

# living BUDDHISM

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"The popular phrase 'rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic' might describe the futility of anything short of a profound cause to transform one's destiny for the better. What we need when facing our heavy negative karma is something powerful enough to change our momentum, or to pump tons of seawater out of the sinking 'ship of our life.' The energy to do this is Buddha-wisdom." Page 10

## 4 General Director's Message

A School to Develop "Leaders and Scholars"

4



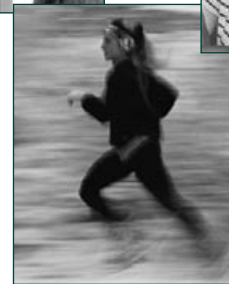
## 6 Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (17)

Perfect Imperfection: Aspiration for Buddhahood



## 8 Passages to Victory

The Path of Difficulties Leads to Enlightenment



8

## 10 The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

"On Prolonging One's Life Span"

10

## 17 The Object of Devotion — the Gohonzon: Its Meaning, Words and Imagery

Is it a symbol or the embodiment of what is to be revered in worship?

30



## 22 Learning from the Principle of "Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life"

The Relationship Between Human Life and the Universe

## 30 Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra #52

Treasuring Each Person is the Conclusion of the Lotus Sutra

44

## 44 Recollections of My Meetings With Leading World Figures

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria



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## Letter to the Editor

Thank you, for publishing *Living Buddhism!* I am a new member who has been receiving this magazine since January 1999. I love the cover photography. I liked the different culture centers featured in the inside covers last year and currently having the "What Is SGI and *Living Buddhism Magazine*" printed on the inside cover. My favorite features are "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" and "Buddhist Concepts for Today's Living." I also enjoyed the "Conversations on Education With Friends From Around the World." Thank you also for printing President Ikeda's speeches and guidance from 1990 [March 2000 issue]. And one last thing, the January 1999 and January 2000 issues had wonderful pictures of President Ikeda in them I have framed.

Valerie L. Johnson  
Alexandria, Virginia

## Acknowledgement

Thanks to Kirk Van Dorn of Roy Lake, Minnestota for suggesting we use the lotus flower symbol as an end box following each article. ☸

## Correction

Josei Toda is on the left in the picture on page 26 in the August issue.

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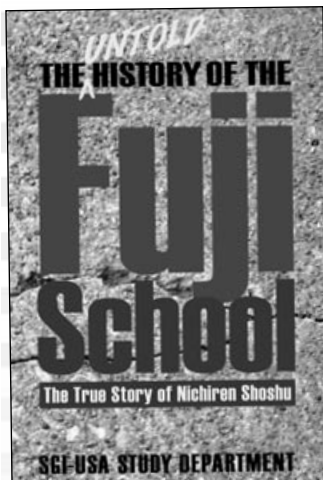
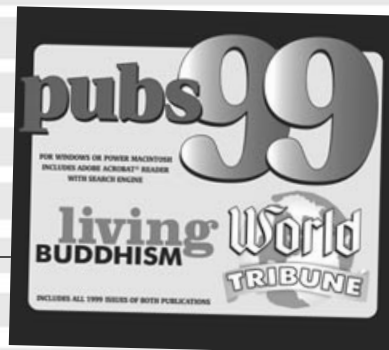
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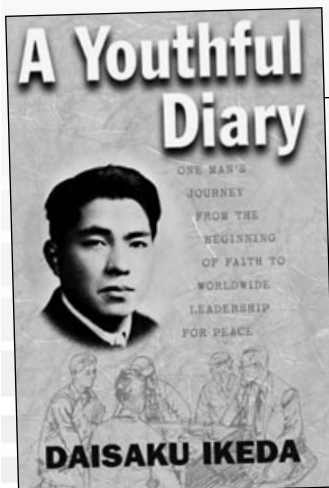
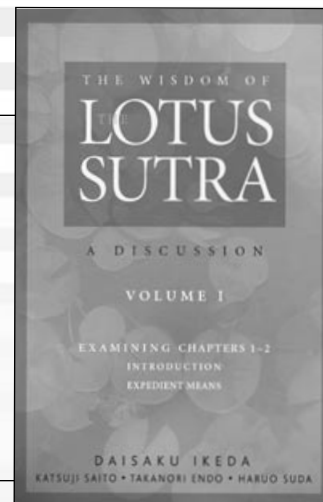
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# A School to Develop “LEADERS and SCHOLARS”

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

*Greetings to the readers of Living Buddhism.*

I hope you all had a wonderful summer. It is hard to believe how fast time flies. It seems like just yesterday that we were celebrating the beginning of the year 2000, and now we only have four months until the year 2001 begins.

In July, SGI President Ikeda wrote a poem dedicated to SGI-USA members called “Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” I know many of you have been studying this poem, and I would like to share some of my thoughts about it.

I was particularly moved by one stanza where President Ikeda quotes John F. Kennedy:

*— It is said that civilization  
is a race between education  
and catastrophe.  
It is you who will decide  
which of these will win! —*

This passage stresses the significance of education in shaping the future. When we view the condition of society entering this new century, the direction in which we move — toward peace or into violence; toward the development of culture, or into a shallow and materialistic culture — depends entirely upon the character, decisions and actions of the people. This is a fundamental principle of democracy, that the improvement of society depends upon the improvement of the people. Just as this stanza suggests, it is the people who will decide the future of humanity.

It is no accident that our organization was founded

by educators. It is also meaningful that the principle of *soka*, or value creation, started as a theory of education. Education and religion both aim to cultivate the human being and give people the spiritual tools to lead lives of integrity and meaning. As I mentioned last month, what the founding president Mr. Makiguchi sought in the realm of education — the means to cultivate the highest potential within each individual — he discovered in the realm of religion, specifically in the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

In this poem, President Ikeda also expresses his hopes for Soka University of America:

*Toward the civilization  
of the twenty-first century;  
for the sake of the young leaders and scholars;  
for the sake of the  
peace, prosperity and joy  
that come from humanistic education!  
Soka University of America  
has been constructed...*

I know that all of us, who are dedicating our lives to sinking the roots of Buddhist philosophy deep within American society, feel tremendous pride that such an educational institution as Soka University of America is being established in our country. This university is the pinnacle of Soka education, the ultimate expression of an idea that was born in the relationship between Mr. Makiguchi and his closest disciple, Josei Toda. As general director, I can't help feeling the responsibility that supporting this institution entails, and I know from talking to many of you that we share the concern about

how to support it.

As I read this poem, I can see that President Ikeda, as the founder of this university, doesn't want to establish a school with a prestigious name. His expectations for this school reach far beyond fame or reputation. He wants this to be a school where people of good character, leaders of real integrity, can be nurtured and developed.

It is clear to me that while the realm of education shares much with the realm of religion, the two are separate. Soka University of America is not a seminary, it is not a school dedicated to teaching or advancing any particular religious doctrine. Rather, when we understand President Ikeda's hope that this will be a school dedicated to the cultivation of the human being, we can see that its purpose or mission is not "religious" in the narrow sense of the word. Because its goal is educating people—"leaders and scholars" in all avenues of human endeavor dedicated to the "peace, prosperity and joy" of all humanity—this university is for the people of the entire world.

I feel that we are living in a truly dramatic, historic time. Or, should I say, through your efforts, you have created such a meaningful time. All of us have chosen to embrace Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism during an unprecedented period of human advancement. It is not a coincidence that, as a new century dawns, Soka University of America is opening in our country. Perhaps only in future generations, decades or even centuries from now, will the significance of this time be fully appreciated.

I am reminded of the grand assembly on Eagle Peak, and the Ceremony in the Air in which Shakyamuni revealed the true teachings of Buddhism and transmitted the essence of the Lotus Sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. As you know, this event is a grand metaphor for human life and the state of life of the Buddha Shakyamuni. The Treasure Tower and the mystical assembly are all symbols and images of the majestic life of Buddhahood.

But as Nichiren Daishonin states, "the purpose of



the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni... lies in his behavior as a human being" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 852). The grand and noble state of life called Buddhahood is what we are realizing through our actions in our families, jobs and communities. And the mythical assembly of the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra is actually occurring as each one of us

awakens to our mission, and opens the eyes of our friends to the nobility and power within their lives.

President Ikeda expresses his deep emotion in the opening of his poem:

*The Bodhisattvas of the Earth  
have emerged!  
They have arisen!  
They have started to stir,  
to move!*

I feel that this refers to all of us. What we are accomplishing is real. It is the actual appearance of people dedicated to living as bodhisattvas who have emerged from the earth of humanity, the earth of the real world.

The opening of Soka University of America, and our practice at this time and in this place, foretell an awesome and historic assembly of people whom future generations will certainly celebrate.

With great pride, let's live with awareness of the significance of this age. Let's be convinced that each of us possesses a noble purpose.

Hoping that I can see you in person soon, I will continue to pray for your health, happiness and prosperity and that of your families. I am so happy and honored to work together with all of you.

Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director

## *Perfect Imperfection:* **ASPIRATION for BUDDHAHOOD**

**H**aving goals can lead us in a positive direction. In the process of striving for goals, we see our unknown potential unfold before us. As we make progress, however small, we feel a sense of fulfillment and excitement. “Yes, I am moving ahead!” This sense of advancement contributes to our happiness.

Buddhism stresses the value of goals. Attaining Buddhahood—becoming absolutely happy—is the ultimate goal of our Buddhist practice. Our “aspiration for Buddhahood,” therefore, is the starting point of our Buddhist practice; it means to recognize our innate potential of Buddhahood and resolve to develop it while helping others do the same. A bodhisattva is someone who does just this, who is constantly working toward the goal of attaining enlightenment or *bodhi*.

In his *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, Nagarjuna, an Indian Buddhist scholar from the second or third century, discusses the three types of enlightenment—the enlightenment of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones and Buddhas. The enlightenment of a Buddha is the supreme *bodhi*, that is, the unsurpassed Buddha wisdom. Those who strive to achieve the

Buddha wisdom are called bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattvas are said to make four great vows in their Buddhist practice toward enlightenment. They are: 1) to save innumerable living beings; 2) to eradicate countless earthly desires; 3) to master immeasurable Buddhist teachings; and 4) to attain the supreme enlightenment of a Buddha. Put another way, as they begin their journey toward true happiness, bodhisattvas: 1) resolve to help others become happy; 2) resolve to overcome their own delusions and weaknesses; 3) seek the wisdom of Buddhism to the best of their ability; and 4) never to lose sight of their ultimate goal of attaining Buddhahood.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin states: “Bodhisattvas invariably make the four great vows, but without fulfilling their first vow, which is to save all living beings, they cannot fulfill the fourth vow, which is to attain supreme enlightenment” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 522). The Daishonin suggests that our altruistic efforts to pray and work for the happiness of others are crucial to our own happiness.

We begin our Buddhist practice resolute and diligent about our daily prayers and Buddhist study. However,

*“Bodhisattvas invariably make the four great vows, but without fulfilling their first vow, which is to save all living beings, they cannot fulfill the fourth vow, which is to attain supreme enlightenment”*

*Our determination to continue to practice Buddhism and strengthen our Buddha nature is the source of enlightened living and true happiness. We will always have some sort of problem. But as we continue to practice Buddhism, we can transcend our imperfect self.*

as time goes by, our initial “aspiration for Buddhahood” tends to wane, especially when we experience disappointments. Also, after we overcome an obstacle, or when things are going particularly well, we tend to relax in our resolve to continue practicing Buddhism. This is like setting out to climb the highest mountain in the world and giving up climbing discouraged by the first steep ascent, or being satisfied with reaching a small ridge half way up the peak.

In this regard, the Daishonin states:

**M**any 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. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they will “quickly attain the unsurpassed Buddha way.” To “continue” means to cherish Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the most important principle for all the Buddhas of the three existences. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 471)

In the course of our practice, we encounter various obstacles and hardships. Being a Buddhist does not mean to be immune to life’s ups and downs; rather, it means having a powerful tool to awaken our supreme potential of Buddhahood and overcome our obstacles. When we mistake the goal of our Buddhist practice as having no obstacles, it will be easy to get confused and discouraged by the realities of conflicts and challenges. For this reason, it is important to understand the true

goal of Buddhist practice as a dynamic process of developing the state of life in which we can overcome any obstacle through courage, wisdom and compassion.

In one sense, we are constantly reaching for the summit of our Buddhist practice since the attainment of Buddhahood is not a static condition we attain once and for all. With each step forward, our Buddhahood becomes stronger, more deeply rooted in our lives. So what is most important is to “continue” as the Daishonin says. We will always have some challenges with or without our Buddhist practice. But as we continue to practice Buddhism and build our inner strength, we develop confidence that our lives will be ultimately secure no matter what may happen; we enjoy each moment while working for the happiness of others.

To continue our Buddhist practice, however, we must constantly renew our “aspiration for Buddhahood.” Our determination to continue to practice Buddhism and strengthen our Buddha nature is the source of enlightened living and true happiness. We will always have some sort of problem as long as we live. In this sense, we will remain “imperfect.” But as we continue to practice Buddhism, we can constantly transcend our imperfect self, always growing in our capacity to challenge obstacles. This process of eternal progress and never-ending self-transcendence is in itself the attainment of Buddhahood; it is a state of “perfect imperfection” in which we can enjoy every moment of our lives. ☸

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

# The Path of Difficulties Leads to Enlightenment

BY ALEXIS TRASS, GARY, INDIANA

Over years of practice, particular passages from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have become favorites of those who practice his Buddhism. This series introduces some of those passages and the people whose lives they have impacted, proving that it is, indeed, a living Buddhism.

“A passage from the Lotus Sutra reads that it is ‘the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.’ Many hear about and accept this sutra, but when great obstacles arise, just as they are told would happen, few remember it and bear it firmly in mind. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they will ‘quickly attain the

unsurpassed Buddha way.’” (“The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 471)

**Background:** This excerpt is from a short letter addressed by Nichiren Daishonin to his faithful disciple Shijo Kingo in 1275. Kingo was under great pressure from his lord, Ema, and other fellow samurai to renounce his support for the Daishonin. This letter was written to encourage Kingo and strengthen his resolve.

**W**hen I read this passage for the first time, I was feeling sorry for myself and searching for something to lift me from my funk and inspire me to wholeheartedly practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. The title, “The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith,” hooked me right away, as I felt my faith was at a low point.

Nichiren Daishonin talks about hearing and accepting this sutra, but that was not my experience. I was born into this practice, so I have always known about and accepted whatever my parents told me about Buddhism. I was told to chant for what I wanted and I would get it. It sounded good to me. I was chanting for things like the newest Cabbage Patch Kid or that Santa Claus would leave more presents than he did the year before.

I didn’t have serious problems. I even remember thinking that I didn’t have to chant too much because I was born with so much fortune and my parents were

chanting for me every day. I was consciously choosing to ride on their fortune for as long as I could. If anyone told me that this practice would be difficult, I was asleep during that lesson.

Fast forward to the college years. During the mid-1990s, I was a student at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. That was the first time I remember having problems I couldn’t easily solve. I had a typical college experience. I worried about my grades and how to juggle seventeen credit hours, volunteer work and a part-time job. I spent way too much time on a romantic relationship that eventually left me with a broken heart and unpleasant memories. I constantly worried about not having enough money.

I wasn’t too active as an SGI member, either. I went to meetings every once in a while, but most times, I was trying to dodge the members that were calling me about going to district meetings. Because I didn’t chant



I learned that my new acceptance of this practice brought out some negativity, but that was OK because I could see what I needed to change about myself. Because I had such a positive

outcome from a negative experience and ended up feeling so good in the end, it was easier to keep in mind that I could become truly happy as long as I continued my faith.

and do gongyo on a regular basis, most of my college friends had no idea that I was a Buddhist.

Some months passed and I knew that I really wanted to practice for myself, challenge my real-world problems and become strong. Soon after I renewed my practice, something happened that made me question everything I had been told about Buddhism.

After chanting daimoku about it, I had decided to join a sorority. I really wanted to be part of an organization that did community service. It was a plus that they threw great parties. I was chosen to go on line (a probationary and initiation process) with the sorority of my choice. Being on line was not easy. All the girls who were on line were at the beck and call of the sorority members. We had to do a lot of ridiculous errands like delivering a single paper clip to another member across campus or run around town trying to find ice that was a certain size or shape. Almost every day, we would be up all evening and night standing straight with our chins up in a hot room trying not to move or show obvious signs of discomfort lest we be yelled at or forced to run in circles outside while barking. We were forbidden to make direct eye contact with a member. The whole process was completely humiliating and degrading.

I did things like that for a week and a half. I wasn't eating or sleeping. To say I felt utterly horrible during that time would be an understatement. I went in knowing that the process would be difficult and time-consuming. What I could never reconcile in my mind were my feelings about how human beings should be treated with respect versus how this sorority was treating people with a complete lack of respect. When I found time to chant, I asked the Gohonzon why I was being punished. After all, I reasoned, prayers that would make me

unhappy wouldn't be answered. I was chanting, I got exactly what I wanted, and I wasn't the least bit happy.

As it turned out, that experience was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I decided not to continue the process because I was missing class and I had no time to study. I also felt I wasn't doing anything that created value for myself or others, and I saw that this sorority, not unlike many others, did not value people and was more interested in parties and appearances than being humanistic. That was the exact opposite of what I wanted, but if I had not had that experience, I don't know if I would have seen it that way.

I realized that the moment I decided to be sincere and practice with more determination, a lot of negativity came out of my life. The negativity showed itself where I was the weakest because at that time, I was looking for acceptance just about anywhere I could get it. I could have easily been shaken to the point that I would not have wanted to practice at all.

"The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith" helped me understand why I was experiencing that hardship and convinced me not to throw my practice away. I learned that my new acceptance of this practice brought out some negativity, but that was OK because I could see what I needed to change about myself. Because I had such a positive outcome from a negative experience and ended up feeling so good in the end, it was easier to keep in mind that I could become truly happy as long as I continued my faith. I feel I am at the point where I can rejoice in difficulties (although not always in the beginning) because they assure me that I am on the right path to Buddhahood. ☸

*Alexis Trass is the Great Lakes Region Young Women's Leader.*

# NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS

## On Prolonging One's Life Span

(*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 954-55; *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 985)

The following is an excerpt from a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to one of his followers, which is known today as "On Prolonging One's Life Span." This is the study material for October study meetings in the SGI-USA.

**T**here are two types of illness: minor and serious. Early treatment by a skilled physician can cure even serious illnesses, not to mention minor ones. Karma also may be divided into two categories: fixed and unfixed. Sincere repentance will eradicate even fixed karma, to say nothing of karma that is unfixed. The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "This sutra provides good medicine for the ills of the people of Jambudvīpa."<sup>1</sup> These words can be found in no other sutra. All the sacred teachings of Shakyamuni's lifetime are the golden words of the Thus Come One; for countless kalpas, they have never contained the slightest falsehood. The Lotus Sutra is the truth of all truths taught by the Buddha, for it includes his declaration of "honestly discarding expedient means."<sup>2</sup> Many Treasures Buddha confirmed the truth of the Lotus Sutra, and all the other Buddhas lent their tongues in testimony. How, then, could it be false? Moreover, this sutra contains the greatest of all secrets. It tells of a woman who suffers from illness in the last five-hundred-year period of the twenty-five hundred years following the Buddha's passing.

King Ajatashatru broke out in virulent sores all over his body on the fifteenth day of the second month of his fiftieth year. Not even the skills of the great physician Jivaka were enough to cure him. It was fated that he would die on the seventh

day of the third month and fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. All the pleasures of his fifty years suddenly vanished, and the sufferings of an entire lifetime were gathered into twenty-one days. His death was predetermined by his fixed karma. But then the Buddha reiterated the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, entitling it the Nirvana Sutra and conferring it on the king. The king immediately recovered from his illness, and the grave offenses that had burdened his heart vanished like dewdrops.

More than fifteen hundred years after the Buddha passed away, there lived a man [in China] called Ch'en Chen.<sup>3</sup> It was prophesied that he would die at the age of fifty, but by following the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, he was able to prolong his life by fifteen years and lived to be sixty-five. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging also transformed his fixed karma and prolonged his life through his practice of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra says, "His life span was increased."<sup>4</sup> The persons mentioned above were men, not women, but they prolonged their lives by practicing the Lotus Sutra. Ch'en Chen lived before the last five-hundred-year period, so his change of karma was as extraordinary as rice ripening in winter or chrysanthemums blossoming in summer. In this age, it is as natural for a woman to change her fixed karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra as it is for rice to ripen in fall or chrysanthemums to bloom in winter.

## Background

**N**ichiren Daishonin sent this letter to the lay nun<sup>5</sup> Toki, the wife of Toki Jonin in 1279. Toki Jonin was one of the Daishonin's staunchest followers. A samurai and retainer of Lord Chiba, the constable of Shimosa, Jonin had become a follower of the Daishonin around 1254, one year after the latter had declared his teaching and practice of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Toki Jonin received some thirty letters from Nichiren Daishonin, including some of his most important works. On a number of occasions, he sent questions that prompted the Daishonin to write and clarify his teachings. He also often reported to the Daishonin about the condition of believers with whom he was in contact, and received messages from the Daishonin to relay to those believers.

In the third month of 1276, Toki Jonin had made the arduous journey from Shimosa province to Minobu to visit the Daishonin, carrying with him the ashes of his recently deceased mother. Jonin reported to Nichiren Daishonin that his mother had recently passed away peacefully, and that his wife, the lay nun Toki, despite struggling with illness herself, had exhaustively cared for his mother until the end. On that occasion, the Daishonin wrote a letter known by the title "The Bow and Arrow," and presented it to Jonin to give to his wife. In it he praised her for supporting her husband, saying: "[It is] the strength of a wife that guides the actions of her husband. In the same way, it is your support that has enabled Toki to visit me here now" (WND, 656).

In that letter, the Daishonin further says: "My greatest concern now is your illness. Fully convinced that you will recover your health, you should continue moxibustion treatment for three years, as regularly as if you had just begun. Even those who are free from illness cannot escape the transience of life, but you are not yet old, and because you are a votary of the Lotus Sutra, you will not meet an untimely death" (WND, 656).

Moxibustion was a contemporary medical

## Commentary

**There are two types of illness: minor and serious. Early treatment by a skilled physician can cure even serious illnesses, not to mention minor ones. Karma also may be divided into two categories: fixed and unfixed. Sincere repentance will eradicate even fixed karma, to say nothing of karma that is unfixed.**

**N**ichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the lay nun Toki, who had been suffering from illness. In it, he encourages her that through the power and benefit derived from practicing the Lotus Sutra, she can change her karma to be sick and prolong her life as a result.

First, he points out that illnesses can be either serious or minor. We may view this as referring either to the symptoms or cause of an illness. Of course, serious causes of illness most often yield serious symptoms. On the other hand, as in the case of cancer, for instance—a serious cause of illness may for decades yield no serious symptoms at all.

In another letter, "On Curing Karmic Disease," Nichiren Daishonin cites six causes of illness, quoting the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. They are: 1) disharmony of the four elements; 2) improper eating or drinking; 3) inappropriate practice of seated meditation; 4) attack by demons; 5) the work of devils; and 6) the effects of karma.

The first three causes may be thought of as describ-



At Wrigley Field in Chicago, a drunk fan falls down in the bleachers. In "On Curing Karmic Diseases," Nichiren Daishonin cites improper eating or drinking as one of the relatively light causes of illness compared to illnesses that are a result of karma which cannot be cured until the karma is transformed.

treatment that involved applying heat to certain key points on the body. It is possible that Shijo Kingo, another trusted believer in the Daishonin's teachings and a skilled medical practitioner, may have given her this advice as a sort of prescription and that the Daishonin here is encouraging her to be consistent in following that advice.

It seems that the lay nun Toki fell ill sometime in 1275, and it is quite possible that her illness was due in part to the exhausting effort of caring for her mother-in-law. In a short letter to Jonin dated the 29th day of the eleventh month, 1276, the Daishonin said, "I think of your wife's illness as if it were my own, and am praying to heaven day and night" (*Gosho Zenshu*, 978).

In 1277, the year before this letter, "On Prolonging One's Life Span," was written, the Daishonin sent a letter to Jonin titled "The Treatment of Illness," and another, dated the same day, to Shijo Kingo titled "Two Kinds of Illness." These two letters seem to have been prompted by a report from Jonin that ongoing epidemics had been "raging all the more fiercely" (WND, 1111) in that part of Japan. The lay nun Toki may have been suffering from an illness contracted at an earlier stage of those epidemics. Nichiren Daishonin himself was struggling with an illness amid the harsh environment of Minobu, where food was scarce and shelter from the elements was far less than ideal. In "On Prolonging One's Life Span," the Daishonin reiterates in more detail the encouragement he gave to the lay nun Toki in his earlier letter, "Bow and Arrow." In the latter part (not covered in this article) he emphasizes the preciousness of even a single day of life: "Life is the most precious of all treasures. Even one extra day of life is worth more than ten million *ryo* of gold" (WND, 955), and finally, "If you live even one day longer, you can accumulate that much more benefit. How truly precious your life is" (WND, 955). Though it is not entirely clear, evidence suggests that the lay nun Toki lived until the year 1303, so she apparently took the Daishonin's encouragement to heart, overcame her illness, and thus prolonged her life.



Joel W. Rogers/CORBIS

Two of the causes of illness, attack by demons and the work of devils, refer to destructive external forces such as pollution and exposure to carcinogens.

ing such influences as changes in weather or climate, immoderate lifestyle, etc. These may lead to serious symptoms, depending on one's resistance and basic physical strength. From the standpoint of cause, however, they are considered relatively light. The next two — attacks by demons and the working of devils — may be thought of as external influences of a more serious order, such as attacks by viruses or exposure to carcinogens. These, of course, may lead to very serious symptoms. Yet the Daishonin says that even these, if treated early on by a skilled physician, are not impossible to cure. Such diseases can be mitigated, and the patient's life prolonged, by medical treatment.

Illnesses that arise as the effects of karma, however, he says "are the most difficult to cure" (WND, 632). This is because when an illness arises from karma, it cannot be cured until and unless that karma is transformed and eradicated.

*Karma* is a Sanskrit word meaning action. Specifically it refers to three kinds of action — action of thought, action of speech and action of body. These correspond to thought, word and deed. The general Buddhist theory of



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Karma means actions of thoughts, speech and the body. These actions remain in one's life through the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and appear when they encounter an appropriate "relation" or "external cause."

karma, or causality, teaches that good karma — i.e., good thoughts, words or deeds — remains in one's life throughout the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. These causes produce effects that appear at some later time. From the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, however, cause and effect do not occur over time but are simultaneous. The moment an action occurs, a cause is formed along with its potential effect. This latent cause-effect pair remain in one's life until one encounters an appropriate "relation" or "external cause." Then they appear as a "manifest effect," or "karmic reward." Of course, karma, causes and effects, and the eventual "reward" they engender can be either good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Good causes reap good rewards; bad actions lead to ill rewards.

As the Bible says, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Certainly, most religions, including those based on the Judeo-Christian Bible, recognize the principle of causality in some general or basic sense. The Bible assigns the doling out of the ultimate "reward" of one's actions, faith, or lack thereof to God. Buddhism, on the other hand, views this process as inherent to life itself. It is a natural outcome, much like the growth, ripening and fruition of a planted seed. Each action we make can be viewed as a kind of "seed" in the soil of our eternal life. Depending on the type of seed and how it is planted, various fruits of various tastes, color and weight appear at different times. Some are heavy, some are light, some bitter, some sour, and some sweet.

Another way of looking at karma is as a life-habit or tendency. This is based on a simple principle — the

more often an action is repeated, the easier and more second-nature it becomes. Eventually it becomes part of a person's very make-up. Good actions practiced again and again become very good habits that yield ongoing good results. Bad actions repeated this way become bad habits that keep our lives on an unfortunate track. We can also view karma as the momentum and direction in which our life is moving.

A satellite traveling along a certain orbit can only change its course when great energy is applied, such as the thrust of a rocket. If our life is on a negative track, we need to drastically change our momentum and direction to move in a positive way. Simply doing a few good deeds — creating some good karma — is not enough to change the direction of a life weighted with heavy negative karma accumulated over countless lifetimes. The popular phrase "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic" might describe the futility of anything short of a profound cause to transform our destiny for the better. What we need when facing our heavy negative karma is something powerful enough to change our momentum, to pump tons of seawater out of the "sinking ship" of our life. The energy to do this is Buddha-wisdom. It is endowed with life-force, hope, courage, compassion, intelligence and joy. It is present in limitless quantities in the ultimate depths of life itself — within our innate Buddha nature.

## Two Kinds of Karma

In "On Prolonging One's Life Span," the Daishonin mentions two kinds of karma — fixed and unfixed. Fixed karma refers to certain actions and causes that yield specific effects or effects that occur at a specific time in our lives. Unfixed karma refers to actions that might yield a variety of more minor effects, or effects that may not occur at a specific time. Two actions that appear very similar can produce karma that is either fixed or unfixed depending on a number of factors. These factors might include what the object of that action is, the strength of will or intent with which the action was performed, whether it was a single, isolated action or part of an series of repetitive actions.

We can see a parallel to the principle of fixed and unfixed karma exists in secular law. Where an offense is minor, it is unlikely to lead to imprisonment and may not even be prosecuted. Even if one were convicted, it would be up to the discretion of the judge what kind of punishment to impose. While there is no judge in the equation, unfixed karma operates in a similar manner. In



David Lewis/CORBIS

In the Roman Catholic tradition, confession is a method of repentance where people submit to the authority of the church. In Buddhism, however, we humbly acknowledge that both the cause and the solution for suffering lie within our own lives and we take full responsibility for changing ourselves for the better.

the case of a serious crime, however, the judge is often bound by law to impose a fixed term of imprisonment. Once that sentence is imposed, it is very difficult to have it changed or commuted. Similarly, with fixed karma, the effect or result is fixed and very hard to change.

Buddhism views the length of one’s life as the primary example of fixed karma. Nevertheless, the Daishonin declares that even fixed karma can be changed through the power of the Lotus Sutra. Miao-lo<sup>6</sup> states in his Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra that through the benefit of practicing the Lotus Sutra, “Even fixed karma can be changed.”

Conversely, the worst and heaviest kind of fixed karma arises from slandering or disparaging the Lotus Sutra, that is, life itself or those who uphold and practice it. The only way to overcome this kind of fixed karma is to go back to the source—the Mystic Law—to believe in that Law, uphold it and work to spread it. Because even this heaviest of fixed karma can be overcome and

extinguished by believing in and practicing the Lotus Sutra, then it is only natural that lighter fixed karma and unfixed karma can be transformed in this way also.

This writing describes various kinds of illness as being the results of fixed and unfixed karma. In general, karma that determines the length of one’s life is regarded as fixed karma and that which does not affect the length of one’s life is regarded as unfixed karma. In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin refers to karmic illness as any serious illness that a skilled physician has trouble curing and that may lead to an early death, and suggests that “sincere repentance” will cure such illness. It is not known how serious an illness Lord Toki’s wife was suffering from, but the Daishonin encourages her that if even the most serious of illnesses can be cured through the Lotus Sutra, then less serious illnesses arising from “unfixed” karma can also be cured.

## Buddhist repentance

Regarding “repentance,” the Meditation of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy Sutra, which is regarded as an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra, reads, “If you wish to repent, then sit upright and ponder the true aspect [of all phenomena].” This may be interpreted to mean to sit upright in front of the Gohonzon, the manifestation of the “true aspect of all phenomena,” and sincerely chant with a strong prayer.

Living in a largely Judeo-Christian society, the idea of repentance might remind us of a rather unpleasant history of subjugation to religious authority. In Christian tradition it generally means the acknowledgment and condemnation of one’s own sins and an acceptance of or turning to God. The motivation of repentance or contrition comes from a love of God, whom human sin rejects or offends (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). The Bible says, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:21). By repenting, Christians believe God will forgive their sins. Historically, however, repentance often became an act of submission to the authority of the Church or its priests. Furthermore, repentance as understood in Western society does not provide a solution to either suffering or illness.

The term repentance in the passage we are studying from “On Prolonging Illness” is a translation of the Japanese term *zange*. Originally it meant to acknowledge one’s misdeeds of the past and express regret for them before the Buddha, fellow practitioners and the people. In this age, however, repentance means to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon. In doing so, the

spirit of repentance also may include acknowledging that the cause for whatever suffering, illness or obstacle we may be facing is to be found somewhere in our own lives. It is also helpful to recognize that the solution to that problem also exists only within our own lives, in our determination, prayer and action. Because suffering ultimately stems from actions that oppose the Mystic Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or the law of life — pledging deeply to support this Law and to fulfill our individual mission for the sake of Buddhism, and for peace and happiness, completes our spirit of repentance.

Rather than humble ourselves before the grace of an external deity or a clergyman, we humbly acknowledge that both the cause and the solution for suffering lie within our lives, and we take full responsibility for changing ourselves for the better. Our faith and practice give us the power to take responsibility for our happiness.

**The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra states: ‘This sutra provides good medicine for the ills of the people of Jambudvīpa.’ These words can be found in no other sutra . . . Ch’en Chen lived before the last five-hundred-year period, so his change of karma was as extraordinary as rice ripening in winter or chrysanthemums blossoming in summer. In this age, it is as natural for a woman to change her fixed karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra as it is for rice to ripen in the fall or chrysanthemums to bloom in winter.**

This section begins with the Daishonin quoting a phrase from the “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” (23rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra comparing the sutra to “good medicine” that can cure the ills of all people. He supports the validity of this statement by referring to the scene described in the sutra in which Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha and all the Buddhas of the ten directions who are Shakyamuni’s emanations attest to the Lotus Sutra’s supremacy.



Asclepius treats a patient. From a fifth-century Greek stone bas-relief sculpture. Nichiren Daishonin explains that we can cure even those illnesses resulting from fixed karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra — chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis

## The Greatest of All Secrets

Next, he speaks of a teaching contained in the sutra that he describes as “the greatest of all secrets.” That, he says, is the story of a woman who lives in the “last five-hundred-year period of the twenty-five hundred years following the Buddha’s passing” and suffers from an illness. In reality, no such story appears in the Lotus Sutra. Here, the Daishonin seems to be referring to the wife of Lord Toki herself. Both she and the Daishonin lived in what was held by all Japanese to be this “last five-hundred-year period.” That period marks the beginning of what is called the Latter Day of the Law. The Sutra teaches that in this evil age following the Buddha’s passing, the Lotus Sutra itself has the power to save from suffering those who are powerfully steeped in the “three poisons”—the illusions of desire—and even slanderers of the sutra and the Law it contains. It also teaches that women can attain enlightenment, which sutras prior to the Lotus either denied or never fully acknowledged. The fact that an ordinary woman such as the lay nun Toki could practice the essence of Buddhism, overcome illness, and attain enlightenment was surely a “secret” to most people of the Daishonin’s day.

Next, the Daishonin cites the examples of King Ajatashatru; Ch’en Chen, who was the brother of T’ien-t’ai; and Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, whose story appears in the Lotus Sutra. All three, he points out, transformed their fixed karma and thus prolonged their lives through their practice of the Lotus Sutra. King Ajatashatru had committed grave sins against Buddhism and the

Buddha; Ch'en Chen, as a general, had been responsible for the deaths of a great many people; and the sutra explains that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging had committed some offense in the past. Though they were men who lived before the Latter Day of the Law, they were able to change their fixed karma. The Lotus Sutra, however, was taught specifically for the present, implies the Daishonin; and, alone among a multitude of sutras, it guarantees the enlightenment of women. Therefore, it is "as natural for a woman to change her fixed karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra" as it is for rice and chrysanthemums to ripen and bloom in their respective seasons.

## Enhancing the Quality and Length of Our Lives

**B**uddhism teaches that the four sufferings — birth, aging, sickness and death — are inherent to all life. Sickness, therefore, cannot be avoided forever. When we become ill, the important thing is how we will face it. The key to overcoming illness or suffering, karmic or otherwise, is the strong faith and conviction that, through the power of the Lotus Sutra — through the power of our prayer to the Gohonzon — we will summon forth the strong life force and wisdom necessary to change our karma into a cause for happiness.

Nichiren Daishonin, concluding his account of how King Ajatashatru overcame illness, says: "And the grave offenses that had burdened his heart vanished like dewdrops." This is similar to another statement by the Daishonin that appears in his "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," which reads: "The offenses of living beings descend like dewdrops and frost upon their six senses as karmic hindrances. Yet the sun of wisdom can quickly eradicate them. The sun of wisdom in this Latter Day of the Law means Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which Nichiren now spreads" (GZ, 786).

"The grave offenses that had burdened his heart" indicates the weight of Ajatashatru's past slanders and actions to destroy Buddhism. The Daishonin compares them to "dewdrops," which will vanish before the "sun of wisdom." This "sun" represents a life imbued with the power of the pure life force, energy, hope and joy that well forth as a result of Buddhist faith and practice. These inner qualities function like a "sun" that makes all the burdens of our hearts "vanish like dewdrops" in its warm light.

Medical science is becoming all the more aware of the important role of human life-condition — of faith, confidence, joy, hope and determination — in overcoming illness. (For the Buddhist view on the inseparability of body



Norman Cousins (left, in a 1987 dialogue with SGI President Ikeda), supported the belief that possessing hope, vitality, and joy, the ability to have fulfilling relationships and the self discipline and common sense to live a balanced life contributes to one's health and longevity.

and mind, please see "The Oneness of Body and Mind" in *Living Buddhism*, August 2000, pp. 6–7.) Research shows that hope and even humor can measurably improve the body's resistance to disease. In this sense, we may view the underlying effect of fixed negative karma as a tendency to have weak life force — to be short on hope, to be humorless or joyless and to lack wisdom. Science is making it increasingly clear that possessing hope, vitality, and joy, as well as the ability to have fulfilling relationships and the self-discipline and common sense to live a balanced life, contributes to one's health and longevity.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of the simultaneity of cause and effect. That means that the moment we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with strong faith in our Buddhahood, we tap the power of our innate Buddha nature, the source of abundant wisdom and life force and all of the other qualities required for a healthy life. Further, when we pray and move our bodies for the sake of others' health and happiness based on the Buddhist law of life, we exercise our lives on the deepest level at which body and mind are one. By doing so, we bring forth the power to help us stay healthy and fight disease, and enhance the quality and length of our lives. ☸

*By the SGI-USA Study Department*

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.
2. *Ibid.*, chap. 2
3. Ch'en Chen (n.d.) was an elder brother of T'ien-t'ai and a general of the Ch'en dynasty.
4. Lotus Sutra, chap. 20
5. A female believer of Buddhism who has taken the tonsure as a nun has done, but continues to live as a lay member of society.
6. (711-782) Restorer of the T'ien-t'ai school.

# THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION— THE GOHONZON: ITS MEANING, WORDS AND IMAGERY

*When people look at the Gohonzon for the first time, what do they see? And what do they make of it? It is a scroll with unfamiliar inscriptions. But is it a religious icon or sacred formula?*

The following essay was presented at the SGI-USA Study Department conference held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center on April 21-23, 2000.

By Shin Yatomi, SGI-USA Vice Study Department Leader

One of the most debated issues regarding any religious object is whether it *is* sacred or *represents* the sacred. Put another way, is it an actual embodiment or symbol of what is to be revered in worship? Those questions about the nature of religious objects have played no small part in the history of religion.

The Iconoclastic Controversy in which Christians debated the merits of religious icons is considered the last step toward the great schism between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church in 1054.<sup>1</sup>

The interpretation of the Eucharist—the consecrated bread and wine used in Holy Communion—has been another source of doctrinal disputes in the Christian Church since the earlier Middle Ages, especially during the Reformation period. At the thirteenth session of the Council of Trent held in 1551, the Roman Catholic Church reaffirmed its doctrine of transubstantiation, asserting the conversion of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the whole substance of the Body and Blood of Christ, only the appearances of the bread and wine remaining after the consecration.<sup>2</sup>

The Protestants opposed this view. For example, Martin Luther claimed that after the consecration, the



"Communion of the Apostles" by Joos van Gent (15th cent.). Is the Eucharist the symbol or the actual Body and Blood of Christ? The meaning of the consecrated bread and wine has been a topic of centuries-long debate in Christianity.

substances both of the Body and Blood of Christ and of the bread and wine coexist in union with each other.<sup>3</sup> Ulrich Zwingli, on the other hand, affirmed that the Lord's Supper was primarily a memorial rite, and that there was no change in the elements whatever.<sup>4</sup>

As evident in the history of Christianity, religious objects often trigger tension and anxiety for those who think that the divine is beyond material expression. At the same time, people tend to seek something tangible as an object or expression of their devotion. Some people regard a sign of the divine as the divine itself while others reduce the significance of a sacred object to a ritual symbol devoid

of its own spirituality. The nature of a religious object, in this way, is often at the center of theological debate and confusion in many religions.

## Is the Gohonzon a Symbol or the Embodiment?

In the case of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, its object of devotion works as both symbol and embodiment.

When people look at the Gohonzon<sup>5</sup> for the first time, what do they see? What do they make of it? It is a scroll with unfamiliar inscriptions, but is it a religious icon or sacred formula? Whatever their reaction, it is difficult not to notice oriental calligraphic characters arranged in a specific pattern—though most have no idea what those characters mean or why they are arranged that way. As our first impressions of things often reveal some important insights into their nature, what most of us first notice about the appearance of the Gohonzon, that is, its written characters and their graphic arrangement, provides us with some clues to Nichiren Daishonin's intent in creating this object of devotion.

In one sense, the Gohonzon represents the Daishonin's enlightenment and, thereby, our innate Buddha nature. The Gohonzon is a symbol of all people's potential Buddhahood; it signifies something other than itself. This is why the Daishonin explains to his elderly disciple Abutsu-bo the meaning of his offerings to the Gohonzon—which is referred to as “the treasure tower”—as follows: “You may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures,<sup>6</sup> but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. You, your-



Martin Luther (1483-1546), the leader of the Protestant Reformation, claimed that after the consecration, the substances both of the Body and Blood of Christ and of the bread and wine coexist in union with each other.

self, are a Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies.<sup>7</sup> You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 299-300). Here the Daishonin explains that when we pray to the Gohonzon, the Gohonzon is pointing our attention to our own innate Buddha nature. The Gohonzon reflects our reverence back to our supreme inner potential. In this sense, the Gohonzon functions as a pointer to our Buddhahood; it is a symbolic representation. In the above passage, therefore, the Daishonin cautions us not to mistake the sign for the signified, which would externalize and objectify the Buddhahood that actually resides within us.

From another perspective, however, the Gohonzon functions as an embodiment of the Daishonin's enlightenment. The Gohonzon is not intrinsically a self-conscious,

living entity embodying the Daishonin's enlightenment, but it functions in our practice *as if it were*. The Daishonin explains: “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND, 412). When we put our faith in the Gohonzon and pray to it in the spirit of this passage, the Gohonzon transforms itself from mere paper and ink into a concrete manifestation of the Daishonin's enlightenment in the reality of our consciousness. The Gohonzon thus works as an external stimulus that calls forth our inner potential of Buddhahood. On one hand, we know that the Gohonzon is a symbolic representation of our Buddha nature. In our practice, on the other hand, we pray to it as if it were the actual embodiment of the Daishonin's enlightened life so that we may gain confidence that the self-same nature exists within our lives as well. Viewing the Gohonzon as the embodiment of the Daishonin's enlightenment is not simplistic make-believe, although the Gohonzon physically remains as paper and ink; it is the affirmation of our faith in the Daishonin's enlightenment and in our own enlightened potential. The Gohonzon, in a sense, serves on behalf of the absent Daishonin as a concrete example of attaining enlightenment.

The Gohonzon, in this way, helps our practice as both symbol and embodiment of Buddhahood. It must be noted, however, that the Gohonzon as an embodiment of enlightenment should not be taken to mean the mysterious presence of the divine in the inanimate object. The

Gohonzon becomes an embodiment of Buddhahood through our faith and practice. In other words, the importance of the Gohonzon as the embodiment of the Daishonin's enlightenment is meaningful and real only to the extent that practitioners pray to it with faith and view it as an example to follow, not as an external saving force. The meaning of the Gohonzon as intended by the Daishonin, in this sense, is created through a dynamic interaction between the object of devotion and its devotee. The significance of the Gohonzon, therefore, would be incomplete without the practitioner's faith and practice.

## The Treasure Tower: the Imagery of the Gohonzon

The design of the Gohonzon dates back to the origin of Mahayana Buddhism, which took shape around the turn of the first century in India. In reaction to monastic Buddhism, which emphasized personal salvation through austerities, Mahayana Buddhists stressed the importance of altruism and the role of lay practitioners (i.e., bodhisattvas) to spread the teachings. The Mahayanists called their doctrine "Mahayana" or "the greater vehicle" to carry the masses to the shore of enlightenment while referring to monastic Buddhism as "Hinayana" or "the lesser vehicle." The popular Mahayana movement developed around the worship of *stupas*—mounds or towers originally built to enshrine Shakyamuni's relics. After Shakyamuni's death, which is dated by many scholars around the fourth or fifth century before the Common Era, his lay followers started to build



"The Council of Trent" by Hermanos Zuccarelli (16th cent.). At Session Thirteen of the Council in 1551, the Roman Catholic Church repudiated the Protestant doctrines of the Eucharist, affirming the complete conversion of the consecrated bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Archivo Iconografico, S.A. / CORBIS

within the lives of all people. Thus he addresses one of his disciples as follows: "Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself" (WND, 299).

The inscriptions on both sides of "Nam-myohorenge-kyo Nichiren" on the Gohonzon depict the assembly of various living beings who gather around the treasure tower to listen

to Shakyamuni's preaching as described in the Lotus Sutra. Some of them are not even humans, such as the dragon king's daughter who demonstrates her enlightenment. The diversity of this so-called Assembly in the Air in the Lotus Sutra reflects the nature of the early *stupa* worship, which was not limited to the elite priestly class but was open to people from all walks of life. These inscriptions on the Gohonzon represent the ten states of existence (i.e., the Ten Worlds): intense suffering and despair (Hell); insatiable desires (Hunger); selfish foolishness (Animality); arrogance and belligerence (Anger); transient calmness (Humanity); intense yet temporary rapture (Heaven); self-improvement (Learning); self-awakening to the partial truths of nature and humanity (Realization); altruism (Bodhisattva); and the indestructible state of happiness rooted in compassion and wisdom (Buddhahood). The Gohonzon graphically shows that each of these

these *stupas*, especially during the reign of King Ashoka (268-232 BCE), who was the third ruler of the Maurya dynasty and the first king to unify India. Many lay followers gathered around the stupas and paid homage to the Buddha, who was now absent. The popularity of *stupa* worship is evident in the central role of the jeweled tower in the Lotus Sutra, one of the early Mahayana sutras, which is thought to have been compiled around the first century.<sup>8</sup> The Daishonin used the *stupa* or "treasure tower" from the Lotus Sutra as a chief graphic motif for inscribing the Gohonzon. Down the center of the Gohonzon is written "Nam-myohorenge-kyo Nichiren," which signifies his awakening to the universal law of Nam-myohorenge-kyo or Buddhahood. As he explains, "The treasure tower is Nam-myohorenge-kyo" (WND, 299), the Daishonin views the treasure tower depicted in the Lotus Sutra as symbolic of the Buddha nature inherent

to Shakyamuni's preaching as described in the Lotus Sutra. Some of them are not even humans, such as the dragon king's daughter who demonstrates her enlightenment. The diversity of this so-called Assembly in the Air in the Lotus Sutra reflects the nature of the early *stupa* worship, which was not limited to the elite priestly class but was open to people from all walks of life. These inscriptions on the Gohonzon represent the ten states of existence (i.e., the Ten Worlds): intense suffering and despair (Hell); insatiable desires (Hunger); selfish foolishness (Animality); arrogance and belligerence (Anger); transient calmness (Humanity); intense yet temporary rapture (Heaven); self-improvement (Learning); self-awakening to the partial truths of nature and humanity (Realization); altruism (Bodhisattva); and the indestructible state of happiness rooted in compassion and wisdom (Buddhahood). The Gohonzon graphically shows that each of these

ten states of existence—when firmly grounded in the law of Nam-myohorenge-kyo—exhibits its most positive functions to nurture one’s life and happiness. For example, although we may find ourselves in the state of Hell, through our prayer to the Gohonzon, we can transform our intense suffering and despair into a source of strength and hope to overcome our difficulties. Incidentally, some ritual aspects involving our practice to the Gohonzon may be reminiscent of the *stupa* worship of the early Mahayana Buddhists. For example, the sounding of the bell may derive from the offerings of music often performed in front of a *stupa*. Other offerings to the Gohonzon may also be traced back to early *stupa* worship, such as the offerings of flowers and incense as depicted in the Lotus Sutra.

## **Words and Imagery: Subjective Universality**

**T**he mode of expression that the Daishonin chose for the imagery of the treasure tower is unique. He depicted the treasure tower and the surrounding assembly of various beings in written characters. While there are examples of pictorial depictions of the treasure tower or calligraphic religious objects that predate the Gohonzon,<sup>9</sup> the Daishonin’s imagery of the treasure tower depicted solely in written characters was rare if not unprecedented. His use of graphic characters follows the emphasis placed on scriptures in the Buddhist tradition. After Shakyamuni’s death, stupas containing Shakyamuni’s relics became objects of veneration among lay practitioners. Soon the

pictorial and sculptural images of Shakyamuni and other imagined Buddhas, as well as bodhisattvas and Buddhist deities, were produced as religious icons. Furthermore, especially within the Mahayana tradition, greater emphasis was placed on scriptures, even to the point where people literally worshiped the scrolls of Buddhist texts. For example, in medieval India, the Wisdom (Skt *Prajnaparamita*) sutras became the objects of devotion among many Mahayana Buddhists.<sup>10</sup> Regarding the religious importance of scriptures within the Mahayana tradition, Jacob N. Kinnard comments: “Relics and stupas are certainly worthy of veneration...but the book is more valuable and more valued, because the book is the source of the Tathagata’s wisdom, and consequently the source of his attainment of enlightenment, and thus the source of the value of the relics.”<sup>11</sup>

The Daishonin also often stresses the important role of written materials, particularly the Lotus Sutra. For example, he states: “The Lotus Sutra is both the teaching of the Buddha and the embodiment of the Buddha wisdom. If one puts sincere faith in each character and brushstroke in it, then one will become a Buddha in one’s present form” (WND, 969). In refuting medieval Zen Buddhism, which rejected the role of Buddhist scriptures, the Daishonin states: “If one disregards written characters, what else could one regard as the Buddha’s work?” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 153). He also writes: “Characters are the forms that manifest the minds of all living beings” (GZ, 380). The Daishonin’s use of written characters as a medium for the Gohonzon reflects his strong belief in the role of written materials in communicating not only the material reality of things, but also the spir-

itual reality of humanity.

The Daishonin’s use of the treasure tower’s imagery as a graphic motif for the Gohonzon and his use of written characters as a medium of expression show his profound insight into the nature of religious worship. He seems to have understood how an image and a written text speak differently to our minds. In inscribing the Gohonzon as an image expressed in characters, the Daishonin unifies the specificity of a graphic image with the universality of written characters to convey the reality of the Buddha nature that is unique to each person and simultaneously universal to all people. The subjective yet universal aspect of the Buddha nature is at the core of the Daishonin’s teaching, which promotes our awareness of the supreme potential not only in our lives but in the lives of others as well.

The Gohonzon is concrete in the sense that it depicts a specific image. But it is not a pictorial image of the treasure tower, Shakyamuni or Nichiren Daishonin himself. If the Gohonzon took such a form, it would be easy to view the Gohonzon as a depiction of someone else’s life or an event far removed from our lives. If the Gohonzon were rendered as the Daishonin’s image, for example, we might respect it, but we would not identify with it. For we simply don’t look like a thirteenth-century Japanese monk! The Daishonin instead created the Gohonzon in characters to depict the specific imagery of the treasure tower from the Lotus Sutra, which symbolizes our innate Buddhahood. Written characters are suited to express universal concepts. But they are often abstract and lack a sense of immediacy. Images, on the other hand, are better suited to elicit personal responses



Bill Ross / CORBIS

Like the moon guiding each and all earth-bound travelers at the same time, the Gohonzon illuminates our individual yet shared Buddhahood with the light of wisdom.

from their viewers because they are more immediate to our senses. The Gohonzon, in terms of its graphic motif and calligraphic medium, is a hybrid of written and visual communication. Judging from the way the Daishonin chose to inscribe the Gohonzon, he probably intended it to communicate both conceptually and sensuously to our minds the universality of the Buddha nature and its immediacy to our lives.

Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, a German literary critic, explains the subjective yet universal nature of poetry as follows: “Poetry should become like the moon, which by night follows one wanderer in the woods from peak to peak and at the same time another from wave to wave and thus attends each, while it simply describes its great arc across heaven and yet ultimately draws it around the earth and around the wanderers also.”<sup>12</sup>

Richter’s analogy of the moon is fit to describe the functions of the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon illuminates the existence of Buddhahood for each practitioner. At the same time, the Gohonzon traces the orbit of enlightenment for all people to see. The Gohonzon — like the moon individually following all travelers on earth — sheds light on the innate Buddhahood in each of us.

The Daishonin’s intent to make the Gohonzon’s meaning universal to all people is also evident in the linguistic and cultural aspects of the Gohonzon.

He used the words and personages of India, China and Japan to depict the Gohonzon.<sup>13</sup>

Two Buddhist deities are inscribed in a medieval Sanskrit orthography; Great Bodhisattva Hachiman comes from Japanese mythology, and there is the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, who established the Lotus Sutra’s supremacy in medieval China. In medieval Japan, those three countries were viewed as the entirety of the civilized world. In other words, the Daishonin probably wished to make the Gohonzon universal in its language and content as well.

Some of the physical features of the Gohonzon suggest the Daishonin’s minute considerations to make the object of devotion suited to the message that it carries to each and all practitioners: the personal yet universal reality of the Buddha nature. Of course, what is most important in our practice is the act of chanting Nam-

myoho-rengé-kyo to the Gohonzon. The seemingly minor details of the Gohonzon, however, sometimes reveal much about the Daishonin’s wisdom and compassion. The goal of this article is that knowing those details may help us become more aware of the Daishonin’s intent behind his inscription of the Gohonzon and thereby pray more strongly and confidently. ☸

1. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. “Iconoclastic Controversy,” pp. 815-16.
2. *Ibid.* “Eucharist,” p. 567; “Transubstantiation,” p. 1637.
3. *Ibid.* “Consubstantiation,” p. 408.
4. *Ibid.* “Eucharist,” p. 567.
5. The object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is called the Gohonzon. “Go” is an honorific prefix, and “honzon” means an object of fundamental respect.
6. Many Treasures is a Buddha who appeared, seated within the treasure tower at the Ceremony in the Air, in order to lend credence to Shakyamuni’s teachings in the Lotus Sutra.
7. Three kinds of body that a Buddha possesses, namely: (1) the Dharma body, which indicates the fundamental truth or Law to which a Buddha is enlightened; (2) the reward body, which indicates the wisdom; and (3) the manifested body, or the merciful actions of a Buddha to save people and the physical form that he assumes for that purpose. The three bodies are generally considered to be three different types of Buddhas, but in the Lotus Sutra they are shown to be the three aspects of a single Buddha (“Glossary,” WND, 1275).
8. Nakamura, Hajime. *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989. p. 186.
9. Stone, Jacqueline I. *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. pp. 272-88.
10. Kinnard, Jacob N. *Imaging Wisdom: Seeing and Knowing in the Art of Indian Buddhism*. Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999. pp. 114-47.
11. *Ibid.* p. 119.
12. Richter, Jean Paul Friedrich. “School for Aesthetics.” *German Romantic Criticism*. The German Library: Vol. 21. Ed. A. Leslie Willson. New York: Continuum, 1982. p. 45.
13. For the meaning of each inscription on the Gohonzon, see the “Diagram of the Gohonzon Transcribed by High Priest Nichikan” and “Further Explanation” in *Living Buddhism*, November 1997, pp. 16-17, pp. 19-24.

# Learning From **The Principle of THREE THOUSAND REALMS *In a Single Moment of Life***

As we practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we often come across the term "three thousand realms in a single moment of life"<sup>1</sup> (Jpn *ichinen sanzen*). This article focuses on what we can learn from this sublime principle of life.

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*The glossary of The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin explains three thousand realms in a single moment of life:*

*A philosophical system established by T'ien-t'ai [sixth-century Buddhist scholar]. The three thousand realms indicates the varying aspects and phases that life assumes at each moment. At each moment, life manifests one of the Ten Worlds. Each of these worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself [mutual possession of the Ten Worlds], thus making one hundred possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the ten factors and operates within each of the three realms of existence, thus making three thousand realms. (WND, 1279)*

**T**he Ten Worlds,<sup>2</sup> from lowest to highest, are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger (Belligerence), Humanity (Tranquillity), Heaven (Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. Within a single state at any given moment, life manifests the characteristics of one of these particular worlds or life-states.

These worlds are not static—they change freely, moment to moment, in no specific order. Each contains the potential to become any of the other nine. This changeability is explained by the "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds."

All of the Ten Worlds have "ten factors" in common, which function within any of the Ten Worlds. They are appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation (or external cause), latent effect, manifest effect and their consistency from beginning to end.

The "three realms" clarify that the Ten Worlds

operate beyond the confines of individual human lives, extending into the environment and all phenomena. The concept of the three realms describes *where* the Ten Worlds function. They are: the realm of the individual comprised of the five components (form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness), the realm of living beings and the realm of the environment. The five components form a living being who manifests the Ten Worlds in his or her surroundings or environment.

The teaching of three thousand realms clarifies the dynamic relationship between human life and the life of the universe. Buddhism perceives that while life may seem calm at the surface, just beneath is a powerful whirlpool. T'ien-t'ai, too, recognized the ever-changing aspect of human life, yet also perceived the constant reality within the whirlpool: the reality of Buddhahood.

Praised by Miao-lo [711–82, sixth patriarch of the T’ien-t’ai school] as “the ultimate of all Buddhist teachings,” three thousand realms systematizes the inner realm of all life and constitutes the pinnacle of the Buddhist life-philosophy. It is a spectacular product of human wisdom. In the comprehensive scope of this principle we can sense T’ien-t’ai’s genius.

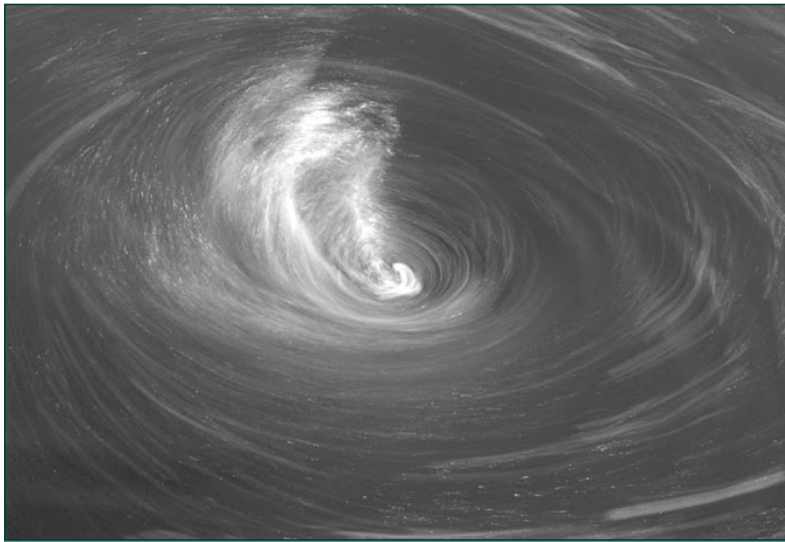
Early Mahayana Buddhist scholars such as Nagarjuna<sup>3</sup> and Vasubandhu<sup>4</sup> had similar insights, but did not present them in the form of a comprehensive life-philosophy. T’ien-t’ai, however, accomplished the awesome task of elucidating a holistic philosophy of life.

In early Buddhist tradition, the Ten Worlds were often described as distinct realms or categories of beings. In other words, before T’ien-t’ai appeared in China in the sixth century, Buddhas were believed to reside in worlds beyond the reach of ordinary people. But T’ien-t’ai, using the Lotus Sutra as his guide, redefined the Ten Worlds as ten conditions within human life. T’ien-t’ai was aware, as the Lotus Sutra dramatically taught, that ordinary people possess all Ten Worlds including Buddhahood. This concept was revolutionary compared to pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

SGI President Ikeda said:

In The Threefold Secret Teachings [expounded by the twenty-sixth high priest of

Nichiren Shoshu, Nichikan<sup>5</sup>], the question is posed: How can the life-moment, which is infinitesimally short, contain three thousand worlds? The answer given is this: “Three Thousand Possible Worlds in Every Life-moment’ [three thousand realms in a single moment of life] has two meanings according to the Lotus Sutra: ‘to contain’ and ‘to permeate.’ The entire universe is contained in



Within the violent and powerful whirlpool of life, T’ien-t’ai saw the constant reality of Buddhahood. The concept of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life” clarifies the dynamic relationship between human life and the life of the universe.

each life at every moment of its existence. Conversely, each life-moment continually permeates the entire universe. The life-moment is a particle of dust holding the elements of all worlds in the universe. It is a drop of water whose essence differs in no way from the vast ocean itself.” (*Life: An Enigma, A Precious Jewel*, p. 165)

These two concepts—“to contain” and “to permeate”—are vital to comprehending the essence of “three thousand realms.”

## “TO CONTAIN”

Our lives contain the vastness of the universe. Specifically, “to contain” means that we inherently possess the supreme, universal life-condition called Buddhahood.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” Nichiren Daishonin states:

The mutual possession of the Ten

Worlds is as difficult to believe as fire existing in a stone or flowers within a tree. Yet under the right conditions such phenomena actually occur and are believable. To believe that Buddhahood exists within the human world is the most difficult thing of all—as difficult as believing that fire exists in water or water in fire. (WND, 359)

Although difficult to fathom, Buddhism posits that the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, which applies to the microcosm of human life, also applies to the macrocosm of the universe. The fact that this principle applies on a universal scale also tells us that the potential of Buddhahood is present in all universal phenomena. Buddhism equates the nature of our innate Buddhahood with the Buddhahood inherent in the universe; they are in essence the same, but manifest themselves differently. Because of the obvious vastness of the outer universe, inner life must be equally vast. Praising the grandeur

of the human heart, Victor Hugo writes in *Les Misérables*, “There is one spectacle grander than the sea—that is the sky; there is one spectacle grander than the sky—that is the interior of the soul.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, because all people are potential Buddhas, the lives of all people should be treasured. Nichiren Daishonin writes in “The Gift of Rice”: “Life is the foremost of all treasures. It is expounded that even the treasures of the entire major world system cannot equal the value of one’s body and life” (WND, 1125).

## “TO PERMEATE”

**T**o permeate,” in terms of “three thousand realms,” refers to the pervasive power of one’s life. Nichiren Daishonin states in “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”:

The Great Teacher Miao-lo says: “You should understand that one’s life and its environment at a single moment encompass the three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the Buddha way, one puts oneself in accord with this fundamental principle, and one’s body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena.” (WND, 366)

Our lives permeate the universe. Therefore, the condition of our lives—what is in our hearts and minds—is crucial. The core philosophy of three thousand realms is that “it is the heart that is important” (WND, 1000). In his lecture on Nichiren Daishonin’s letter “Gift of an Unlined Robe,” President Ikeda states:

The Mystic Law elucidates the

inscrutable workings of the heart. The doctrine of a life-moment possesses three thousand realms explains the immense power of the heart. A Buddha is someone who understands, on the most profound level, the workings and the power of the heart. (*Learning from the Goshō*, p. 24)

As American author James Allen<sup>6</sup> put it, “The vision that you glorify in your mind, the ideal that you enthrone in your heart—this you will build your life by, and this you will become.” Buddhism teaches that the power of our lives can permeate the universe and change our environment for the better.

“To permeate” and “to contain” encourage us to reflect on the state of our heart: What is our frame of mind? Is it strong or weak? Is it empowered or lifeless? Is it expanding or shrinking? Is it pure or impure? These are crucial questions for us as Buddhists. *Soka* of Soka Gakkai means “value creation.” The Buddhist way of life is characterized by ceaseless effort to *improve* our state of life—to lead a valuable and worthwhile existence. We chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to manifest Buddhahood.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE TEN WORLDS

**T**he theory of the Ten Worlds prompts us to ask where our life-state resides, giving us further clues as to our inherent Buddhahood.

There is a major difference between how the six lower worlds (Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity and Heaven) and the four noble worlds (Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood) mani-

fest in our lives. In the six lower worlds, we passively react to stimuli in our environment, controlled by what are usually negative impulses. But in the four noble worlds, we actively explore the meaning of life and orient ourselves in a positive direction.

While other Buddhist philosophies look at Buddhahood as removed from the other nine worlds, Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism locates the supreme life-condition of Buddhahood, inherent in every individual, nowhere but in the lower nine worlds. This is a very important point. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime means that our innate Buddhahood manifests itself in the reality of our day-to-day existence and is reflected nowhere but in our actions as human beings. Nichiren Daishonin states, “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND, 852). A Buddha is by no means a supernatural being.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE MUTUAL POSSESSION OF THE TEN WORLDS

**T**he principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds points to the truth that ordinary people inherently possess the Buddha nature and that even a Buddha possesses the lower nine worlds. This principle expresses the dynamic changeability of life.

Suppose there is a man who is happy one day but suffering the next day due to some misfortune. The joy he felt yesterday is completely gone. It does not exist anywhere in his heart now. His entire being is in a hellish state. Where did yesterday’s Heaven and Humanity go?

Suddenly, he receives incredibly good news. His emotional pain is instantly gone. He is light, happy and full of joy. Where did these new feelings come from? Surely, they came from within his life. What happened to that state of Hell—is it gone for good?

The fact is, he may find himself in the world of Hell again according to what happens in the next moment. When he is experiencing Hell, the other nine worlds are dormant. Any of the other nine worlds can replace the life-condition of Hell. Also, the current state of Hell may be further aggravated. We can go from one level of suffering to an even deeper suffering. Likewise, when we are in a rapturous state, all other life-conditions are latent, but they retain the potential to become the dominant state at any moment. The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds allows any world to transform into any of the other nine.

Then, how do the Ten Worlds coexist in one's life? Hunger, for instance, does not necessarily follow after Hell. Nor are Hunger and Anger physically side by side. They coexist within one's life sort of like ten different liquids mixed in a cocktail. This fusion of the ten different worlds in one's life and their potential to become manifest or dormant is what is meant by the expression "mutual possession."

Our life-condition is fluid. The vital question is what is our fundamental, dominant life-condition. Are we constantly frustrated, in a state of Hunger? Or are we always seeking the truth of life and trying to share with others what we've discovered, living as a bodhisattva? The principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds points to the necessity of Buddhist practice to make Buddhahood our fundamental life-condition. Since Buddhahood



Ted Sreethinsky/CORBIS

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "That only which we have within, can we see without." Similarly, Buddhism teaches that we attain Buddhahood as we are. The key is strengthening and expanding our inner self by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

exists as a potential within everyone's life, it is vitally important to solidify Buddhahood and allow it to dominate the other nine worlds. The most positive transformation within one's life is attaining Buddhahood, referred to in the SGI as "human revolution."

Buddhism teaches us how to cultivate our inner Buddha nature until it constitutes the basis of our existence. Our Buddha nature is most easily reflected in the actions of the

bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas of the Earth, as described in the Lotus Sutra, are bodhisattvas-in-action and Buddhas-in-essence. In "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," President Ikeda explains: "The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact also Buddhas whose lives are illuminated by the awareness that the present moment is one with eternity" (October 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 38). Buddhahood is strengthened

through our bodhisattva action based on our faith in the Mystic Law.

The word *renge* (lotus flower) of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo symbolizes the blossoming of human beauty out of the impurities of greed, anger and foolishness. Since Buddhahood does not exist apart from the lower nine worlds, a Buddha is not aloof from reality enjoying absolute happiness by him- or herself apart from the interconnectedness with all life and living beings. Nor is the life-condition of Buddhahood supernatural. The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds suggests that the location of this supreme life-condition is within the lives of ordinary people. The Daishonin looked upon Buddhahood as “the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND, 832).

Buddhism teaches that we attain Buddhahood as we are. The key is strengthening and expanding our inner self by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “That only which we have within, can we see without. If we meet no Gods, it is because we harbor none. If there is a grandeur in you, you will find grandeur in porters and sweeps.”<sup>8</sup>

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE TEN FACTORS

While the Ten Worlds and the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds focus on the differences in these states of life, the theory of the ten factors points to their equality. People may display different states of life, but the workings of the ten factors within those states is always the same.

The first three factors (appearance, nature and entity) describe life

as an existing phenomenon whose essence has both a physical and spiritual aspect. The next six factors (power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect and manifest effect) describe the functions and workings of life as defined by the first three factors. The final factor (consistency from beginning to end) integrates and unifies the other factors, guaranteeing that where there is one factor, the other nine also exist. Moreover, consistency from beginning to end ensures that whichever of the Ten Worlds manifests at that moment, all factors exist according to the characteristics of that world.

By understanding the law of cause and effect, we can choose to make causes that improve our state of life. Nichiren Daishonin states: “How one’s life finds expression in the three thousand realms differs from individual to individual. The law of cause and effect is strict” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 714). Understanding the ten factors allows an individual to direct the course of his or her life-condition.

## WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE THREE REALMS OF EXISTENCE

As we have learned from the tenth factor of consistency from beginning to end, the causes we make permeate the ten factors of our life-condition. Furthermore, the three realms explains where our life-condition manifests (the five components, living beings, environment), and we see that our causes not only permeate each aspect of our existence but also our whole being and environment as well. In light of the law of cause and effect, this principle of the “three thousand realms” shows that

we can change our environment for the better. Buddhism allows us to win over negativity both in our lives and our environment.

The concept of the three realms addresses the individuality of our lives. Society consists of a web of unique individuals. The condition of the people in our environment and the condition of the land where we dwell are related to our life-condition. As Nichiren Daishonin states: “If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, 4).

The objective world of the land where we live is a part of our lives—this is the holistic approach of the Buddhist view of life and the philosophical principle of the oneness of life and its environment. Enlightenment can be expressed as “My life contains the universe” and “My life permeates the universe.”

In his foreword to *The Human Revolution*, President Ikeda states, “In any case, a great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind<sup>9</sup>.”

The principle of “three thousand realms” in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism demonstrates that changing ourselves can change our environment. We determine not only our own life-condition, but also that of our environment. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and carrying out the SGI’s altruistic movement to manifest and solidify our innate Buddhahood and help others do the same, we develop a global network of

forces for peace and happiness. This is why Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is relevant—why we can call it engaged, Buddhism.

## THE GOHONZON AS THE ENTITY OF “THREE THOUSAND REALMS”

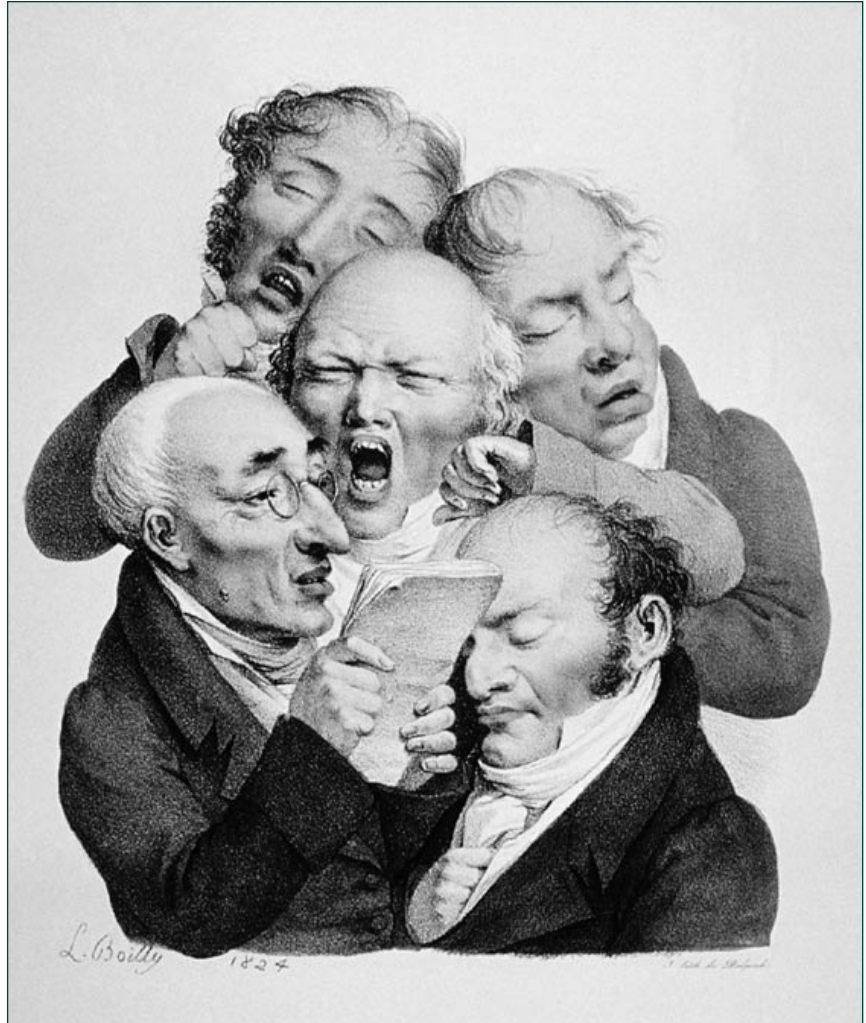
T’ien-t’ai systematized the contents of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment to the Law as the philosophy of “three thousand realms.” Nichiren Daishonin’s awesome achievement was to establish the object of devotion for the people of the Latter Day of the Law based on this principle.

The Gohonzon—the object of devotion—inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin, has as its philosophical basis the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Mystic Law (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or Buddhahood) on the Gohonzon illuminates all the other life-conditions within the life of the Daishonin. The Gohonzon depicts how our Buddhahood can uphold and illuminate our lower nine worlds.

The Gohonzon is the actual embodiment of the principle of three thousand realms [For further explanation of the Gohonzon see page 17]. The Daishonin turned the theory expounded by T’ien-t’ai into reality. In other words, when the Daishonin talks about Buddhahood, he means something that every human being can actually attain.

## CONCLUSION

The teachings of Shakyamuni and T’ien-t’ai are like a detailed map pointing to the location of a great treasure. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the treasure itself. While the former had an impact in their day, the latter is the energy source for ceaseless value creation today.



The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds explains that within each life state exists the potential for the other nine. Life states are fluid. What is important is that we solidify Buddhahood as our fundamental state of life.

Even though the principle of “three thousand realms” contains the potential for human revolution and environmental reformation, it was never presented in a concrete manner until Nichiren Daishonin appeared in thirteenth-century Japan, some six hundred years after T’ien-t’ai’s death.

The philosophy of “three thousand realms” clarifies both the internal and external structures of our existence that resonate with the life of the universe, putting theory into practice by chanting Nam-myoho-

renge-kyo. This teaching clarifies the dynamic relationship between human life and the life of the universe. In this light, T’ien-t’ai’s “three thousand realms” is theoretical while the Daishonin’s “three thousand realms” is actual.

The practical point of “three thousand realms” is to strengthen our inner self—our heart—which is also universal. The Daishonin provides us with the concrete way to do this.

In “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” Nichiren Daishonin states:



Gregory Nakasujii

“Three thousand realms in a single moment of life” teaches that inner determination can transform everything, including our environment. It is a principle that advocates the infinite potential and dignity inherent in human life, empowering people to develop their own happiness.

*Nam* derives from Sanskrit and is rendered here [in Japanese] as *kimyo*, meaning “devote one’s life.”... “Devotion” (*ki*) indicates dedicating our lives to the principle of the eternal and unchanging truth revealed in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. “Life” (*myo*) indicates basing ourselves upon wisdom that functions in accord with changing circumstances as revealed in the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Thus, to “devote one’s life” is the very meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. T’ien-t’ai states, “The eternal unchanging truth and wisdom that functions in accord with changing circumstances are both contained within ‘life at each moment,’ which embodies and permeates all phenomena.” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708)

Wisdom in this context signifies all necessary human qualities for cre-

ating value in our lives and environment. As indicated in this passage, Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism put the principle of “three thousand realms” into perspective and gave us a practical way to call forth wisdom by basing our lives on the universal Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

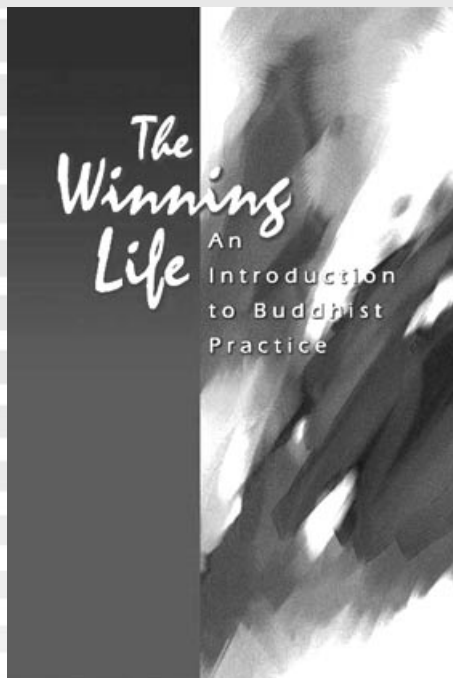
More than 2500 years ago in India, Shakyamuni Buddha became enlightened to the Law that was his innate Buddhahood. What he expounded was later collected as Buddhist sutras; thus Buddhism was born. Near the end of his life, Shakyamuni Buddha told his leading disciple, Ananda: “In this world be an island to yourself, be a refuge to yourself and take refuge in no other. Make the Dharma your island, the Dharma your refuge and no other.”<sup>10</sup> Buddhism is synonymous with inner strength and a well-grounded sense of self. True inner strength derives from the Dharma or Law inherent within us—our innate Buddhahood. It emerges from and permeates our

life when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with all our hearts. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we are reaping the fruits of the teaching of “three thousand realms.”

In closing, let me quote President Ikeda:

Some people say that the prevailing mood in the world today is one of powerlessness [...]. At the opposite extreme of this sense of powerlessness lies the Lotus Sutra’s philosophy that a single moment of life encompasses three thousand realms (*ichinen sanzen*) and the application of this teaching to our daily lives. The principle that one moment of life contains three thousand realms teaches us that the inner determination (*ichinen*) of one individual can transform everything. It is a teaching that gives ultimate expression to the infinite potential and dignity inherent in the life of each human being. (April 1995, *Seikyo Times*, p. 37) ☸

1. For convenience sake referred to subsequently as “three thousand realms” in this article.
2. The glossary in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* lists more literal translations of the Ten Worlds: 1) hell, 2) hungry spirits, 3) animals, 4) *asuras*, 5) human beings, 6) heavenly beings, 7) voice-hearers, 8) cause-awakened, 9) bodhisattvas and 10) Buddhas. 3.150–250. Indian Mahayana scholar.
4. Indian Buddhist scholar thought to have lived in the fourth or fifth century.
5. 1665–1726. The twenty-sixth high priest and restorer of Nichiren Shoshu.
6. Hugo, Victor, *Les Miserables* (Penguin Books Ltd., New York: 1982) p. 208.
7. Allen, James *As a Man Thinketh* (Putnam Publishing Group, New York) p. 66. (1849–1925), Writer and educator.
8. Emerson, Ralph Waldo, “Worship,” *The Conduct of Life*, 1860. See [www.jjnet.com/emerson/worship.htm](http://www.jjnet.com/emerson/worship.htm).
9. Ikeda, Daisaku, *The Human Revolution* (Los Angeles, CA: World Tribune Press, 1986) vol. 1, p. IV.
10. Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha*, p. 114)



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# DIALOGUE

ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

52

Treasuring Each Person Is the Conclusion of  
the Lotus Sutra

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

In “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy,” the twenty-eighth and final chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy arrives at Eagle Peak just before Shakyamuni con-

cludes his sermon, and pledges to protect the sutra’s votaries in the Latter Day of the Law. This bodhisattva possesses the wisdom to encourage all people so that they may become happy. In this installment, the participants discuss the Soka Gakkai’s movement to expand the circle of mutual encouragement. They talk about the importance of treasuring each individual as one would the Buddha explained in the Lotus Sutra. They also touch on how to attain a state of freedom both in life and in death and how to bring forth wisdom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the name Universal Worthy, “universal” refers to the principle of the true aspect of all phenomena, the essential and unchanging truth contained in the theoretical teaching [of the Lotus Sutra]. And “worthy” expresses the idea of wisdom, the wisdom that functions in accordance with changing circumstances, as contained in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 780).

**IKEDA:** The “principle of the essential and unchanging truth” indicates a fundamental principle upon which wisdom “functions in accordance with changing circumstances.” This function of wisdom is to create



Jonathan Wilson

The action of treasuring each individual as one would the Buddha is earnestly listening and putting our whole heart into encouraging a single person.

value. Without fundamental principles, everything becomes arbitrary and falls apart. On the other hand, just brandishing rules amounts to rigid dogmatism. Faith is what can bring the two together.

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

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

## Putting One’s Whole Heart Into Encouraging Others

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Core Teaching of the Lotus Sutra

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From the “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” (twenty-third) chapter on — through the “The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound” (twenty-fourth), “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of

the World's Sounds" (twenty-fifth), "Dharani" (twenty-sixth) and "Former Affairs of King Wonderful Adornment" (twenty-seventh) chapters—the preaching is consistently directed toward the practice of the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's passing.

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

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

## The Soka Gakkai Meets All of the "Four Conditions"

**ENDO:** Yes. Shakyamuni first explains "four conditions."

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

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

**IKEDA:** To sum up the significance of these four conditions, to be "protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas" means to be protected as a result of embracing and upholding the Gohonzon, which is the source of the enlightenment of all Buddhas—past, present and future. "Planting the roots of virtue" means to believe in the Gohonzon and chant daimoku for the happiness of oneself and others. Herein lies the source of all goodness. "Entering the stage where they are sure of reaching



Jonathan Wilson

Despite busy schedules, when people gather together to help each other lead fulfilling lives, it can be a truly worthwhile effort. When people focus on substance they create great value.

enlightenment" means joining in solidarity a group of people who are continually striving to advance and determined never to backslide in faith. Practically speaking, one cannot fulfill these conditions without being part of a harmonious body of practitioners who uphold the correct teaching. In modern terms, I am confident that these conditions are met by living out one's life nobly as a member of the SGI organization.

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

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

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

I would like to make a declaration for the sake of the future. Apart from the faith practiced by the Soka Gakkai, there is none that accords with the Daishonin's spirit. Nowhere else can the true benefit of the Gohonzon be found. . . . Victory and defeat in Buddhism are very strict. Eventually everything will become clear. The Daishonin will never forgive those who pit themselves against the Soka Gakkai, whoever they may be. Without this

conviction, I could not be president. Anyway, just watch and see what happens.

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

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

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

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

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

## A Vow To Protect Practitioners of the Lotus Sutra

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

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

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

the Ten Worlds to function as Buddhas, their lives illuminated by the Mystic Law.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The components of the Chinese character meaning "encouragement" could be interpreted to mean "the power of ten thousand." Truly, there is no greater force than encouragement. There is significance in the fact

that the Lotus Sutra concludes with the encouragement of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

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

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

**ENDO:** I imagine that the concrete forms of encouragement you have given to SGI members over the years, in the way of messages, *haiku* and *waka* poems, and cal-

ligraphy, must number in the hundreds of thousands. Including all the spoken words of encouragement you have offered, the amount is beyond calculation. Encouraging people to take action with such words as, "Don't give up! Keep going!" you have inspired many.

### Utmost Sincerity Moves People's Hearts

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

**IKEDA:** Putting talk of myself aside, in this day and age, it is absurd to think that people will take part in an organi-



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zation simply because they've been told to. No organization has the power to coerce people into joining. Furthermore, any group whose members are acting against their own will cannot produce any lasting strength.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leaders cannot be too perceptive. They should always ask themselves, "What does he need right now?"

"Is she tired?" "Is she hungry?" "Is there something he wants to say? Something she needs to talk about?"

## Focus on Substance, Not Formality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

victory or defeat.

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

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

## Adoration for the Mystic Law

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

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

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

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



Faith is nothing out of the ordinary. It is an extension of natural human sentiments such as the bond between parent and child, or husband and wife.

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

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

It's also important that the situations of those people are understood and that they are offered support and encouragement. To reject people simply because they are not always present at meetings is the opposite of compassion. Those who always participate in activities, on the other hand, we need not worry so much about. Those who can-

not attend regularly are in even more need of our encouragement, and we should think of the best ways to provide it for them. If we can do this, we will see kosen-rufu advance in leaps and bounds.

## Like the “Bond between Parent and Child”

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

**IKEDA:** The phrase about children not wanting to part from their mother brings to mind a story I heard about a child who was born prematurely. One week after birth, the baby's condition suddenly deteriorated, and



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Leonardo Da Vinci's drawing, Anatomical Studies. In Buddhism, the Universe is compressed into our individual life. This oneness of the macrocosm and microcosm explains that the segment and the whole contain the very same essence. Miao-lo states: "It is known that one's body is comparable to the universe."

it would not respond to any stimulus from the nurse. Yet when they brought the mother into the intensive care unit and she called her child's name, the baby's heart rate suddenly increased. Life is truly a mystery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Wisdom of Manjushri and the Practice of Universal Worthy

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

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

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

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

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

## The Ultimate Transmission

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

This contains the ultimate transmission [of the Buddha’s teaching] chapter [“Encouragement of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” of the Lotus Sutra].

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

The word “should” shows that these words refer to the future. The words “should rise and greet him from afar” indicate that one should without fail show the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra the kind of respect one would show a Buddha (GZ, 781).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, though some may hold high positions in the organization or become famous in society, if they lose their faith and their spirit of concern for fellow members, they will not be able to attain Buddhahood. And if members, who are the Buddha’s children, are made to suffer on account of such people’s lack of concern, then those people will naturally suffer retribution.

## The First and Last Characters Represent “Life” and “Death”

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

**SAITO:** After Bodhisattva Universal Worthy makes his vow

to protect practitioners in the Latter Day, Shakyamuni praises him. Shakyamuni then tells Universal Worthy that since he himself will also protect future practitioners, Universal Worthy should revere them all as Buddhas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Entire Universe Is Compressed into One's Mind

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Einstein's Intuition

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

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

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

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

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

And:

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

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

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

## Total Freedom in Both Life and Death

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

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

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



Jonathan Bleir/CORBIS

About the Lotus Sutra, President Ikeda states, “the twenty-eight chapters in their entirety, from the first word ‘thus’ to the last word ‘departed,’ express ‘life’ and ‘death.’”

## Humankind’s Need for Compassion

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

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

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

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

I want our country to become the most beautiful country in the world. I do not want our country to become the richest and strongest. . . . What humankind today lacks is neither force of arms nor economic strength. . . . We have already achieved a great deal in the natural sciences, making it fully possible for all people to live happily. The fundamental reason that humankind is miserable at pres-

ent is the lack of humanity and justice, the lack of a spirit of compassion, the lack of love. If such a spirit could be developed, it would be possible, with the material resources existing at present, for all two billion people on the planet to lead fulfilled lives.<sup>6</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Wisdom Arises from a Sense of Responsibility

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

clear in the long run.

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

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

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

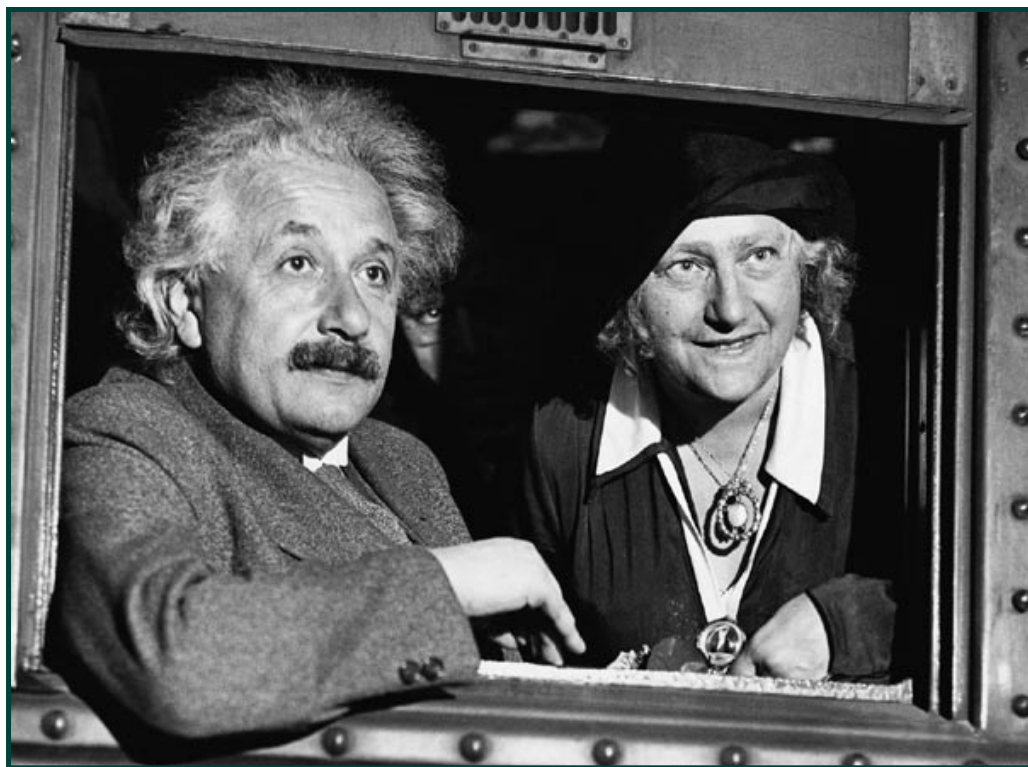
When I stood up with such a sense of responsibility, it was as though a gale of wisdom started to blow through my mind. I was able to seize the initiative.

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

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

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

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



American Physicist Albert Einstein with his wife, Elsa. He said: "Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe...In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort."

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ever, are only temporary, while faith is a lifetime issue, a matter of one's heart.

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

The word "thus" that starts the Lotus Sutra expounds the

## "Thus" and "Departed" Indicate the Faith of Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

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

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

Twenty years have passed since I retired from the position of the Soka Gakkai president. Because I am now honorary president of the Soka Gakkai, I am technically free of many responsibilities. Organizational positions, how-

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

The twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra passionately call on us to take action based on the oneness of mentor and disciple.

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



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SGI President Ikeda welcomes President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in April of 1999. President Obasanjo has spoken at multiple SGI events including a Soka Gakkai women’s division leaders meeting and at Soka University.

## *Recollections* of MY MEETINGS with LEADING WORLD FIGURES

*By SGI President Daisaku Ikeda*

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

### President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria— Bringing Power to the People

“Daddy, do not become head of state,” implored his nine-year-old daughter Iyabo.

His becoming the nation’s leader was what everyone else in the family dreaded most. They had not dared broach the subject.

Silence fell over the room. Everyone waited anxiously to hear how her father, Olusegun Obasanjo, would reply.

In February of 1976, becoming Nigeria’s leader was life-threatening. The reigning head of state, General Murtala Ramat Muhammed, had been assassinated just

as he had been trying to lead the nation from military to civilian rule. General Obasanjo was the second in command. It was highly probable that the next leader would meet the same fate as his predecessor.

“You have my word, Iyabo,” he finally said. “I will resign at the end of the Supreme Military Council meeting tomorrow and we will go to Abeokuta and live a quiet life.”

He had decided to do just that, having begun preparations for the return home. But he did not know what the next few days might have in store for him. He hugged each of his five children, one by one. It was his parting gift to them, just in case something terrible should happen.

Mr. Obasanjo was thirty-eight. His decision to turn down the position of head of state was not made out of fear, but because he was utterly disgusted with the present state of his country. “Nigeria is no longer worth serving if General Muhammed could be so cruelly rewarded for his selfless service to the nation,” he insisted to the council members.

While still under colonial rule, most African nations regarded “independence” as a magic word. With independence, their centuries of suffering and strife would all come to an end; if only they had independence, everything would be all right, they thought. But this, they were soon to learn, was an illusion.

Even after independence, they continued to be dominated, though in a different form, by foreign nations. A small, privileged class allied themselves with the exploiters and lined their own pockets in the process.

Reformist groups carried out one coup d’état after another, but each new government quickly became tainted by the very corruption they opposed. Countries involved in the Cold War exploited the many civil wars by selling weapons to both sides.

After gaining its independence from Great Britain in 1960, Nigeria fell victim to the terrible tragedy of civil war, and happiness for its people seemed far away.

At the council meeting, it was pointed out to General Obasanjo that if he didn’t accept the office of head of state, it would fall into the hands of the rebels.

He no longer had any choice. Perhaps this is my duty and destiny, he thought. When his little daughter learned that her father could not keep his promise, she wept inconsolably.

I first met Mr. Obasanjo sixteen years later, in the spring of 1992. He was with the Nigerian Ambassador to Japan, Mai-Bukar Garba Dogon-Yaro. He had come to Tokyo as an African representative to an environmental conference.



Daniel Laine / CORBIS

A busy street market in Lagos.

Mr. Obasanjo served as head of state for three years—from 1976 to 1979. As he had pledged, he brought an end to the military government. He introduced a democratic constitution that enshrined the sovereignty of the people and basic human rights, and established a presidential system of government. He was the first Nigerian leader to step down to make way for democracy.

On that first visit to Japan, Mr. Obasanjo attended a Soka Gakkai women’s division leaders meeting and gave a speech affirming his support of our cultural movement. Culture, he said, is the guiding force in our lives. Without culture, we are rootless. His speech was broadcast by satellite all across Japan.

He identified the spirit of Buddhism as rejecting servility and oppression, saying that Buddhism has the power to elevate humanity.

He showed himself to be a dignified leader with a sharp, quick mind and a warm smile.

A leader, he said, must be clearly focused and have his own goals, or he will be swayed by others and pulled off course.

Mr. Obasanjo’s personal focus was education. When he was head of state, he made elementary school education free and built many universities in an effort to make education available to all Nigerian children.

In October of the same year, we welcomed Mr. Obasanjo to Soka University, where student members of the Pan-African Friendship Society gave a choral performance in his honor. They sang the Nigerian song “Abeokuta,” which is the name of the town where Mr. Obasanjo grew up.

*That hill, that land—  
That is where you were born,*

*A land of rich blessings and peace.  
I am happy, here on the Olumo  
Rocks.*

*I will never forget you,  
I will keep you always in my heart.*

“Abeokuta” means “under the rocks.” The song is based on the legend of the Olumo Rocks that saved lives by concealing people and keeping them safe from warfare.

True leaders must be rocks that protect the people. In our conversation, Mr. Obasanjo and I agreed with the Nigerian saying: “The roof battles the rain, but those who are protected by the roof are unaware they are being protected.”

Mr. Obasanjo, son of a prosperous farmer, was born in 1937 in a small village near Abeokuta. He was a very bright student, skipping grades several times. When he was about thirteen, the fortunes of his father’s farm suddenly turned and he was forced to pursue his studies under increasingly difficult circumstances.

He would go to the nearby forest to collect firewood, or to the river for sand, which he sold to construction companies. He also worked as a laborer on other people’s farms. Faced with these hardships, whenever he began to get discouraged he would recall his elementary school motto, “Help Yourself,” and then try even harder. He supported himself by doing odd jobs throughout his high school years.

The school was located in Abeokuta, and occasionally his mother would travel from their village to bring him what little food she could spare.

Mr. Obasanjo got excellent grades and went on to become a teacher, but he remained as poor as ever. He later entered the military, an unlikely course for someone whose high school class described him as “unsoldierly”. But, in the military, he could receive a free education.

Later, he went to study at the British Royal College of Military Engineering in England where he won a citation as the best Commonwealth student in the history of the school.

When he entered the military, he did not dare tell his mother that he had adopted this most dangerous of professions; he knew she would faint in shock if she were to find out.

Is it the fate of heroes to be dogged by tragedy, and



SGI-Nigeria members express their enthusiasm to SGI President Ikeda.

Seiyo Press

the sincere, by betrayal?

The road to democracy that Mr. Obasanjo had initiated was blocked by a coup d’état, and military rule was restored. Once again, the nation was wracked by corruption and looting of the public treasury. In the mid-1980s, Nigeria’s standard of living dropped below what it had been in the 1950s, prior to independence.

Nigeria has a population of close to 120 million, the largest in Africa. One in five sub-Saharan Africans is a Nigerian. From ancient times, Nigeria has boasted highly developed cultures, such as those of the Nok and Ife, which date back some two millennia. Its music and art have also had a great influence on that of modern Europe.

Nigeria’s beautiful land is rich in oil resources and wonderful people. Yet, why has there been so much suffering and poverty?

Corruption. “Corruption is a greater threat to African development than AIDS,” says Mr. Obasanjo, who continued to promote democracy even after his retirement from politics. He has lived true to his belief in a life of service to humanity.

He has promoted Nigeria on the world stage. He established the African Leadership Forum and Foundation, worked for UNESCO, and mediated tirelessly in peace talks between Angola and Namibia. He has even been proposed as a candidate for secretary-general of the United Nations.

In 1986, as co-chair of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa, he went to South Africa and visited Nelson Mandela in prison. During that visit,

Mr. Obasanjo is well known for entering a “Whites Only” beach in protest of Apartheid, showing the world the absurdity of this policy. Later, Mr. Mandela praised Mr. Obasanjo as “a special friend who stands head and shoulders far above many who occupy high positions.”

The Nigerian leader has many friends around the world and he has continually fought to prevent Nigeria from being isolated from the international community.

But how did the political leaders of his own country repay his efforts? With prison.

In 1995, the government arrested this man who had spoken continuously for democracy. He was sentenced to death. Vigorous outcries from around the world led to the sentence being reduced to fifteen years, and he was imprisoned in Yola Prison, which was known as a hell on Earth.

He remained in prison for more than three years. Finally, with the death of the dictator, he was released. But what he found outside was a nation torn apart and nearly destroyed by corrupt and greedy leaders.

Mr. Obasanjo decided to stand up once again for the sake of his beloved Nigeria. His slogan in the presidential election was “Power to the People.” And in February 1999, he was elected president.

He would be the valiant individual who would lead his homeland into the twenty-first century. When he came to visit Japan two months after his election, I welcomed him with deep emotion. He opened his arms wide and was just as happy to see me.

I lauded his invincible conviction. Though his physical health suffered as a result of his time in prison, his spirit never wavered. He never despaired. He believed in God and knew the day would come when he would be

freed. He never considered giving up his struggle to serve humanity. A friend wrote him while in prison, saying “you seem to have something that we outside the prison do not have.” Mr. Obasanjo’s every word was filled with strong faith and commitment to life.

What is democracy?

There are leaders who do not abandon their political convictions, even when they are imprisoned for them. Yet, there are also political leaders who care only for immediate gain and change their beliefs as easily as their clothes. In their quest for power, they have no compunction in trampling on truth and justice, and equally little compunction in trampling on the people. How dare such leaders talk about democracy?

Without people willing to risk their lives for their beliefs, democracy becomes lifeless. However fine a constitution or political system a nation may have, without a democratic spirit, it will be only an empty form. A body without breath is dead.

Mr. Obasanjo says that he wants to give the people of his country self-confidence. He wants to restore their faith in themselves, their government, and their country. The fervor with which he said these words almost brought tears to my eyes. I saw much in Mr. Obasanjo’s humility and his love for the people that the Japanese can learn from.

How much more noble it is to clutch hope firmly to one’s heart, to always look to the future, no matter how often one is trampled down than it is to let a brief period of prosperity go to one’s head and convince one that the spiritual realm of life is unimportant and irrelevant!

The Japanese have a deplorable tendency to look down on what we call the Third World. Judging a

## Soka University Honors Nigerian Delegates

On May 13, thirty-four members of the Nigerian Conference of the Northern States Chamber of Commerce and Industry, headed by former Nigerian Ambassador to Japan M.B.G. Dogon-Yaro, visited Soka University in Hachioji City, Tokyo.

Eight individuals from the Nigerian delegation received Soka University’s Award of Honor.

Dogon-Yaro received an honorary doctorate from Soka University, and was presented with a medallion, commemorative plaque and a faculty pin by Soka University President Kinnoyoshi Komuro and Board of Trustees Chair Hiroshi Okayasu. The Soka University student body presented the Ambassador with a Soka Friendship Award. In his acceptance speech, Ambassador Dogon-Yaro expressed his appreciation for the award and vowed to live by the ideals and philosophy of Soka University. He reminded the students, “You have a dual responsibility of first, upholding the legacies of the founder [Dr. Daisaku Ikeda], and second, to excel in all fronts of human endeavor.”

*-Soka Gakkai Newsletter*



Hubert Stadler / CORBIS

Ships on the Bay of Lagos.

nation solely on its wealth is nothing if not evidence of being uncultured and uncivilized. Today, Japan is paying the price for its hypocritical lip service to the importance of the spirit.

From ancient times, the cultures of Africa have had a deep respect and awe for the wondrous life force permeating nature, human society and all things in the universe. Today's materialistic culture has reached a dead end, and Africa holds the key to the transformation to a culture of life.

The future — a glorious future — awaits Africa.

Mr. Obasanjo and I talked about the future. I spoke of my hopes for a United States of Africa; the new Nigerian president spoke of his hopes for educational exchange.

A Nigerian proverb says, "Hope is the pillar that holds up the world."

I presented President Obasanjo with a poem I had written for him, titled "Rising Sun of Africa — Paeon to Democracy." The poem begins:

*The sun is never defeated!*  
— "Nothing can obscure me,  
No matter how deep the darkness!"

*The sun never retreats!*  
— "The path of my mission is unchanging,  
No matter how storms may rage!"

*The sun never rests!*  
— "I will shine as long as there are people who seek my  
light,  
No matter how heavy the clouds of exhaustion!"

This poem is also a paean to Africa, "great continent of the sun," and a tribute to Nigeria, a developed nation in the struggle for human rights, that has broken through the darkness, holding high the light of hope and illuminating all. ☸

*(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)

Toda Peace Institute for Global Peace and Policy  
Research [www.toda.org](http://www.toda.org)

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

Soka University of Japan [www.soka.ac.jp](http://www.soka.ac.jp)

Institute of Oriental Philosophy

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

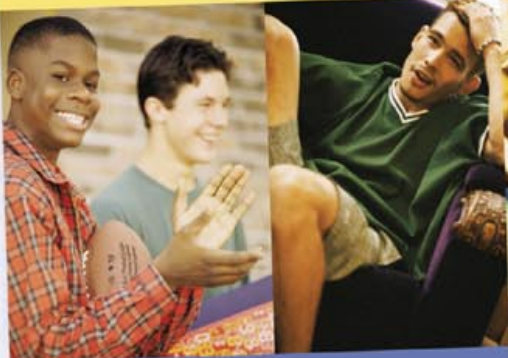
Tokyo Fuji Art Museum

The Min-on Concert Association [www.min-on.or.jp](http://www.min-on.or.jp)

# The Way of Youth

Buddhist Common Sense for Handling Life's Questions

Daisaku Ikeda  
Foreword by Duncan Sheik



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— From the author's preface



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*(Not available at SGI-USA bookstores.)*

APPLYING BUDDHISM TO DAILY LIFE

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A vibrant photograph of two young African girls standing in a lush, green outdoor setting. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. Each girl is carrying a large, round, woven basket balanced on her head. The girl on the left is wearing a colorful, patterned dress with shades of teal, purple, and pink. The girl on the right is wearing a teal dress with large, circular, patterned motifs. The background is filled with various tropical plants, including palm trees and large green leaves, creating a dense and natural environment.

# living

## BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION \$6.00 SEPTEMBER 2000

### **"THE FUTURE — A GLORIOUS FUTURE — AWAITS AFRICA"**

SGI President Ikeda Meets with  
Nigerian President Olusegun  
Obasanjo

### **USING BUDDHISM TO FIGHT ILLNESS AND PROLONG LIFE**

Study Material for October: "On  
Prolonging One's Life Span"

### **GIVING ULTIMATE EXPRESSION TO OUR INFINITE POTENTIAL**

"Three Thousand Realms in a  
Single Moment of Life"

### **THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION: ITS MEANING, WORDS AND IMAGERY**

The Buddhist Representation and  
Embodiment of the Sacred



## ***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 163 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 what is present day 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 30 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)*