I had lost sight of.

**BUCK:** What an encouraging story! Mrs. Ochoa was always there to support you whenever you felt like giving up.

**FEASEL:** If I look back on it now, it is clear that the SGI is playing the same kind of role in society. It has not merely been giving people a dream—it has also been giving them the courage to never be beaten even by the severest of circumstances and to never let go of their dreams. Mrs. Ochoa always watched over me, and I never gave up. I simply continued to study as hard as I could to realize my dream and to respond in some way to the great hopes and expectations she had placed in me.

Finally I found myself attending my own high school graduation awards ceremony. Just as I was vaguely thinking that this is what it must have been like for those graduating students three years earlier, I heard my name called over the loudspeaker. They were announcing the names of scholarship recipients. I was called on many times to receive commendations and certificates on the stage. It gave me an indescribable sense of satisfaction. I hadn't been informed that my name would be announced, so I was surprised; but no one was as surprised as my mother. Until that time, my mother had never been able to attend school functions such as open houses or parent-teacher conferences. However, a few days before the ceremony, she received notice from the school to "please be sure to leave that day open. There is

something we want to tell you at that time . . .” My mother worried that I was in some kind of trouble.

**BUCK:** I know exactly how she must have felt. Whether things are going well or poorly, it is always a mother’s job to worry.

**FEASEL:** That’s really true. In the meantime, my mother adjusted her work schedule to attend. Hearing her son’s name called again and again, and seeing me standing up on the stage—whether it was from happiness, surprise or relief, she seemed a little bit flustered. Afterward I learned that it was Mrs. Ochoa again who had intervened to make sure that my mother could be there.

Up on the stage, I too was overwhelmed with emotion; and just then, the emcee pointed in my direction and called out to the audience: “. . . and he will be attending Yale!”

I recalled the scene at the awards ceremony I had attended three years before. My turn had really come, just as Mrs. Ochoa had promised! She had lit a flame of hope in my heart and helped me nurture my dream. And now, at this moment, that dream was being realized.

## Victory for Educators is the Growth and Success of Their Students

**IKEDA:** A person with a dream is strong. Those with a dream will never stray. A dream is like a lamp that never loses its brightness, even amid the darkest of nights. It always enables us to look forward, to set our minds on what lies ahead.

The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson records the following anecdote about Sir Isaac

Newton, the “father of modern physics” who made such important discoveries as the principle of universal gravitation: Someone once asked Newton, “Why were you able to discover all that you did?” to which Newton plainly replied, “By always intending my mind.”<sup>2</sup>

It is human nature that, once we set our minds on something, we can tap energies and abilities we never thought we had; we can open the door to a whole new world of possibilities. To tap this great potential, we need to be directed along a correct and reliable course. Providing such direction is the first step in the process of education. Ms. Ochoa’s encouragement created the Ed Feasel we see today. Such an accomplishment in itself is the crowning victory for an educator. To grasp the hearts and minds of one’s students and offer encouragement along with a concrete goal and direction will inspire those students’ power and ability beyond calculation.

**BUCK:** That is the spirit of Soka Education that first Soka Gakkai President Makiguchi taught, isn’t it?

**IKEDA:** Exactly. Mr. Makiguchi had held the post of principal at a number of elementary schools and for a period was assigned to a school in one of Tokyo’s poorest districts. For those children whose families were too poor to let them attend school regularly, Mr. Makiguchi quietly arranged to provide them with meals and other support. Also, he would make the time to visit with the family of each child, one by one, and work tenaciously to uplift that child’s spirits.

Even amid the worst of circumstances, he would put forth his best effort for the children, determined that they become happy. President Toda frequently shared with me



Ed Feasel, SGI-USA Youth Division Senior Advisor.

details of Mr. Makiguchi’s efforts in those days. Following Mr. Makiguchi’s lead, Mr. Toda even had himself transferred to one of the worst schools so that he could be with Mr. Makiguchi and assist him in his work. The struggles of these two bore fruit, and an elementary school that had been doing very poorly achieved a rebirth before everyone’s eyes. Mr. Makiguchi thus honed and perfected the principles of Soka Education by putting them into practice himself. He certainly had the ability and opportunity to establish himself as a scholar in his field. However, he rather chose not to remove himself from the elementary-school environment, which he considered to be the front lines of education. This speaks of how great an educator he really was. Mr. Makiguchi writes, “We must not allow the miseries of this age, in which ten million children agonize amid a cruel and heartless society, to pass to the next generation” (*Soka kyoikugaku taikai*) These words

express the true soul of an educator.

**FEASEL:** It is of great concern that while the United States boasts the highest standard for university education in the world, its primary through high school education is plagued with many unresolved problems that need to be addressed. For this reason, Mr. Makiguchi's struggle to enrich elementary education and create a pioneering example of Soka Education is extremely significant.

## **The Founding of Soka University: The Fulfillment of a Pledge Between Mentor and Disciple**

**IKEDA:** I have heard that the English version of Mr. Makiguchi's book on value-creating education, *Education for Creative Living*, is attracting much interest. I can only think that this is because people sense in Mr. Makiguchi's view, that everything must begin with children's happiness, a solution to many of the problems facing today's schools. How can we instill a dream and ignite a flame of hope in the hearts of children, who are the treasures of the future? A dream is not just something that makes clear what lies immediately ahead. It becomes nourishment for living, a guidepost by which to live one's entire life. The other day [Feb. 28, 2000], I posed for a commemorative photo with graduating students from Kansai Soka Schools. There I had a discussion with the students, and they really asked lots of questions. Among them, one girl asked very seriously, "What is your dream, President Ikeda?"

"My dream," I answered her, "is to realize every one of President Toda's dreams." And, "Beyond that, my

greatest dream is for each of you to become excellent scholars and excellent leaders, in every respect." The driving force in my life has been the dreams of my mentor, and my pledge as his disciple. For ten years, I studied under and received excellent training from President Toda. That experience determined the course of my entire life. Every occasion of guidance and instruction I received from him is indelibly etched in my life. I have decided that it is my mission in life to limitlessly spread and expand upon my mentor's every word, and to bring each to fruition. There is nothing more for me than this.

**BUCK:** And you have done exactly that.

**IKEDA:** Even Soka University has its origins in a single statement President Toda once shared with me: "Daisaku, I want to build Soka University. I hope it can be completed while I am still alive and well, but that is probably impossible. When the time comes, I'm going to leave it to you, Daisaku. Why not make it the greatest university in the world?"

President Toda's ideas were also the ideas of his mentor, Mr. Makiguchi, with whom he shared a relation of oneness as a disciple. Mr. Makiguchi often would say to him, "I'm counting on you to build a Soka University!" That is why I have continued to work to fulfill that dream, and why, sensing how President Toda would have wanted it, I founded Soka University in 1971, the year marking the 100th anniversary of President Makiguchi's birth. The opening ceremony was held that year on April 2, the anniversary of President Toda's passing. On New Year's Day of this year, which marks the centennial of President Toda's birth, I headed directly for the new administration building of Soka

*My Greatest Dream is for Each of You to Become Excellent Scholars and Excellent Leaders, in Every Respect.*

University where, thinking deeply about the future, I made a vow to redouble my efforts for the sake of education. Next year, the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America will be opened. I hope to ensure that from this campus there will emerge a stream of individuals who are willing and able to wage a persistent struggle for world peace and for the people's happiness.

To that end, I will continue to be active. I will do this so that I may realize the vision of President Makiguchi and fulfill the vow I made to President Toda.

To be continued

1. The story of Shariputra and the Brahman begging for his eye appears in Nagarjuna's *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Jpn Daichido ron). According to the story, in a previous existence in the distant past, Shariputra had already striven in bodhisattva practice over many lifetimes (for 60 aeons). Then, when Shariputra was practicing almsgiving, he met a Brahman who begged for his eye. In response, Shariputra gouged out his eye and offered it to the Brahman as alms. Instead of thanking Shariputra, however, the Brahman sniffed at the eye and complained about its foul smell. He then threw the eye to the ground and stomped on it. When Shariputra saw this he was deeply discouraged and discontinued his bodhisattva practice.

2. "Conduct of Life: Power," in *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2 vols. (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., 1929) vol. I, p. 542.

*The SGI has been an NGO—Non-Governmental Organization of the U.N.—since 1983.  
So what is an NGO and what are its roots?*

# MAKING PEACE:

## *International Civility and the Question of Culture*

By Virginia Straus

### **Some Thoughts on NGOs and the SGI by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda**

#### **Excerpts from his annual peace proposals**

President Ikeda has been issuing an annual peace proposal on January 26, SGI Day, since 1983 when the SGI became a nongovernmental organization of the United Nations.

#### **1984**

I propose that the United Nations adopt a Universal Declaration Renouncing War. Consensus among nations on such a declaration would be an important breakthrough in actualizing eternal peace. Lest I be criticized for over-optimistically believing the goal can be attained at once, I further propose that, as a first step, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) begin the process by building up a foundation for the ultimate adoption of a Universal Declaration Renouncing War in the United Nations. Discussions

*Ms. Straus is the executive director of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. Before joining the BRC, she served as an urban policy aide in the Carter White House and directed the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research in Boston.*

### **The Concept of Civil Society**

Civility derives from the Latin word *civitas*, meaning “city.” The term arose when people moved from agrarian to city life and needed to develop workable strategies to communicate across barriers of language and custom. Civility, therefore, was a set of behaviors that allowed a community of strangers to live together peaceably.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it gradually took on a narrower meaning, delineating only that part of a democratic society separate from the state. In Europe, as state governments began to assume greater responsibility for military, legal, administrative, and other functions, the pluralistic realm of society that was governed by the state, but operated independently from it, was dubbed civil society. Its partially autonomous spheres include the

economy, religion, culture, intellectual life, and politics.

While touring America during the nineteenth

century, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville observed vibrant civic associations beyond the control of state institutions that kept the popularly elected government from becoming oppressive. Such networks helped maintain democratic equality and prevent tyranny of the minority by the majority.<sup>1</sup>

In civic associations, citizens could experience the satisfaction of cooperation with fellow citizens, and see that they are not independent from their fellows.<sup>2</sup> Because of this spirit, America has been presented in political theory as a model of civil society.

Interestingly, in Communist central and eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, nonviolent revolutions led by political dissidents were fueled by civic associations created initially to provide a refuge from state power. As democracies were



Virginia Straus

between states tend to give priority to strategy and considerations of gain and loss, and this precludes consideration of the basic revulsion against war shared by people at the grass-roots level everywhere. Because of their nonpolitical nature, NGOs more accurately reflect the concerns of the ordinary people.

## 1987

The existence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among which the SGI is numbered, is symbolic of the upsurge of worldwide “people power.” At present about 10,000 NGOs worldwide are said to be working on such issues as the environment, human rights and arms reduction. All of them are powerfully inspired by the ideal of furthering the peace, well-being and security of humanity. Approximately 800 of these NGOs participate officially, though in a limited way, in the work of the United Nations. These groups have introduced the voices of the ordinary people into that body’s proceedings. Increased civic influences as a consequence of more extensive participation from such NGOs should renew and revitalize the United Nations. Furthermore, intensifying mutual exchanges among private groups can be expected to cultivate a solidarity transcending national boundaries.

At present, the authority of such NGOs in the United Nations is minute. Furthermore, there is no well-ordered controlling organization to establish solidarity among them. These factors, plus the tendency that NGOs are developing mostly in advanced nations, create numerous difficulties. But there is no reason to



When people moved from agrarian to city life, they needed standards of behavior that allowed them to communicate across barriers of language and customs. Above, a meeting of the Grangers, part of the Farmers Movement in the West.

established, the dissidents—now holding political office—defined their first task as one of expanding these emergent civil societies as guarantors against state tyranny. Thus, they went about rebuilding such networks as the unions, churches, political parties, cooperatives, neighborhoods, and the various brands of civic associations so admired by Tocqueville for their ability to sustain a continual “democratic revolution.”

## Civility within a Civil Society

Edward Shils says civility and civil society both postulate a minimal dignity for all citizens.<sup>3</sup> Civility means regarding others as members of the same inclusive collectivity and respecting them as such. Even one’s enemies must be included in this same moral universe. In addition, civility describes the conduct of a person who has a concern for the good of

the whole society, a person “whose individual self-consciousness has been partly superseded by his or her collective self-consciousness.”

Key features of civility, he says, involve two capacities:

1. The capacity to regard one’s fellow citizens with goodwill and accord them dignified treatment and the capacity, when necessary, to give precedence to the common good over individual self-interest; and

2. An attachment and willingness to participate in the institutions of a civil society, and even hold affection for them, since they embody and sustain the civility of the whole society.

Another writer on this subject, Adam Seligman, also sees civil society as a crucial arena, ethically, where a balancing of private interest and public responsibility can occur.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, these two writers point to a kind of social solidarity in civility, interdependent with the state, serving to cultivate respect, regard, and participation in the institutions of the state, especially as these institu-

think that international popular opinion can be easily united. Such an undertaking demands the perseverance and patience that “faith can move mountains.”

## 1989

Needless to say, the construction of a new U.N.-centered world order is not possible without popular support, and that is exactly where the NGOs come into the picture. They must pool their resources to influence world opinion. To that end, I would like to propose the holding of an NGO Peace Summit as one means of focusing popular wisdom and energy on the question of how to build such an order. In addition to NGO representatives, the proposed conference ought to include peace researchers and activists. The SGI is prepared to extend its full cooperation while remaining in close consultation with the other NGOs of the world, toward the realization of such a meeting.

## 1992

This year is likely to be an extremely important turning point in our attempts to solve our global environmental problems. In June, the heads of state from many countries and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will meet in Rio de Janeiro under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), the so-called “Earth Summit.” Although I share with others a hope that the results will be positive, the outlook leaves little room for optimism.

Another prominent problem of

tions are led by individuals exhibiting civility in good measure themselves.

Sometimes, civility connotes a certain hypocrisy, the outward show of good manners that acts as a smokescreen for self-interested behavior. In *The Nation*, Benjamin DeMott describes the “leader class” as basically motivated by power and profit, but busily criticizing ordi-

nary citizens for the decline in the civility of their behavior. DeMott regards the widespread “incivility” among the ordinary masses of people as a justified cynicism toward a morally bankrupt leader class that has no true regard for democratic values.<sup>5</sup>

Neither this kind of insincere civility appropriated by an amoral leader class, nor the kind defined in the *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary* as a bare minimum of courtesy, as implied in the phrase, “keep a ‘civil’ tongue,” is at issue here.

## International Civility and the State System

**O**n an international level, there are two social orders: the state system and a far-flung non-governmental sector. First, let’s look at the state system. Nation-states are jealous of their sovereignty and compete with one another. Hard-power politics, the prevailing mode of interaction, reflects the workings of realpolitik under the dominant “Westphalian Model” of international relations, which traces its origin to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

This treaty established a system of



Steve Royner/CORBIS

The former president of Poland and leader of the Solidarity Trade Union, Lech Walesa. In Communist central and eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, nonviolent revolutions led by political dissidents were fueled by civic associations

sovereign states asserting total independence from one another. There is not much room for civility here or such “soft” sentiments as goodwill or neighborliness. This Westphalian order also bears no resemblance to the single moral universe into which civility draws even one’s enemies. Instead, it is informed by moral skepticism. With the nation-state as the basic unit of international society and sole standard for measuring international conduct, this agreement permits, in fact encourages, a state to see its primary responsibility as pursuing its national interest. Moral principles take a distant second place.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, the society of nation-states is not much of a society at all. It is a disorganized association of governments that alternately compete for political and economic power and cooperate for mutual benefit. Various regional and international institutions have grown up around their cooperative efforts, from NATO in the military realm to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in the economic, from ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to the Big Seven. The workings of these insti-



Joseph Sohm: ChromeSohm/CORBIS

Sometimes, civility connotes a certain hypocrisy, the outward show of good manners that acts as a smokescreen for self-interested behavior. In *The Nation*, Benjamin DeMott describes the “leader class” as basically motivated by power and profit, but busily criticizing ordinary citizens for the decline in the civility of their behavior. Above, a National Guardsman stands in front of a burnt building after riots broke out in Los Angeles, April 1992.

the nineties is the plight of refugees, whose number has already swelled to some seventeen million people. In addition to ordinary refugees, who leave their homelands and flee to nearby countries to escape the ravages of war, we are also seeing a sharp increase in the number of people pouring into industrialized countries to escape poverty, as well as victims of ethnic strife, who wander homeless within the confines of their own countries. As an NGO of the United Nations, the SGI recognizes the seriousness of this international problem, and has earnestly undertaken refugee aid activities.

## 1995

If we maintain our faith in the future of humankind and consciously work to close the gap between North and South, I am confident that we will find our way to a brighter future. In this effort, I believe the resources and contributions of the nongovernmental

tutions reflect the uneven distribution of power, resources, and military strength among the participating nations, as well as shifting alliances between them.

## **The United Nations: A Singular Hope**

The one international body with a moral foundation that includes all nation-states is the United Nations and its agencies. Founded in a rare instance of international unity after WW II, the U.N. is based on a profound revulsion against war and a commitment to peace. There are traces of the birth of a true international civility here. The U.N.’s agenda reflects an ethical vision of a world at peace—giving precedence to human rights, disarmament, the elimination of poverty, human development, and, more recently, environmental protection.

In practice, the U.N.’s effectiveness in pursuing these goals has been limited by the reluctance of nation-states to cede any degree of their

sovereignty to the U.N. by giving it the necessary powers of enforcement, and hampered by an undemocratic structure. In crucial matters, the five countries that are permanent members of the Security Council have greater authority than the General Assembly of all nations.

Therefore, the one institution with the potential for putting the good of the whole world over individual state interests and for establishing a minimal degree of neighborliness within the world community is prevented from doing so.

Today this singular hope is floundering in the face of mounting evidence that the global problems the U.N. is expected to address are worsening daily and vastly exceed the reach of its limited powers. The problems the U.N. must address include: increasing incidence of ethnic violence, rising levels of poverty as income gaps between and within nations widen, and the dangerous deterioration of ecological systems throughout the world.

Other fundamental behaviors that militate against civility are:

1. When force is used to resolve disputes. The U.N. Charter actually outlaws the use of military force except for self-defense. During the Cold War, the provision for states to establish a collective security system to multilaterally enforce this prohibition did not gain support, for obvious reasons. The end of the Cold War, however, opens the door to revisit this question, but this is unlikely to happen if the Westphalian model of international relations prevails.

2. An almost complete absence of the rule of law at the international level. Instead, an uneven hodgepodge of treaties on various issues of mutual concern dot the interstate landscape.

organizations (NGOs) will be in greater demand than ever. These organizations are creating an international civil society on a global scale by working in fields that transcend national boundaries and ethnic groups, such as human rights, humanitarian aid, and peace education.

## 1996

Inspired by a sense of responsibility for the future, the SGI has sponsored many events over the years. As a non-governmental organization (NGO) with official ties to the United Nations, we have held various exhibitions designed to raise awareness of global problems (including “Nuclear Weapons: Threat to Our World,” “War and Peace,” and “Environment and Development”); we have supported the UN human rights education campaign with another series of exhibitions (including “Toward a Century of Humanity: An Overview of Human Rights in Today’s World,” “What Are the Human Rights of Children?” and an exhibition on the Holocaust entitled, “The Courage to Remember”); and we have pursued various humanitarian activities throughout the world to support the efforts of the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

SGI’s efforts are not limited to U.N.-centered endeavors for peace. We are also active in the spheres of culture and education as we strive to realize what we consider to be the social mission of religion.

Our aim is to pursue humanism, to practice religion in the service of people, and to take resolute action to overcome the difficult problems now confronting humankind.

## International Civility beyond the State System

Does hope lie with the civic associations commonly known as international non-governmental organizations—NGOs—the primary actors in the second realm of social order at the international level? Since many of these NGOs object to a term that defines them in the negative sense, by reference to what they are not, I will use the preferred term, civil society organizations, or CSOs.

Peace scholar Elise Boulding has called the emergence of international CSOs one of the most important developments of the twentieth century. In 1909, there were only 176 international CSOs.<sup>7</sup> Today there are more than thirty thousand. They have come into existence because of a shared concern for human well-being across national boundaries.

The character and scope of these people’s associations is extremely varied. They pursue a wide variety of goals in all the fields in which the U.N. is active—from disarmament to human rights, to sustainable development, and even peacekeeping. They are much more willing than states to work with the U.N. on the U.N.’s global agenda, and they want to make the U.N. more effective. Compared to the U.N., these organizations have greater flexibility, better access to on-the-ground networks in various regions of the world, and a continuity of interest that political structures, with shifting leadership, lack.<sup>8</sup> Today, international CSOs serve as a training ground for global citizenship in much the same way as did the civic associations Tocqueville admired in

the nineteenth century.

As the problems pressing on the world for its undivided attention have increased, this people’s movement has steadily gained adherents and now presents a strong challenge to the prevailing Westphalian order of the nation-state system. The shared ethical concerns of CSO members are strong motivating and unifying forces. By definition, CSOs possess the capability to put world public interest over national interests—a key ingredient of civility which sovereign states lack. But they sometimes display their own sovereignty concerns by focusing so exclusively on their particular missions that they miss opportunities to collaborate and to strengthen the standing of the overall movement.

## A Key Breakthrough: The Human Rights Declaration



The United Nations Building, New York.

Lawrence Manning/CORBIS

## 1998

For many years, there has been agreement that the human rights agenda must move beyond standard setting; true implementation must begin. Needless to say, the path to universal implementation of human rights standards is strewn with difficulties. As one possible means of overcoming these obstacles, I would propose a network of human rights agencies, present in each national setting yet with a status independent of the national government, charged with implementing the human rights agreements which that state has signed.

The work of these agencies would include compiling reports on national efforts to implement international human rights treaties, fostering public awareness of human rights, and working to secure redress in specific cases. The essence of this plan is to create a new framework of transnational cooperation, involving national human rights agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and competent U.N. bodies, in order to make existing human rights agreements most effective.

## 2000

The members of the SGI worldwide are actively engaged in the work of fostering a culture of peace. For example, in 1999, the youth membership of SGI-USA launched a "Victory Over Violence" campaign to help young people uncover and counteract the root causes of violence in their lives. It encourages young people to respect their own lives, respect all life and inspire hope in others.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, SGI representatives



Beitman/CORBIS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 through the efforts of a committee led by Eleanor Roosevelt.

Ironically, a key move on which the rapid growth of this movement was based came from the states shortly after the founding of the United Nations. CSOs active on human rights issues prior to the U.N.'s founding were disappointed to see no mention of human rights in the U.N. Charter. This omission occurred in spite of the fact that public support for the war effort had been generated in large part by an idealistic vision of "establishing the supremacy of human rights everywhere," a phrase used by United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt and echoed by other national leaders.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, eventually adopted in 1948 through the efforts of a committee led by Eleanor Roosevelt, stands as

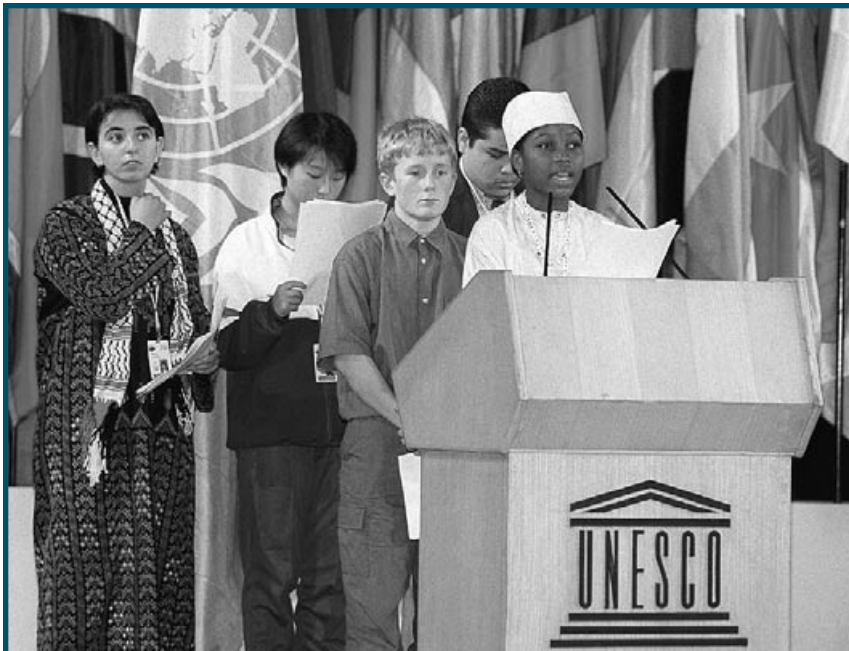
the greatest legal challenge to every aspect of the Westphalian system.

As human rights specialist Winston Langley has pointed out, the Treaty of Westphalia in effect "defined states as subjects, and vested them with all rights and responsibilities under international law. Individuals, on the other hand, were objects—objects like ships, mud-islands, and boundaries—to which international law applied and had effects." The Human Rights Declaration, by contrast, defined the individual, not the state, as the basic unit of the international community. From this perspective, the Human Rights Declaration becomes a kind of foot in the door for international civility by giving the individual human being standing in the international arena.<sup>9</sup>

## U.N. Conferences: Gathering Momentum

The movement of people's associations has gathered strength from opportunities created by the U.N. itself. In addition to governmental forums, a series of international conferences in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, allowed CSO forums to be staged. CSOs became particularly active during the 1990s, developing their own agendas for action and pushing states to make concrete commitments.

Many CSO leaders got themselves appointed to the state delegations that attended the governmental forums and worked as intermediaries between the CSO forums and the official conferees. In this way, these people's associations proved to be adept at influencing state policies and also learned to network together and share information for the sake of common interests, rising above the specialized



The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) initiated the Culture of Peace Program as a peace-building effort in war-torn countries. The U.N. decided to expand it by establishing the year 2000 as the "International Year for the Culture of Peace." Above, presenting a Children Manifesto at a UNESCO conference.

participated in the NGO (non-governmental organization) conferences held at The Hague in May and in Seoul in October [of last year], on both occasions organizing symposiums to explore various aspects of the culture of peace. The SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) held a series of conferences and consultations on this theme in the first part of 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Linking all of these dialogues was the question of how the deeply ingrained and culturally reinforced psychology of confrontation and hatred can be transformed into an even more robust psychology of peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

1. "Victory Over Violence Peace Pledge,"  
2. Newsletter No. 13, Spring/Summer 1999, <http://www.brc21.org/n13a3.html>, January 7, 2000.

interests that any one of them might have previously held paramount.

Women's groups proved to be particularly effective in this arena, uniting CSOs and working across their sovereignty lines on common issues. They have shown how civil society groups can unite in common cause across a number of related issues. The late Bella Abzug was a leading figure in these activities, through the worldwide association she founded, Women's Environment and Development Organization.

As social solidarity was built among the CSOs, what Elise Boulding calls "women's culture" has begun to create a new kind of politics. According to Boulding, the women leading international CSOs generally see patriarchy and militarism as closely linked. As they begin to participate in international

affairs, the patriarchal order erodes because they refuse to maintain it.

In addition, in the collaborative participatory processes they set in motion through their customary modes of relating to others, they also begin to replace power politics with a politics of mutual aid, a type of human relations fundamentally based on goodwill toward one's fellow citizens.<sup>10</sup> The U.N. has found that CSOs can expand their effectiveness in the field in dealing with humanitarian emergencies, sustainable development, and peace building.

## A Challenge to the State System

Another historic development that occurred in large measure because of the intensive lobbying of CSOs is the creation of an International Criminal Court. This breakthrough reflects a change in international ethics, a new conviction that crimes against humanity cannot go unpunished. The establishment of the Court works with the Human Rights Declaration to further establish the primacy of the human being and human morality in the international order. Giving CSOs standing to bring complaints to the International Court, in effect recognizes them as agents for the protection and advancement of the common interests of humanity and as a civilizing influence.

In addition, CSOs are exploring the possibility of establishing a CSO voice at the U.N., exercising the kind of policy influence they did at the series of world conferences.

There are many who, with Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of the Boston Research Center, believe that a Civil Society Forum at the U.N. is the way to finally make the funda-



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Spain sought to bring Chile's Augusto Pinochet to trial in its national court for crimes against Chilean residents even as Pinochet continued to serve in a legislative body of his own country.

mental democratic reforms in that body which the states will not make on their own. In his words, "My basic concept is that the United Nations will be properly reformed only when it succeeds in hearing and empowering the voice of the common people."<sup>11</sup>

This people's movement has staying power and the qualities of global citizenship which embody the essential qualities of international civility: they put the common good of humanity above parochial interests and they uphold a standard of human dignity and humane behavior in the international order.

## Into the Next Century

If not from CSOs, the other alternative would be that civility emerges from the community of nation-states themselves. According to Edward Shils, one of the characteristics of a civil citizen is support for, and even love for, the institutions of a civil society.

Unfortunately, the United States is showing the opposite inclination. It is the chief scofflaw on U.N. dues, setting an example of non-support to all the other nations of the world.

In addition, its national policy statements fly in the face of the U.N. Charter in regard to the use of force in international relations. These statements reserve the right to use military force to protect national interests in any part of the world, while the U.N. Charter clearly states that military force should be used by nations only in self-defense.<sup>12</sup>

Far from exerting a leadership role, the US frequently takes obstructive action against international treaties that are clearly in the collective interest of all nations, but compromise its own wealth and power in some way. Its recent bid to be the only nation exempted from the workings of the statute of the new International Criminal Court is just another example of its attitude of incivility.

To some, it may seem absurd to apply these standards of civility in the present world order. Yet such standards ought to be applicable in a changed world order. In fact, some nation-states are standing up on their own to meet this challenge, in spite of United States leadership in the opposite direction. For example, Spain sought to bring Chile's [former military leader and president] Pinochet to trial in its national court for crimes against Chilean residents even as Pinochet continued to serve in a legislative body of his own country. This is the first time a state has sought to assert human rights in its own courts for its citizens as well as for citizens not its own against a foreign political leader, holding him criminally accountable for human rights violations that occurred during his rule.

However, because of the prevailing Westphalian model, it is unlikely that other states will rush to follow Spain's example. In fact the obverse is true. Many sought to discourage Spain from its stated goal.

## Next Steps: Broader Ethical Movements With Religious Support

The world needs a better-organized international civil society that can more effectively challenge the disordered state system. This is starting to occur through a strengthening of the shared ethical foundations of the CSO movement. What threatens to divide CSOs, however, is interest lines. CSOs specializing in sustainable development and environmental protection work together on their interests. On a somewhat separate track, human rights groups work on theirs.

Only recently have some human rights organizations in the West considered expanding their scope to include economic and social rights. In another field, disarmament groups are working together in a broad-based movement, Abolition 2000, to eliminate nuclear weapons and develop an even more far-reaching strategy for abolishing war.

A more integrated ethical vision is developing through an alliance between CSOs and broader cultural resources, most particularly religions. In my view, religions are taking on a role here, seeking in part to atone for past involvement in fomenting war, but also to express the spiritual yearnings of their adherents for world peace.

A brief history is in order. German theologian Hans Kung, working with a group of religious scholars, developed a shared ethical statement for the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1993. This statement sought to build on versions of the golden rule found in almost every world religion to create a larger spiritual vision for a peaceful

world. Unable to reach a consensus on exact language, the Parliament nevertheless agreed to give its approval to this document as a stimulus to further public dialogue and named it “Toward a Global Ethic.”

In another move, the Interaction Council, a CSO founded by former Prime Minister of Japan Takeo Fukuda, submitted to the General Assembly a draft Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities to complement the Human Rights Declaration. Hans Kung has also been involved in this initiative. The focus on duties reflects the greater influence in the international order now enjoyed by those religious and cultural traditions, especially Eastern ones, that give weightier emphasis to responsibilities than do the rights-minded traditions of the West.

The “emerging alliance of religion and ecology,” an unprecedented series of conferences and published volumes, has recently been undertaken by Bucknell University professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at Harvard’s Center for the Study of World Religions. At the project’s culminating U.N. conference, Maurice Strong, senior adviser to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, took into account these and similar religiously motivated international initiatives when he observed, “I do not believe that our civilization will in fact make it through the next century unless . . . our economic and security and political life is driven by, motivated by, and in the service of our highest moral and spiritual instincts and values.”<sup>13</sup>

Today, various ethical strands are being gathered together in a new worldwide social movement launched by the Earth Council and the Earth Charter Commission, of which Maurice Strong and Mikhail Gorbachev are co-chairs, working with Steven Rockefeller, a religion professor

at Middlebury College. The Earth Charter seeks not just to elaborate a new set of ethical principles to guide human-earth relations but also, more broadly, to serve as a people’s treaty, to provide an integrated vision of the ecological, economic, and social values needed to address the full range of interrelated problems facing humanity.

This Charter challenges the anthropomorphism that has permitted so much destruction of the world’s ecosystems. For the first time, the Earth Charter would expand the human community’s moral universe to include nonhuman living beings. The religion and ecology project and the Earth Charter are harbingers of hope, promising to draw in new cultural resources and grassroots participation to support the objectives of the CSO movement.

Richard Falk, a scholar of international law, in commenting on the religious dimension of these global movements, has observed that “time partially displaces space as the essence of what the experience of global citizenship means; citizenship thereby becomes an essentially religious and normative undertaking, based on faith in a world to come—not in heaven, but on earth—guided by convictions, beliefs, and values.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Question of Culture

These broader global movements indicate that a larger and deeper process than simply the further growth of international civil society is going on here. Peace scholars are beginning to speak in terms of an evolving culture of peace, replacing the dominant culture of violence and war. Or rather, to avoid hegemonic constructions, this evolutionary process

might be better conceived as the emergence of numerous cultures of peace. These cultures are enabled to harmonize rather than clash with each other, because a shared ethical and spiritual vision is developing through respectful dialogue.

This is why, at this stage, the U.N. and UNESCO are beginning to seek broader support for a humane, even spiritual, vision through something called the Culture of Peace Program. UNESCO initiated this program as a peace-building effort in war-torn countries. The U.N. decided to expand it by establishing the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

In addition, peace scholars, who have been working with UNESCO on its culture of peace program, have begun to write and think about peace in terms of culture. Their conviction is that war itself is a cultural invention. Therefore, it can be replaced by another set of cultural inventions that will make it possible for humans to live in dynamic peace with other humans and the earth.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, UNESCO sees the goal of its culture of peace program as non-violent relations not only between states but also between states and their citizens and between human beings and their environment.<sup>16</sup>

This concept of cultures of peace is extremely promising. As a way to think about peace, it has several advantages over the concept of international civility. By progressing from a political idea to a cultural one, we leave behind some cumbersome baggage. For instance, there’s a more inclusive sense to the notion of a culture of peace. Everyone’s participation is needed, not just that significant and growing vanguard of international CSOs. Further, this conception of peace cultures does



Promoted by the youth of the Soka Gakkai, the "Voice-Aid" campaign shipped more than 280,000 used radios to educate people on the reconstruction efforts of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia.

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not have the historical connection to city life that the idea of civility does. Therefore, it has a more personal, familial ring to it. The term culture holds out the prospect of balancing and integrating modern lifestyles with the lifeways of indigenous, pre-industrial, and agrarian societies, implying a recovery of intimacy with the earth. The cultural approach even seems to strike a better balance between the feminine and masculine, since women have historically participated much more fully in the shaping of cultures than they have in the shaping of the public space of city life.

The root word from which culture derives is *cult*, which at least linguistically brings religion back into the picture of peacemaking. The inclusion of religion raises possibilities for drawing on a deeper well of inspirational feeling than mere civility offers. Culture is also tied more closely to education, as its chief means of transmission. Civility, on the other hand, implies training—a learning that is not as deeply rooted and fundamental as education.

## Making Peace

Lifelong peace activist and poet Denise Levertov served as poetry editor of *The Nation* magazine. Her poem "Making Peace" suits our topic well. Peace researchers have pointed out that though "war" can be used as a verb, "peace" cannot.<sup>17</sup> When she refers to poets, she is addressing all of us. All of our imaginative potential and goodwill is needed to accomplish the cultural change involved in peace-making.

*A voice from the dark called out,  
"The poets must give us  
imagination of peace, to oust the  
intense, familiar  
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only  
the absence of war." . . .*

*A feeling towards it,  
dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have  
until we begin to utter its metaphors,  
learning them as we speak.*

*A line of peace might appear if we  
restructured the  
sentence our lives are making,  
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and  
power,  
questioned our needs, allowed  
long pauses. . . .<sup>18</sup>*

It is for all of us to become "a voice from the dark," for all of us to carry out the work that derives from imagining peace. □

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# DIALOGUE

## ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

50

**Those Who Devote Themselves to Kosen-rufu Receive the “Benefit of Protection”**

This is the fiftieth 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 March 1999 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

Those who embrace the Lotus Sutra are most respectable. The benefit gained by making offerings to and protecting the sutra’s practitioners is the same as that gained by making offerings to all Buddhas. And the offense of persecuting and slandering them is the same as

that of persecuting and slandering all Buddhas. The “Dharani” (twenty-sixth) chapter explains the “pledge” of the Buddhist gods to courageously protect those who carry out the practice of kosen-rufu.

In this installment, the participants examine what it means to work for kosen-rufu with single-minded determination through a discussion of the vast benefit of chanting daimoku, the solid bond of mentor and disciple connecting the successive Soka Gakkai presidents, the meaning of *dharani*, and the sound of the Mystic Law resonating throughout the universe.

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** In July 1960, an outdoor training session was held for the Suiko-kai<sup>1</sup> at Inubozaki, a cape with a well-known lighthouse in Chiba Prefecture. I hoped that participants in this event would themselves serve as lighthouses to illuminate the lives of all people. That was a little more than two years after President Toda's death. I had just succeeded him as third Soka Gakkai president [in May 1960]. Most of the leadership of the organization was young.

I wanted Mr. Toda's spirit to be carried on eternally by generations to come. Not knowing how long my health would hold up, I hoped to pass on his spirit to these youthful successors.

At night, we built a fire. The youth gathered in a circle around the crimson flames. We could have used flashlights instead, but I deliberately had them make a bonfire because I wanted to teach them that life is like a bonfire; that we ourselves need to burn bright so as to illuminate those around us. When the flame of faith is burning in the lives of leaders, all members can advance with peace of mind toward the same light. The day when people throughout Japan, throughout the world, will gather together in pursuit

of justice with a sense of hope is definitely near.

I wanted those young people to know that as long as the bonfire of their lives continues to burn, as long as the flame of the Soka Gakkai spirit continues to blaze, kosen-rufu can be accomplished without fail. Among the people there, some lived true to their pledge to uphold these words, while others betrayed it.

I now wish to call out again: "Let your faith burn brightly! For only then is Buddhism truly alive." Bud-

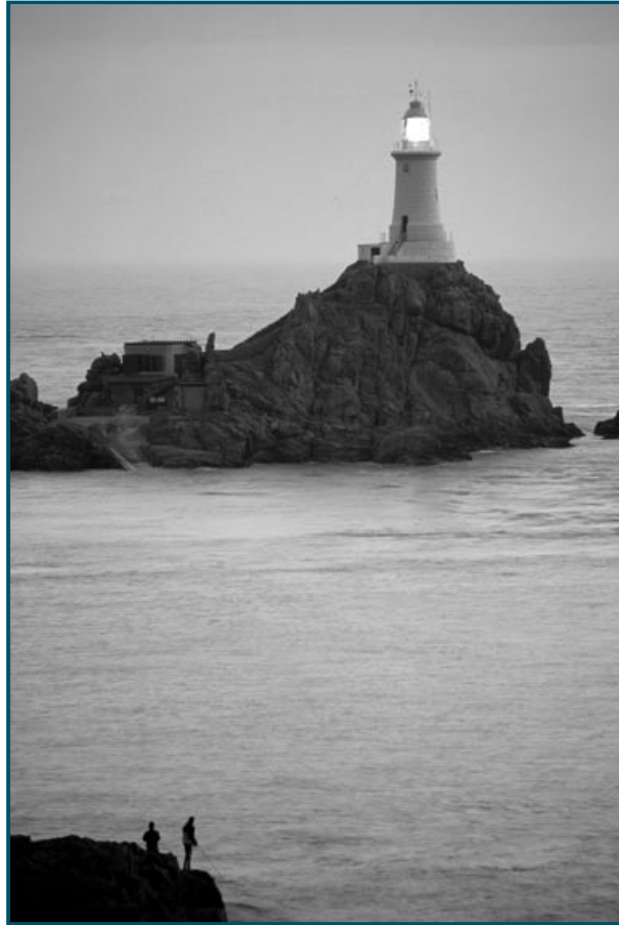
dhism comes down to the human being; it is faith. It is not to be sought anywhere else. As long as the flame of faith burns in the SGI, the sacred enterprise of kosen-rufu to lead all people to happiness will continue to advance. How precious is the SGI! Let us dedicate our lives to protecting this wonderful organization! Should this flame go out, the future of humankind will be plunged into darkness. We need also to be aware that

all manner of obstacles will, as a matter of course, threaten to extinguish this flame like a strong gale. But the Daishonin says, "A strong wind makes a kalakula grow larger" (WND, 471).<sup>2</sup> Kalakulas are mythical insects that are said to swell in the wind, using its force to grow larger. In this way, we, too, must move forward, causing the flame of faith to burn all the more powerfully, the greater the obstacles we face. Wind will extinguish a small flame, but it will cause a large flame to burn with even greater intensity. Kosen-rufu is an eternal struggle. It is a great battle between good and evil, between the Buddha and all kinds of opposing negative forces.

In the "Dharani" (twenty-sixth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, bodhisattvas, Buddhist gods and even demons, discern-

ing the great passion for kosen-rufu that is alive in the Buddha's heart, one after another pledge: "I will support this great struggle!" "I will protect and serve with all my might those working to advance kosen-rufu!" Eagle Peak, where this scene takes place, is filled with their irrepressible enthusiasm. Such is the dramatic episode that the "Dharani" chapter describes.

Why don't we start our discussion by considering the chapter's basic outline?



CORBIERE LIGHTHOUSE

Corbiere Lighthouse, Channel Islands, England. President Ikeda states, "I hoped that participants in this [gathering of youth] would themselves serve as lighthouses to illuminate the lives of all people."

## The Unfathomable Power of Daimoku

The Buddha said to Medicine King, “If there are good men or good women who offer alms to Buddhas equal in number to the sands of eight hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges, what is your opinion? The merit they gain will surely be great, will it not?”

“Very great, World-Honored One.”

The Buddha said, “If there are good men or good women who, with regard to this sutra, can accept and uphold even one four-line verse, if they read and recite it, understand the principle, and practice it as the sutra directs, the benefits will be very many.”

(LS26, 307–8)<sup>3</sup>

**KATSUJI SAITO:** The “Dharani” chapter begins with Bodhisattva Medicine King asking Shakyamuni how much merit or benefit people can gain from accepting and upholding, reading and reciting, studying the meaning of or copying the Lotus Sutra.

Without replying to this query, Shakyamuni poses the following question to Bodhisattva Medicine King: “If there are good men or good women who offer alms to Buddhas equal in number to the sands of eight hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges, what is your opinion? The merit they gain will surely be great, will it not?” (LS26, 307).

When Medicine King says that the benefit of such people will be very great indeed, Shakyamuni instructs him: “If there are good men or good women who, with regard to this sutra, can accept and uphold even one four-line verse, if they read and recite it, understand the principle, and practice it as the sutra directs, the benefits will be very many” (LS26, 308).

**HARUO SUDA:** He says that by accepting and upholding even a single verse of the Lotus Sutra, we will gain the same benefit as we would by making offerings to an infinite number of Buddhas. When you stop to think about it, this is remarkable.

**IKEDA:** How is this possible? It’s because the Lotus Sutra is the source of the enlightenment of all the infinite numbers of Buddhas. In particular, the source of the enlightenment of all Buddhas is the implicit teaching of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. This daimoku is the sutra’s undiluted and pure essence.

**TAKANORI ENDO:** The Daishonin’s Buddhism is truly incredible.

**IKEDA:** Therefore, we mustn’t try to gauge the power of daimoku with our own limited state of life, thinking, “This must be all there is.” The sutra says that the benefit of daimoku is beyond even the Buddha to fathom. For us to suppose that we understand its full

scope is nothing short of arrogance. If we underestimate the infinite power of benefit of the Gohonzon owing to weak faith, then we will only be able to tap a minute portion of the Gohonzon’s power.

Speaking at Toshima Public Hall in Tokyo, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda would often say on numerous occasions: “If the benefit

that I have received is as great as this hall, then the benefit all of you have received is no more than the size of my little finger.”

Japan today is facing a difficult economic situation. For precisely that reason, I hope all of our members will acquire immense benefit now. I would like to see each one gain inexhaustible good fortune. When times are good, anyone can do well. It is when things get tough that we see what we are made of. That is when our faith is put to the test. It is important that we patiently strive to create hope.

**SAITO:** Bodhisattva Medicine King and the others present at the assembly are moved when they hear Shakyamuni expound the great benefit of the Lotus Sutra. Medicine King vows: “World Honored One, I will now give to those who preach the Law *dharani* spells, which will guard and protect them” (LS26, 308). With that, he begins to recite an incantation.



A meeting of the youth group Suiko-kai, a gathering started originally by second President Toda.

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**ENDO:** It begins, “anye manye mane mamane chitte charite shame . . .” (LS26, 308) and so on, but I haven’t the foggiest idea what it means!

**IKEDA:** After intoning this spell, Medicine King declares: “If anyone should assault or injure these teachers of the Law, then he will have assaulted and injured these Buddhas!” (LS26, 308). In other words, to persecute those who are working to accomplish kosen-rufu is to persecute all Buddhas.

**SUDA:** Hearing this, Shakyamuni praises him, saying: “Excellent, excellent, Medicine King! You keep these teachers of the Law in your compassionate thoughts, shield and guard them, and for that reason you pronounce these dharanis. They will bring great benefit to living beings” (LS26, 308).

**ENDO:** Essentially, protecting the practitioners of kosen-rufu brings great benefit to humankind.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. Practitioners of kosen-rufu today means the SGI organization and its members. To protect the SGI and SGI members is to protect humankind. Since SGI members are spreading the Mystic Law, which brings great benefit to all people, they are treasures of humanity. I am not saying this out of self-aggrandizement or arrogance. This is what the Lotus Sutra teaches.

How truly fortunate we are! The key is whether we can fully awaken to this noble mission. When we do so, our life undergoes a complete transformation.

## The Vowing to Protect Practitioners

[In “A Sage and an Unenlightened Man,” Nichiren Daishonin writes:]

The ‘Dharani’ chapter in the eighth volume of the Lotus Sutra says, ‘If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable.’ In this passage, the Buddha is praising Mother of Demon Children (Jpn Kishimojin) and the ten demon daughters for their vow to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, and saying that the blessings from their vow to protect those who embrace the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra are beyond even the Buddha wisdom, which completely comprehends the three existences, to fathom. While by rights nothing should be beyond the grasp of the Buddha wisdom, the Buddha says here that the blessings that accrue from

accepting and embracing the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra are the one thing that wisdom cannot measure. (WND, 131)

If there are those who fail to heed our spells and trouble and disrupt the preachers of the Law, their heads will split into seven pieces like the branches of the arjaka tree. Their crime will be like that of one who kills father and mother, or one who presses out oil, or cheats others with measures and scales, or, like Devadatta, disrupts the Order of monks. Anyone who commits a crime against these teachers of the Law will bring on himself guilt such as this! (LS26, 310)

**SAITO:** In the “Dharani” chapter, five parties vow to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

After Medicine King, a bodhisattva named Brave Donor says to the Buddha:

World-Honored One, I too will pronounce dharanis to shield and guard those who read, recite, accept, and uphold the Lotus Sutra. If a teacher of the Law acquires these dharanis, then although yakshas, rakshasas, putanas, krityas, kumbhandas or hungry spirits should spy out his shortcomings and try to take advantage of them, they will be unable to do so. (LS26, 308)

Next, the heavenly kings Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation individually recite dharani to safeguard the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

**IKEDA:** So after the two bodhisattvas, two of the four heavenly kings also make vows.

**SUDA:** Yes. After that, the ten demon daughters (Jpn Jurasetsumyo) and the Mother of Demon Children and a whole host of demons pledge: “World-Honored One, we too wish to shield and guard those who read, recite, accept, and uphold the Lotus Sutra and spare them from decline or harm. If anyone should spy out the shortcomings of these teachers of the Law and try to take advantage of them, we will make it impossible for him to do so” (LS26, 310).

**IKEDA:** What spirit! Women are really strong!

**ENDO:** After intoning a *dharani*, they resolutely declare: “Though they climb upon our very heads, they will never trouble the teachers of the Law! . . . though it [the harassment] be only in a dream, it will never trouble them!” (LS26, 310). They continue:

If there are those who fail to heed our spells

and trouble and disrupt the preachers of the Law,  
their heads will split into seven pieces  
like the branches of the arjaka tree.

Their crime will be like that of one who kills father  
and mother.

(LS26, 310)

**IKEDA:** The passage “If there are those who trouble the preachers of the Law, their heads will split into seven pieces” is famous. It is paraphrased on the upper right-hand side of the Gohonzon as we face it.

**SAITO:** This is the doctrine of punishment.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. The important thing to understand about punishment is that it is not something someone else does to us; it is our effect when we act contrary to the Law. However, when we live based on the Law, we receive benefit. These go hand in hand.

In the upper left-hand corner of the Gohonzon are the words, “Those who make offerings will gain good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles [of the Buddha].”

**SAITO:** Still, the force of the ten demon daughters is tremendous.

**SUDA:** In fact, their pledge goes on: “We will see that they [the teachers of the Law] gain peace and tranquility, freeing them from decline and harm and nulling the effect of all poison herbs” (LS26, 311).

Shakyamuni delights at their words and praises the demon girls, saying:

“Excellent, excellent! If you can shield and guard those who accept and uphold the mere name of the Lotus Sutra, your merit will be immeasurable. How much more so if you shield and guard those who accept and uphold it in its entirety. . . . you and your attendants should shield and guard the teachers of the Law such as these!” (LS26, 311)

The sutra further says that the sixty-eight thousand persons in the assembly listening to this exchange attain the “truth of birthlessness,” signifying a kind of enlightenment (LS26, 311).

This concludes the “Dharani” chapter.

**IKEDA:** The chapter exudes the passion to steadfastly protect those who carry out the practice for kosen-rufu.

According to one interpretation, Bodhisattva Medicine King’s function is to protect practitioners of the Law in terms of health. He safeguards them from illness. Of course, since Medicine King represents the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching, his vow can be



CORBIS/Joseph Sohm

About the youth group Suiko-kai, President Ikeda states, “I wanted those young people to know that as long as the bonfire of their lives continues to burn, as long as the flame of the Soka Gakkai spirit continues to blaze, kosen-rufu can be accomplished without fail.”

taken to mean that all bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching protect the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, or bodhisattvas of the essential teaching.

Also, Bodhisattva Brave Donor courageously and unbegrudgingly offers the treasure of Buddhism to all living beings. While this primarily indicates making offerings of the Law, it can also mean supporting practitioners from a material standpoint.

Again, Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation represent the four heavenly kings who protect Buddhism. Since they are kings of the world of Heaven, they have great power. In today’s terms, they can be thought of as leaders of society. It is the duty of such leaders to protect all practitioners of kosen-rufu without exception.

**ENDO:** Indeed, many leaders today around the world are praising the SGI.

## Change Evil Demons Into Benevolent Deities

### From “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”

“The name of the Lotus Sutra’ means the daimoku. The ‘person’ or ‘you’ in the passage refers to all practitioners of the Lotus Sutra among the living beings of the country of Japan.

We may also say that, while the word ‘person’ or ‘you’ may refer either to men or women, here it is intended as praise for women in particular, since the persons being addressed are the ten demon daughters, who are of course female.” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 778)

**IKEDA:** The fact that the ten demon daughters pledge their protection indicates that practitioners of the True Law can change evil demons into benevolent deities.

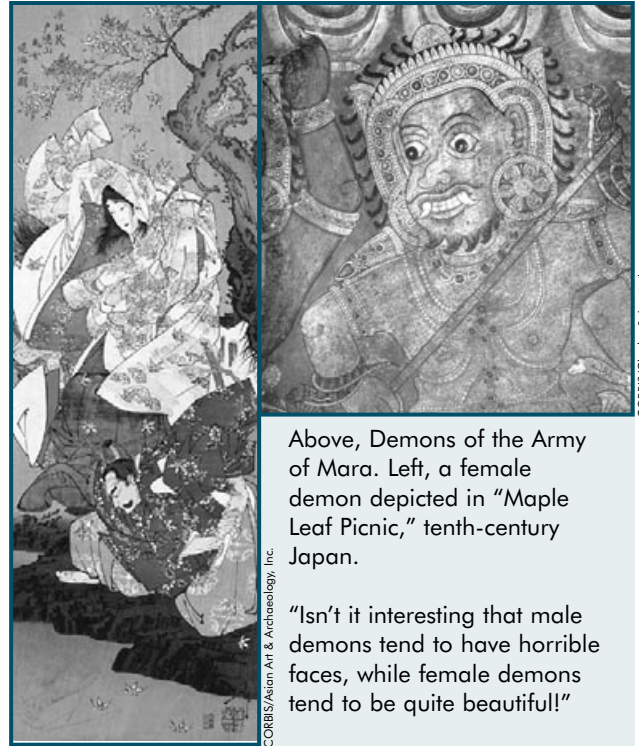
**SUDA:** After all, Mother of Demon Children and her daughters are originally all evil demons.

**IKEDA:** In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” Nichiren Daishonin says: “In the case of the teachings that pertain to transmigration, the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, she is an evil demon. But in the case of the teachings that pertain to the extinction of earthly desires, the Lotus Sutra teachings, she acts as a benevolent demon” (GZ, 778). With regard to Mother of Demon Children, for example, the Daishonin teaches that the characters can be read in two different ways—from top to bottom and from bottom to top—as meaning either “evil demon” or “benevolent demon” (cf. GZ, 778).

**ENDO:** The first interpretation is based on the top-to-bottom reading of the characters of *ki shi mo*. The Daishonin says, “*Ki*, the demon, is the father.” This refers to the fact that Kishimojin is the wife of the evil demon Panchika. Panchika is said to carry a sack of jewels, and in Japan he came to be known as Daikokuten, who is revered as the god of rice and rice fields.

**SUDA:** As to the middle character, read from the top, the Daishonin says, “*Shi*, the children, are the ten demon daughters.” Mother of Demon Children is said to have ten thousand children, and according to the Daishonin, these include the ten demon daughters.

**ENDO:** Speaking of demons, isn’t it interesting that male demons tend to have horrible faces, while female



Above, Demons of the Army of Mara. Left, a female demon depicted in “Maple Leaf Picnic,” tenth-century Japan.

“Isn’t it interesting that male demons tend to have horrible faces, while female demons tend to be quite beautiful!”

demons tend to be quite beautiful!

**SAITO:** Images of the ten demon daughters produced in Japan show them as having plump faces. It seems that these were objects of devotion in ancient times.

**IKEDA:** Beautiful women who protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra—today these are none other than the members of our women’s and young women’s divisions. But calling them demons will surely bring retribution!

**SAITO:** Indeed, their fierce resolve to protect the SGI puts men to shame!

**IKEDA:** Men need to work harder so that women don’t have to go to such lengths. It’s inexcusable for men to take the efforts of women for granted.

**ENDO:** Regarding the third character making up the name of Mother of Demon Children, the Daishonin says, “*Mo*, mother, is Hariti.” This is apparently her original name, and it seems that she was first revered in the Gandhara region of India (which is today in northern Pakistan).

**SUDA:** In Buddhist texts, Mother of Demon Children is described as a demon who steals and eats people’s children. When Shakyamuni witnesses this, he hides her youngest child from her. Seeing Mother of Demon

Children's grief at the disappearance of her child, Shakyamuni reprimands her, saying: "If you are so sad at the loss of just one of your many children, you must be able to understand the enormous grief of the parents whose children you steal and devour!" This well-known episode causes her change of heart.

**IKEDA:** Mother of Demon Children, who dotes on her own children while not the least concerned about the children of others, symbolizes the negative side of the maternal instinct. By contrast, to take the love one feels for one's own children and extend it into a love of humanity is the spirit of the merciful mother Perceiver of the World's Sounds, of a bodhisattva.

The Daishonin explains that the name of the "evil demon" Mother of Demon Children can also be read in reverse: "The word *jin* or 'goddess' represents the ninth consciousness. The word *mo* or 'mother' represents the eighth consciousness, the level at which ignorance appears. The word *shi* or 'children' represents the seventh and sixth consciousnesses. The word *ki* or 'Demon' represents the first five consciousnesses, those of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch" (GZ, 778).

Simply put, the ninth consciousness is the world of Buddhahood. When the world of Buddhahood in the depths of our lives wells forth, the eighth (or *alaya*) consciousness changes, as does the seventh (*mano*), the sixth (which corresponds to "mind"), and the rest of the five consciousnesses. These are all purified and come to function positively.

Through the power of the Mystic Law, the Mother of Demon Children becomes a benevolent demon. When we fight resolutely for *kosen-rufu*, then even evil demons turn into benevolent forces. Our obstacles become our aids.

**SAITO:** So, thanks to Shakyamuni, Mother of Demon Children and her daughters became benevolent deities.

**IKEDA:** And those to whom these benevolent deities give their protection are primarily women. They protect those women who are exerting themselves for *kosen-rufu*.

This is why the Daishonin declares, "[While the word *person* or *you* may refer either to men or women], here it is intended as praise for women in particular, since the persons being addressed are the ten demon daughters, who are of course female" (GZ, 778).

**ENDO:** It occurs to me that among those whom the Daishonin encouraged with the words, "The ten demon daughters will protect you," the majority of

them were women. These include Shijo Kingo's daughter Kyo'o, Oto Gozen, Lady Nichinyo and the wife of Myomitsu Shonin.

**IKEDA:** I like to see women protected. I am always praying, indeed imploring, all the Buddhas and heavenly deities throughout time and space to: "Guard and protect wholeheartedly the SGI women's and young women's division members. Keep them safe from harm and in good health, and fill their lives with good fortune and boundless happiness." I pray with the fervor of a roaring lion. I hope all leaders will have that same spirit.

## Buddhism Is a Great Struggle Between Good and Evil

**IKEDA:** In the "Dharani" chapter, two sages (the bodhisattvas Medicine King and Brave Donor), two deities (Vaishravana and Upholder of the Nation) and various demons all pledge their protection. They are representatives of the Buddhist gods and bodhisattvas throughout the universe who all make the same pledge. They could be described as the alliance to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

Why is this? Why is their protection necessary? It's because *kosen-rufu* is a great struggle between the Buddha and all manner of negative forces. This *saha* world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. The "revolutionaries" who stand up and challenge this "evil sovereign" in the name of justice are Buddhas; they are the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. It is only natural that they will be attacked by the forces of evil. If this evil were allowed to persist, however, the world would remain shrouded in darkness. But the "Dharani" chapter states that the sutra's practitioners will be protected from this army of evil by an army of good.

The Daishonin says: "You people look to human beings to be your allies. But I, Nichiren, make the gods of the sun and moon, Shakra and Brahma, my allies" (WND, 1057). He says in effect: "You make allies of people. I will make an ally of the heavens." On a different level, I, too, have tried to live with the universe as my ally.

The Daishonin also says: "[Despite the personal interference of the devil king of the sixth heaven] it is because the heavenly deities came to my aid that I survived even at Tatsunokuchi, and also emerged safely from other great persecutions. By now, the devil king must be discouraged" (GZ, 843).

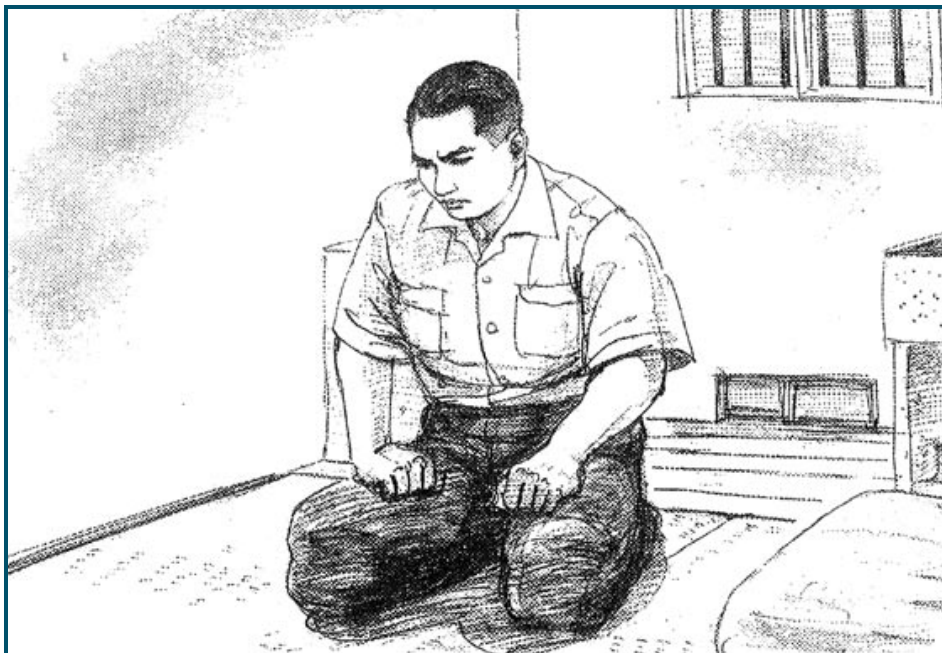


Illustration by Teikichi Miyoshi

During the Osaka Incident the prosecution went to great lengths in interrogating a young President Ikeda on trumped-up charges of which he was later found not guilty. On more than one occasion, he was denied meals. Above, an illustration from the novel, *The Human Revolution*, depicting President Ikeda as Shin'ichi in his cell during the incident.

demanded: "Release Daisaku! I will come get him myself, club in hand, if I must." And he said, "I'm ready to spend fifteen more years in prison."

I absolutely had to prevent them from getting at President Toda and from trampling on the citadel of kosen-rufu. I prayed that I would bear the brunt of the attack and go to prison instead. I prayed to be a shield protecting President Toda. And so it was that I ended up going to jail.

**SAITO:** You went in his place.

**IKEDA:** It has been my determination to become the roof of the Soka Gakkai. A roof has to withstand scorching heat, rain,

**SAITO:** What a remarkable state of life to be able to say, "The devil king must now be discouraged." Certainly it is true that, even with the full power of the Japanese state behind them, the Daishonin's enemies could not do away with him. This is incredible! It's inconceivable! Standing entirely alone, the Daishonin resolutely fought on with universal forces on his side.

**IKEDA:** In his later years, President Toda remarked: "The Soka Gakkai has managed to come to this point. This would have been unimaginable without the protection of the Buddhist gods." Only people who have put their all into the struggle for kosen-rufu can understand these words.

The Osaka Incident,<sup>4</sup> to take one example, was a ploy to crush the Soka Gakkai. Because of the organization's rapid growth, plans were made to suppress it. The principal targets were President Toda and myself. The authorities obviously intended to use my arrest as an excuse to investigate the Soka Gakkai and eventually haul in President Toda. Mr. Toda was getting on in years and I knew better than anyone how physically weak he was. Had he been put in jail, it could well have meant his life.

In response to their tactics, President Toda

demanded: "Release Daisaku! I will come get him myself, club in hand, if I must." And he said, "I'm ready to spend fifteen more years in prison." I absolutely had to prevent them from getting at President Toda and from trampling on the citadel of kosen-rufu. I prayed that I would bear the brunt of the attack and go to prison instead. I prayed to be a shield protecting President Toda. And so it was that I ended up going to jail.

I am like a stake in the water. As long as the stake is firmly in place, the ship of the people tied to the stake can remain stalwart. Then, even on stormy days, everyone can rest assured. Meanwhile, as everyone enjoys their security, the stake, out of sight in the cold water, stands firmly to keep the ship in place.

**SAITO:** My understanding of the "Dharani" chapter has until now been rather vague. The vow of the ten demon daughters, "Though they climb upon our very heads, they will never trouble the teachers of the Law!" (LS26, 310), is also a pledge to bear the brunt of attacks and protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, even if it means being attacked themselves.

I had interpreted this as simply the pledge of the Buddhist gods. But I now understand that it is an exhortation to me personally to embrace the same determination.

**SUDA:** To protect the person is to protect the Law.

**IKEDA:** As the Daishonin says, “The Law does not spread by itself” (GZ, 856). Without people, Buddhism would perish.

**ENDO:** That reminds me of the Daishonin’s words of praise to Joken-bo and Gijo-bo [who had been his seniors when he initially became a priest] for protecting him at a time of crisis. He says, “You have performed an unrivaled service for the Lotus Sutra” (WND, 729).

## People Function as Buddhist Gods

**IKEDA:** That’s right. “You have performed an unrivaled service for the Lotus Sutra”—in other words, there is no greater offering to the Lotus Sutra than to protect its votary.

Gijo-bo and Joken-bo had not gathered together high-ranking priests and held a grand ceremony. Nor had they delivered fine lectures before many people or made contributions to Mount Hiei, which could be thought of as the head temple of the Lotus Sutra for that time. But when the Daishonin first proclaimed his teaching, these two priests protected him from attack at the hands of the local authority (the steward Tojo Kagenobu) and secretly helped him escape capture. It was this act that the Daishonin praised as “an unrivaled service for the Lotus Sutra” and what led him to declare that they were sure to attain Buddhahood.

He makes this statement in “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude” more than twenty years after the incident occurred. Even so long after the fact, the Daishonin never forgot his gratitude and continued to warmly encourage them.

The Daishonin was always appreciative and full of praise for those who had protected him, saying things like, “You must be the incarnation of Bodhisattva Pure Practices”; and “Shakyamuni lord of the teachings must have entered your body prompting you to come to my assistance.” He never expected nor took for granted the efforts of others on his behalf. Self-centered people tend to be arrogant, thinking it only natural that others support and protect them. But those who live centered on the Law will be filled with gratitude for such consideration, regarding it as an act for the sake of the Law.

The world of kosen-rufu is bound together by feelings of mutual respect and appreciation. I don’t know

how many times in a single day I say the words “thank you.” It must be tens or even hundreds of times.

**SAITO:** I think that people who have lost such a beautiful spirit eventually find it impossible to stay with the SGI.

**SUDA:** But they don’t want to recognize that they have fallen from this pure world of faith. So to justify themselves, they blame the SGI. This is most likely what goes on in the minds of those who abandon their faith and turn against the SGI.

**ENDO:** When we read such words of the Daishonin, however, we can clearly see that while he speaks of Buddhist gods, which may conjure images of some mysterious invisible force, these actually take the form of real people.

**SUDA:** Buddhist gods also represent natural phenomena, such as the power of wind.

**ENDO:** That is also true, but I think it is above all the people in our immediate surroundings who function as Buddhist gods.

## Working Together for Kosen-rufu Is Most Respectworthy

**IKEDA:** Exactly. In particular, our fellow members of the SGI are themselves Buddhist gods, something that should be treasured and appreciated to the utmost.

This is what the Daishonin tells his followers. For example, he says: “The heavenly gods and benevolent deities will assume various forms such as those of men and women, and present offerings to help the persons who practice the Lotus Sutra” (WND, 35); and “It must be that the ten demon daughters have entered into your body to come to my aid” (GZ, 1414).

[The Daishonin wrote this to a follower who had brought offerings for him all the way to remote Mount Minobu at a time when his priestly disciples of many years had ceased to visit him.]

There are many such examples. Today, those who support kosen-rufu and the SGI, the organization of kosen-rufu, can all be thought of as Buddhist gods. They are bodhisattvas and the Buddha’s emissaries. To forget this and instead admire only influential people in society, while thinking little of one’s fellow members, is completely backward. Our fellow members are most precious and honorable. What is societal status?

What is wealth? In light of the Lotus Sutra, no one is more respectable than SGI members who are working for kosen-rufu. I have said this many times. I would like this to be taken as my final injunction.

Kosen-rufu will advance to the extent that we sincerely treasure and support our fellow SGI members. Should the bonfire of this passionate spirit be extinguished, it would lead to bureaucratism, and the flame of kosen-rufu would die out.

**SUDA:** I imagine there are some arrogant and cunning individuals within the SGI as well.

**IKEDA:** For precisely this reason, I would like to see members establish a firm solidarity as true comrades and protect the SGI. For this is the organization that President Toda declared more precious to him than his own life.

At any rate, those who treasure the Gohonzon will in turn be treasured by the Gohonzon, as well as by all Buddhas and Buddhist gods throughout the three existences and the ten directions, just as a mirror reflects our image. When we protect those who are struggling for the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, we in turn will be protected by the Gohonzon. This is indicated in the “Dharani” chapter when Shakyamuni praises the two sages, two deities and the benevolent demons saying, “Excellent, excellent!” (LS26, 311).

Those who treasure the SGI will be treasured by the Gohonzon. As long as we remember this one point, our lives will be rock-solid.

## The Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

**SUDA:** I understand that Mr. Toda also worked with great determination to protect first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. He gave himself entirely to the publication of Mr. Makiguchi’s *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (System of Value-creating Education), from getting the manuscript into order to printing it.

**IKEDA:** Yes. That’s why President Toda is listed in the book as both publisher and printer.

The name *soka* was born from a discussion that took place between President Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. As is well known, it was Mr. Toda who came up with it.

**SUDA:** Yes. It seems this happened around 1929 when Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were talking one night until after midnight at Mr. Toda’s house, seated around the brazier.

President Makiguchi said to Mr. Toda: “Never before has there been even one elementary school principal who has published a theory of education. There is a chance that I will be forced to resign my post as principal of the Shirogane Elementary School [in Tokyo]. And while this is not a problem for me personally, I want to prepare my theory of education for those to come while I am still active as school headmaster.”

Mr. Toda replied, “Sensei, let’s go ahead with it!”  
“It will take money, Toda.”

“I don’t have very much, but I will gladly put in all I have—19,000 yen.” Mr. Toda then asked President Makiguchi, “What is the purpose of your theory on education?”

“It is to create value.”

“Then let’s call it *soka* [value-creating] education.”  
The name was thus decided.<sup>5</sup>

**IKEDA:** This is also the *soka* of Soka Gakkai. In today’s confused world, this is a name that brings hope to humankind. The creation of value—of beauty, benefit and good—this is a name filled with profound philosophy and character. It also reflects the character of these two great predecessors.

The name had been decided, but from that point on, the journey was long. Just scraping together the necessary capital to finance the project was a great struggle.

**SUDA:** President Toda came up with the idea of holding practice examinations for students in Tokyo. This was around the time that the term “entrance examination hell” came into use, referring to the grueling process of gaining admission to high school. It seems that the process was made even more rigorous by the fact that examinees had no way of gauging their ability or the degree of difficulty of the exams in advance. By returning corrected answers on the practice tests, Mr. Toda gave students a way to determine to which schools they should apply based on their ability.

The first time, he administered the test for a group of about five hundred in a single hall. Several years later, he had approximately three thousand students taking the test at five sites. Through these efforts, Mr. Toda came up with the funds to finance the publication of President Makiguchi’s *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei*.

**IKEDA:** Mr. Toda later wrote a mathematics textbook titled *Suirishiki Shido Sanjutsu* (A Deductive Guide to Arithmetic), which became a bestseller. Again, he used the royalties to help President Makiguchi.

They decided on the book's title and managed to pull together the necessary funds to publish it, but a lot more was required to see it through to completion. That's because Mr. Makiguchi's busy schedule didn't allow him the time he needed to get the manuscript in order. He was always jotting down his thoughts on memo pads or scraps of paper. While these notes contained the crystallization of his profound thought, he simply hadn't the time to organize them. So Mr. Toda offered to do it for him.

President Makiguchi hesitated, not wanting to burden Mr. Toda with such a task. It would be quite an undertaking, as his notes were in utter disarray. He probably also doubted whether it would even be possible for another person to make sense of them.

But Mr. Toda insisted: "If I can't even understand your theory, then who is the book going to be published for? Do you want leading scholars around the world to read it? If I read your notes and can understand them, then I am confident I will be able to compile them."<sup>6</sup>

When he came upon overlapping information, Mr. Toda would cut the memos apart, regrouping them by topic. He reportedly had an eight-tatami-mat room filled with such clippings, which he arranged in logical order and which became the basis for Mr. Makiguchi's book.

President Makiguchi's theory was extremely complex, and Mr. Toda's diligence completing the project was a monumental endeavor. President Toda organized the first three volumes in this fashion, eventually publishing all four volumes himself.

**SAITO:** From its inception, the *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* was the crystallization of the principle of the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is truly moving.

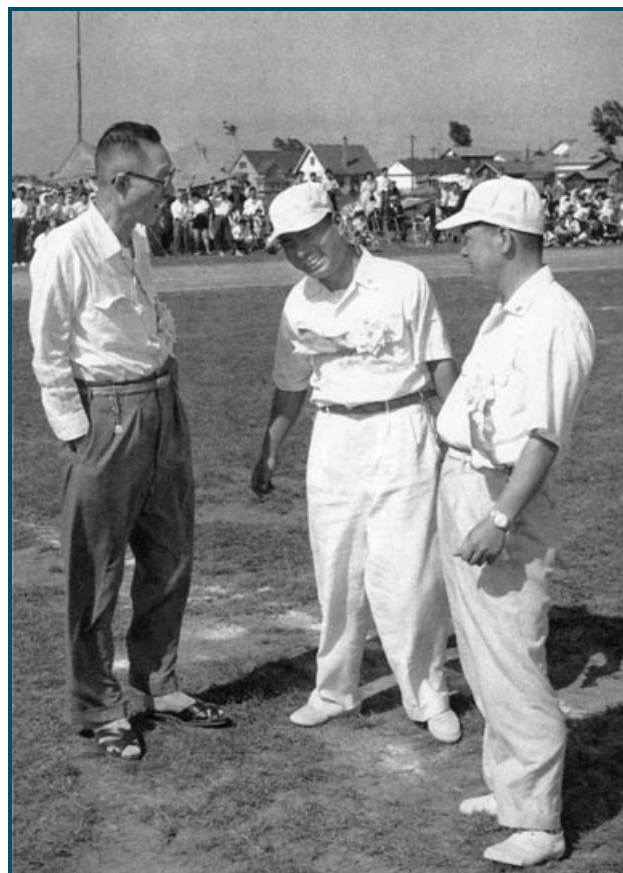
**IKEDA:** Whenever Mr. Toda, who tended to be lighthearted and candid, spoke about Mr. Makiguchi, he always became very serious. And he continued to talk about President Makiguchi to the very end of his life.

His life overflowed with the solemn determination to protect his mentor. This is itself the spirit of performing "an unrivaled service for the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 729).

## The Meaning of "Dharani"

**IKEDA:** I think it's time we clarified the meaning of dharani. This term is probably unfamiliar to many.

**ENDO:** Earlier we looked at the *dharani* spell that Bodhisattva Medicine King intones. It begins, "*anye*



Mr. Toda, left, who tended to be lighthearted and candid, with Daisaku Ikeda, center, at a sports festival.

*manye mane mamane*" and so forth. These are the first four words; altogether it is forty-three words long.

**SUDA:** It sounds like a spell.

**ENDO:** It is a spell.

**SAITO:** And it has a literal meaning.

**ENDO:** That's right. Referring to the original Sanskrit text and the Chinese translation appearing in the Dharmaraksha's *Sho-hokke-kyo*,<sup>7</sup> it basically goes like this:

The state of tranquil extinction and emancipation which is the Buddha's enlightened state eradicates the sufferings of all people equally. With his gaze fixed on his inner aspect that is pure, unchanging and inherent in all, he abides in peace and tranquility. He causes people to believe and accept this, and so enables them to experience peace and tranquility. With skilled words that are inexhaustible, he develops boundless happiness and greatly advances without looking back.

This is the gist of it. It seems that quite a bit of research is being done on this passage.

**SAITO:** These words are often simply discounted as spells or incantations.

**IKEDA:** There must be some meaning in the fact that Kumarajiva did not translate this passage into Chinese.

**SUDA:** He simply transliterated the Sanskrit sounds into Chinese characters.

**IKEDA:** The word *dharani* is itself a Sanskrit term.

**SAITO:** Yes, and in Chinese the term is translated using characters that mean “upholding.” It includes the idea of being “capable of upholding” as well as “able to ward off.” According to the explanation of the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China (in *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*), by firmly upholding the words of the Buddha, one can “thwart evil and give rise to good.”

Originally, *dharani* meant to “remember and preserve,” its roots meaning to “support” or “maintain.”

**IKEDA:** Hence, it means “upholding”—to uphold and maintain all the teachings. In the Sho-hokke-kyo, the chapter is titled not “Dharani” but “Upholding.”

**ENDO:** Yes. It means to maintain the teaching in its entirety in one’s heart.

The term *dharani* in fact appears in the Lotus Sutra about ten times in the preceding chapters. The “Introduction” (first) chapter says of the bodhisattvas gathered at the assembly, “All had gained *dharanis*, delighted in preaching, were eloquent, and turned the wheel of the Law that knows no regression” (LS1, 4). *Dharani*, here, means to remember and uphold the Buddha’s preaching.

**IKEDA:** In ancient civilizations, important teachings were not recorded. It was customary instead to commit them to memory, carrying them always in one’s heart. To deeply engrave the mentor’s teaching in one’s life for eternity—this is the original meaning of *dharani*. In short, it is to “remember and bear firmly in mind.” It is to absolutely never forget the words of the mentor.

[The expression “remember and bear firmly in mind” appears in the Universal Worthy Sutra. In his writings, the Daishonin says, “Many hear about and accept this sutra, but when great obstacles arise, just as they were told would happen, few remember it and

bear it firmly in mind” (WND, 471).

This is the “*dharani* of retaining all that one hears” (cf. LS17, 233). There is also a “*dharani* of retaining repetitions of teachings” (cf. LS17, 234).

**SUDA:** This means “repeatedly intoning.” The “Distinctions in Benefits” (seventeenth) chapter speaks of *dharani* to retain repetitions of teachings, saying that numerous bodhisattvas “gained *dharani* that allow them to retain hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions, immeasurable repetitions of the teachings” (LS17, 234).

**ENDO:** To chant *daimoku* that many times would bring incredible results!

## Dharani Are the Buddha’s Secret Words

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin flatly states in the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” “*Dharani* here means Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (GZ, 777). He continues, “Therefore, *dharani* represent the secret words of all Buddhas.” He is saying that it is a secret language that only Buddhas understand.

The Daishonin further says: “The five characters of the *daimoku* are the secret words of the secret of all Buddhas over the three existences of past, present and future.” In other words, they are the secrets of all secrets.

Among secrets, some hide faults or evil deeds, and some veil hidden treasure. We are of course talking about the latter kind of secret. Simply put, *dharani* may be described as an example of words imbued with spirit. They do not simply convey a meaning; they are infused with the energy of life. Therefore sound and rhythm are very important.

**ENDO:** It seems like *dharani* are similar to poetry.

**IKEDA:** In a broad sense, poetry and *dharani* are alike. As a matter of fact, in ancient times in Japan, *waka* poetry was considered the *dharani* of Japan, and the art of poetry was considered the most direct way to enlightenment. This was the belief of such figures as Saigyō.<sup>8</sup>

The sound and rhythm of words infused with the energy of life were considered to be a kind of power.

**SUDA:** It has traditionally been thought in Japan that words themselves when spoken have a mysterious power to bring about what they describe.

**SAITO:** Throughout the ancient world, it was often

believed that words that express truth possessed the power to dispel misfortune or cure illness.

**ENDO:** It may be that such beliefs are what the “Dharani” chapter was based on. After all, the purpose of presenting the votaries of the Lotus Sutra with *dharani* spells is to afford them protection.

**IKEDA:** That’s true. Still, we mustn’t just accept at face value the concept that words have mysterious power; Shakyamuni himself prohibited the casting of spells and fortunetelling. That said, however, the sound and rhythm of words do have greater power than the meaning of words themselves. Words indeed have life.

The Japanese author Toson Shimazaki (1872–1943) said: “Life is power. Power is voice. The voice is words. New words are therefore new life.”

The voice more than anything expresses our life force. That is why the heart, the body and life itself can be transformed depending on our voice and choice of words.

As the Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (GZ, 708). The voice also has the ability to produce evil. Positive words create a healthy mind and body while negative words adversely affect our mental and physical well-being.

**ENDO:** So *dharani* are words of truth infused with the greatest vitality.

**IKEDA:** In the world of art, there is an enormous difference between an original and a forgery. The original is filled with an indescribable force, a power that grabs people’s hearts. That’s because it has been infused with the artist’s life itself. A forgery, on the other hand, no matter how close to the original, is infused with only the desire to make money. This cannot help but be expressed in the work. It is the same with words. Words that are filled with life, that have life flowing through them, are like great art.

**SAITO:** That must be why Kumarajiva did not translate the *dharani*.

**IKEDA:** We also do not translate Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, for this is the language of the Buddha.

If you go to an English-speaking country and you say “Thank you,” you will be understood even if you don’t understand the precise meaning of the words. Likewise, since *daimoku* is the language of the Buddha, when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo our prayers are communicated to all Buddhas throughout time and space.

The Daishonin says, “The voice of chanting



CORBIS

The great violinist Sir Yehudi Menuhin remarked in his dialogue with President Ikeda that the sound of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is easy to hum and has a pleasant rhythm.

*daimoku* cannot fail to reach all the worlds in the ten directions” (GZ, 808). The voice is what matters.

To illustrate, the sounds *ka ki ku ke ko*, of the fifty sounds in the Japanese phonetic system, are hard on the ear. There is a very solid feeling about them. But the sounds *sa shi su se so* are soft and airy, like the wind. *Na ni nu ne no* feels smooth, whereas *ma mi mu me mo* feels damp and moist.

**SAITO:** Come to think of it, the great violinist Sir Yehudi Menuhin remarked in his dialogue with you, President Ikeda, that the sound of *daimoku* is easy to hum and has a pleasant rhythm.

**IKEDA:** And this was coming from one of the most particular persons in the world when it comes to the nuances of sound!

**SUDA:** He also said that he received an especially strong impression from the syllable *nam* in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

And he described the sound of the letter “m” as the

wellspring of life. Observing that it is present in the word *mother*, and in *mama*, he said it is often the first sound that children learn to make. It is therefore a very important sound, he stated, adding that it was also deeply significant that the sound of “r” (in *ren*) occupies a central position.

**IKEDA:** Mr. Menuhin said he thought there were profound similarities between chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and singing. And he pointed out that the act of using one’s voice has a positive influence on the human body.

**SAITO:** I understand that Rector Roberto Kertész of Flores University in Argentina expressed interest in finding scientific evidence of the effects of chanting daimoku.

[He made this comment while visiting Japan in January 1999 to present Mr. Ikeda with an honorary doctorate and Mrs. Ikeda with an honorary professorship.]

He explained that his interest had been piqued from seeing all the benefit that SGI members are receiving and that he wished to help people who either know nothing about Buddhism or have no interest in it understand its greatness and the greatness of daimoku.

**ENDO:** This is truly an incredible time!

**SUDA:** So, to recapitulate, there are three kinds of *dharani*: the power to remember and bear firmly in mind (the “*dharani* of listening and upholding”), the repetition of a teaching engraved in one’s life for the benefit of oneself and others (the “*dharani* of retaining repetitions of teachings”), and short phrases to protect those who correctly uphold the Buddha’s teaching (the *dharani* spell). There are of course other *dharani*, too.

**ENDO:** The “Dharani” chapter primarily concerns the third of these. The source and underlying power of these spells is of course the Mystic Law.

## The Universe Sings a Song of Support

**IKEDA:** The Mystic Law is the fundamental rhythm of the universe. The entire universe is a grand orchestra, a choir.

The great French writer Victor Hugo (1802–85) sings:

You must know that everything has its law, its goal, its road;  
That from the star to the atom, immensity listens to itself;  
That everything has a consciousness inside the creation;



Everything speaks;  
The air which passes, the seabird which sails;  
Each blade of grass, flower, germ and element.  
Did you imagine the universe differently?



Everything in the universe says something to someone;  
One thought fills with superb tumult.  
God didn’t make any sound without mixing a verb in it;  
Everything speaks.  
And now, man, do you know why everything speaks?  
Listen.  
It is because wind, waves, flames, trees, reeds, rocks—  
Everything is alive.<sup>10</sup>

The poet’s intuition is in fact being substantiated by modern science.

I have discussed this in the past, so I won’t go into great detail here, but the point is that people’s view of the universe is shifting. Whereas the universe was once thought of as a mere collection of silent matter, it is coming to be seen as dynamic—a place where, as Hugo describes, the “harp of the heavens” rings out and all things produce sound.

Everything from the microscopic world of elementary particles, atoms and molecules to the macrocosmic world of planets, the solar system and the galaxy—to say nothing of the world of living organisms—is oscillating and emitting sounds in accord with the principles of musical harmony.<sup>11</sup>

**SAITO:** The Daishonin says:

In the last analysis, since this is the mantra [true words] of the *dharani* of the Mystic Law, the words and sounds of all beings in the Ten Dharma Worlds from Buddhahood to Hell are all *dharani* [to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra]. . . . *Dharani* are part of the function of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (GZ, 802)

**IKEDA:** All things produce sound. And all of these sounds, from the world of Hell to the world of Buddhahood, are songs of support for the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. They are the pledge of the vast universe to protect the sutra’s votaries without fail.

**SUDA:** An inspiring thought!

**ENDO:** The Daishonin speaks of the “mantra of the *dharani* of the Mystic Law.” There is also a *dharani* known as the “mantra *dharani*” (spells used by the True

Words [Shingon] school of Buddhism). Mantra and *dharani*, which had different origins, seem to have grown closer in meaning.

**IKEDA:** One thing that distinguished them originally was that mantra referred to “short spells” and *dharani* to “long spells.”

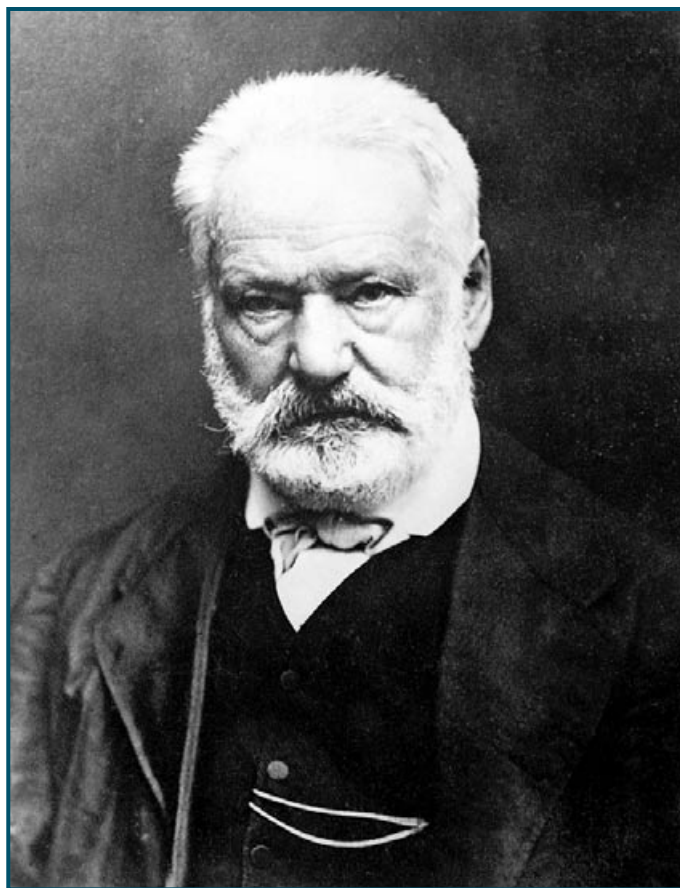
**SAITO:** “Mantra” means the true words of the Buddha. This ultimately means Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Daishonin says that the five *dharani* pronounced by the two bodhisattvas, the two heavenly kings and the ten demon daughters in the “Dharani” chapter in fact correspond to the “five characters of the Mystic Law”; and that “the five *dharani* are our own life” (GZ, 778).

## The Buddhist Gods Respond to Self-Reliant Faith

**IKEDA:** The macrocosm of the universe is an expression of the five characters of the Mystic Law, as is the microcosm of our lives and the protection *dharani* described in the “Dharani” chapter. This means that we, as votaries of the Mystic Law, will receive the universe’s protection depending on how vibrant our lives are. The universe protects those whose life burns with faith. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China states: “The stronger one’s faith, the greater the protection of the gods.”<sup>12</sup> This is a passage that the Daishonin cites repeatedly.

If a people who have faith in the Mystic Law become great leaders, then the Buddhist gods who are their supporters will work wholeheartedly on their behalf. If, on the other hand, they have weak faith,



The Mystic Law is the fundamental rhythm of the universe. The entire universe is a grand orchestra, a choir. The great French writer Victor Hugo (1802–85) sings: You must know that everything has its law, its goal, its road; That from the star to the atom, immensity listens to itself; That everything has a consciousness inside the creation.

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their supporters will not lift a finger. The Daishonin says: “A sword is useless in the hands of a coward” (WND, 412). The Buddhist gods will work hardest to protect those striving most diligently for *kosen-rufu*.

**ENDO:** We shouldn’t be dependent on the Buddhist gods for protection, but should work ourselves to spur them to action.

**IKEDA:** Otherwise, we will grow weak and spineless. And then what would be the point of faith?

Strong faith means self-reliant faith. The Daishonin says: “Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law” (WND, 280). The

solemn protection of the Buddhist gods is acquired through such unflagging faith.

If we have the kind of faith where we can say: “If I can work for *kosen-rufu*, I don’t need anything else,” everything will open up for us. Buddhism is a battle. Without victory, everything is meaningless.

## Dedication to Kosen-rufu Brings Forth Incredible Life Force

**IKEDA:** At any rate, there is a fundamental difference in someone who strives to protect the SGI for the sake of *kosen-rufu* and someone who tries to use it for personal gain. It’s incredible just how much energy, wisdom and compassion well forth from our lives and

how much the Buddhist gods go to work for us when we truly stand up for kosen-rufu.

Exactly three years after I took faith, President Toda's business failed.<sup>13</sup> While he was not accused of any criminal wrong-doing, he wound up with debts of several tens of millions of yen. This would be equivalent to tens of millions of U.S. dollars today. But I worked and worked, and I repaid it all.

There wasn't even enough money to buy Mr. Toda a bottle of *sake*, so I pawned my overcoat to get him some. For six months I received no salary. My shoes were falling apart, I didn't have any proper clothes, and I was in poor health. But if it meant I could protect President Toda, I was even willing to suffer in the worlds of Hunger and Hell. I was determined to have no regrets. I knew that to protect President Toda was to protect kosen-rufu.

Among the more senior employees, who were also leaders in the Soka Gakkai, there were some who deserted Mr. Toda when he was in the direst of straits. At the crucial moment it becomes clear who are living true to the spirit of mentor and disciple and who are interested only in protecting themselves. Arrogant people above all view the mentor from the perspective of their own needs. They are like someone gazing at the summit of a high mountain from below, unable to grasp what it is like at the top. Yet they pretend to understand it perfectly well.

The Daishonin says: "Among my disciples, those who think themselves well versed in Buddhism are the ones who make errors" (WND, 903). The kind of arrogance that feigns a complete understanding of Buddhism is most dangerous. When times get difficult, people with such arrogance will do what they can to stay out of harm's way and, acting as though they were mere observers, try to make themselves look good. They will manipulate things for their own protection. Because they never experience true hardship, they are completely unaware of the debt of gratitude they owe their mentor and the SGI.

When we practice humbly with the attitude that we will give our lives for the sake of kosen-rufu, incredible power wells forth from the depths of our life. In every activity where I took responsibility, I produced results that were unmatched in the entire country. I have spread the Mystic Law around the world. I have made the impossible possible. There is therefore no way that my successors should be unable to manifest genuine strength!

There were many leaders who had been practicing

longer than me, who were many years my senior. I was also not a top leader. But it's not a matter of position. It's not about appearances. Position in the organization and faith are entirely separate issues. Position does not make one worthy; strong faith is all that matters. This is why I have said that I want the members of the youth division to possess the awareness that they are each the president of the SGI.

The important thing is to stand alone and chant daimoku with the pledge, "I will accomplish kosen-rufu without fail." We need to pray to the Gohonzon, "Please allow me to fight with the intensity of a charging demon." With such prayer, we cannot fail to manifest power. We cannot fail to win.

No matter how difficult the circumstances, one who stands up in earnest for kosen-rufu will absolutely receive the protection of the Buddhist gods. It is the "Dharani" chapter that teaches such passionate confidence in faith.

#### *To be continued*

1. Suiko-kai: A young men's division special training group that studied directly under second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda. They took their name from the Chinese novel *Suikoden* (The Water Margin).

2. Editor's Note: All quotations from Nichiren Daishonin are from the recently published translation *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (abbreviated as WND) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), unless otherwise stated.

3. 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 the page number.

4. Osaka Incident: On July 3, 1957, Daisaku Ikeda was arrested and imprisoned by the Osaka Prefectural Police on trumped-up charges of violating the election law. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing.

5. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 417.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 418.

7. Sho-hokke-kyo: The earliest Chinese translation of the Saddharamapundarika-sutra (Lotus Sutra), consisting of twenty-seven chapters in ten volumes. This translation (dated A.D. 286) corresponds with the Myoho-enge-kyo (A.D. 406) of Kumarajiva in most respects, except that it contains several parables which the latter omits.

8. Saigyō (1118–90): Waka poet and Buddhist priest of the Shingon School.

9. *Toson Shimazaki*, Toson Shisho (Personally Selected Poems by Toson Shimazaki) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972), p. 4.

10. Translated from the French. Victor Hugo, "Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre" (What says the shadow's mouth), *Les contemplations* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), pp. 361–63.

11. President Ikeda spoke about this at the first SGI World Youth Division Leaders Meeting, held in Tokyo on July 10, 1991.

12. The eighth volume of *Maka Shikan Bugyoden Guketsu* (Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insights").

13. Mr. Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai on August 24, 1947 and became Mr. Toda's employee in 1948. On August 22, 1950, Mr. Toda was forced to shut down operations of his business.

(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](http://www.sgi-usa.org)

#### **SGI-Affiliated Institutions**

The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century  
[www.brc21.org](http://www.brc21.org)

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Research [www.toda.org](http://www.toda.org)

Soka University of America [www.soka.edu](http://www.soka.edu)

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Pacific Basin Research Center [www.ap.harvard.edu](http://www.ap.harvard.edu)

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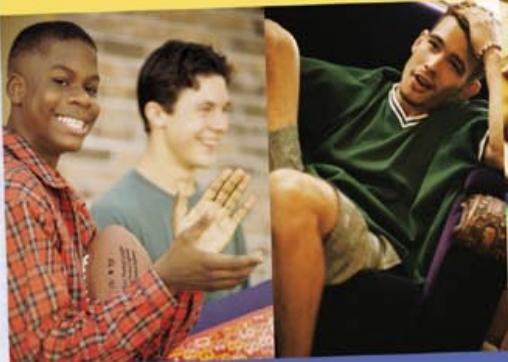
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## What Is the SGI & 'Living Buddhism' Magazine?

### ***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)*