

# living BUDDHISM

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"Although people are all humans, some are born intelligent while others are not. Some are born beautiful while others are born ugly. Some are born healthy while others are born sickly. Some people, no matter how hard they work, remain poor. Science and social institutions are utterly powerless to help people suffering from their own greed or jealousy or people tormented by others who are greedy or jealous. Differences in our realities have their causes. Without seeking the causes on a fundamental level, the solutions to those problems will not likely be found." Pages 13–14

## 4 General Director's Message

Victory Over Violence

## 6 Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (20)

Positive and Negative Relationship With the Law

## 8 Living the Teachings (3)

An Untimely Death Does Not Diminish Life

## 10 On Life by Josei Toda

## 19 Beyond Precepts to A Full Expression of Joy and Human Revolution

A Personal Perspective on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the Practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

## 28 A Summary of the Lotus Sutra (2)

Chapters Fifteen Through Twenty.

## 40 Recollections of My Meetings With Leading World Figures

Aurelio Peccei, Co-founder of the Club of Rome

## 47 2000 Index

COVER: The Pantheon, Rome, Italy by Vince Streato/Corbis

10



19



28



40



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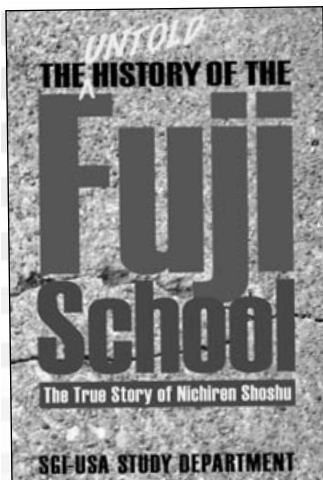
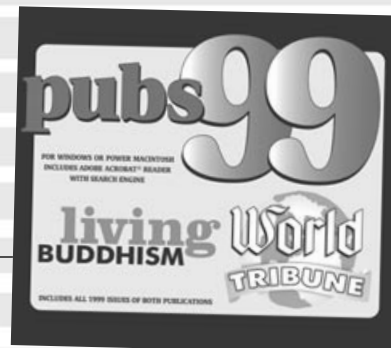
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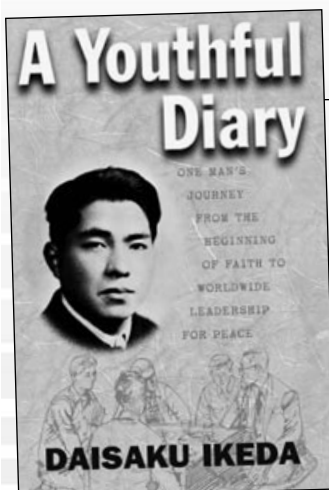
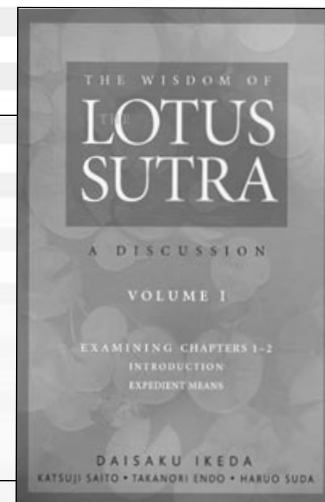
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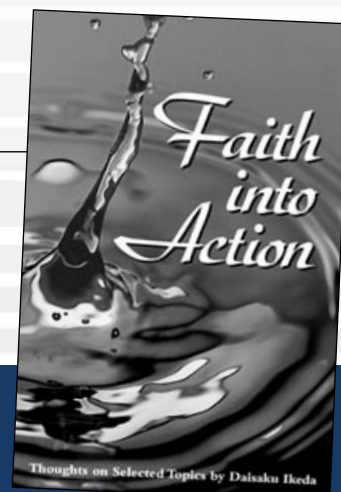
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# GLOSSARY

## Buddha

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

## Gohonzon

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

## Karma

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

## Kosen-rufu

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

## Lotus Sutra

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

## Nam-myoho-rence-kyo

The fundamental law expounded in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, it expresses the true aspect of life. Chanting it allows people

to directly tap their enlightened nature. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is revealed only through its practice, the literal meaning is: Nam (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; myoho (Mystic Law), the essential law of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; rengo (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; kyo (Buddha’s teaching), all phenomena.

## Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82)

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

## Shakyamuni

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

## Ten Worlds

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

## Notice

The author of the November issue’s “Ten Points to Derive Maximum Benefit From Our Practice,” Jeanny Chen, can be emailed at: [happyjeanny@hotmail.com](mailto:happyjeanny@hotmail.com)

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## Frequently Cited Sources

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

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

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

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

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# VICTORY *Over Violence*

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

**G**reetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism!* This year has been filled with meaningful development throughout our organization. What a fitting way to end one century and begin another!

This past fall, each district conducted their general meeting commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. In October, as you have seen in the *World Tribune*, thousands of people gathered all over the country to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the American kosen-rufu movement. Successful gatherings were held throughout the country. Many of these celebratory events were used as forums to share our Victory Over Violence efforts.

The youth division formally began the VOV campaign in 1999. Achieving victories over the violence that affects many of our lives is one of the primary reasons we exist as an organization — it is truly a fundamental premise of our American kosen-rufu movement.

As the year draws to a close, I find myself reflecting not only on the wonderful accomplishments of this year, but also on the sorrow and hardship that were part of those successes. I know that many of you are struggling amidst the many inequities and disregard for human life that permeate our society.

I have met people who live in fear for their family's safety because the community in which they live is dangerous and those who have lost children to stray bullets in crossfire. I know people who have experienced

domestic violence and abuse. I have spoken to members whose lives were threatened by addiction. I have also visited members who have lost someone they love to suicide. But in spite of the most severe circumstances, they continue in their determination to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. They have inspired me.

Many of you have heard of the tragic death of SGI-USA member Anthony Dwain Lee in Los Angeles. He was a fine man who exerted himself behind the scenes and was dedicated to developing the abilities of young people. In his teen years, he was a member of a gang, but he left this life behind and established a successful career as an actor. He was a warm, compassionate and committed person who embodied the very best values of our peace movement. Tragically, his life was cut short by a policeman's bullet.

It is always painful to lose someone we love. It is especially tragic when, in the midst of our journey for peace, we lose loved ones to an act of violence that seems impossible to understand.

When we lose someone, we are naturally filled with questions. Why have those people died? What is the purpose of life?

Please remember that we practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to change society for the better. Those of us who have lost people we love to violence or who live in fear of violence should keep this firmly in mind. Through our practice and propagation efforts, we can have a positive impact on our communities.

The message of the writing “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” is that if we are concerned about our own welfare, we must work to establish a better world. The violence so prevalent in American society is the result of a culture that has no respect for the dignity and value of each person’s life. But the solution is not “out there,” it lies in developing our own lives and using dialogue as a tool to transform the people and community around us. Through developing our own lives, we can become beacons of hope in our communities, lighting the way to a better society.

In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” Nichiren Daishonin states:

Joy as well as sorrow moves us to tears. Tears express our feelings for both blessings and misfortune. The one thousand arhats shed tears in memory of the Buddha, and in tears Bodhisattva Manjushri chanted Myoho-enge-kyo. From among those one thousand arhats, the Venerable Ananda replied in tears, “This is what I heard.” The tears of all the others fell, wetting their inkstones, and they wrote Myoho-enge-kyo, followed by “This is what I heard.” I, Nichiren, now feel exactly as they did. I am now in exile because I spread the five and seven characters of Myoho-enge-kyo. I spread this teaching because “This is what I heard.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386)

**T**his passage describes the dramatic moment when the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, in deep despair because of the passing of their mentor, commenced the work of transmitting his teachings to future generations. Tears expressed the sorrow at the loss of the man they regarded as their teacher, and at the same time, their profound joy at being able to continue his legacy. Nichiren Daishonin used this example to express his sorrow at experiencing persecution, but at the same time, his profound joy at fulfilling his mission to teach Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

When we think about those we have lost, our deep sadness is natural. The grief and bewilderment at our loss is proof of our humanity. But at the same time, let us transform our tears into cries of determination, tears that express our resolve that this aspect of our culture must change. In this way, we can continue the legacy of our loved ones. We can change the lives of those suffering from violence to lives of profound meaning and value.

As I mentioned, I have visited many members who have lost loved ones or have suffered due to violence. Despite the tremendous challenges in their lives, however, these courageous individuals are determined to prove the validity of their Buddhist practice in the place where they are. I have met members who began their practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism while in prison and people who previously led lives of violence. Through their practice of Buddhism, they came to appreciate the value of life and understand the profundity of the Daishonin’s teachings. All of these people are proving that the philosophy and practice we embrace truly has the power to transform our hearts, transform our lives, and transform our communities. They are showing us that the only way to make such transformation possible is to face the reality of our lives and commit ourselves to the hard work of change.

When I think about this, it is clear to me that as we enter a new century, we have much work ahead of us. “The Century of Life” that we have been proclaiming as disciples of SGI President Ikeda will not emerge of its own accord. May 3, 2001, the date we have been working toward for so long, is not a finale or the date on which we will have accomplished kosen-rufu. Rather, at the dawn of a new millennium, we must confirm that our real work is just beginning. And May 3, 2001—the date we have cherished for so long—is our starting point, the date when we take our stand to change society, alongside our mentor.

As we end this auspicious year of 2000, I hope we can savor the great efforts and accomplishments of this past year and these past decades. At the same time, let’s greet the new century, and this new millennium, with great determination. Not a momentary determination created in our celebration of the new millennium, but a profound determination based on our real experiences and rooted in a firm commitment to change our communities. Let us work together and inspire one another through the sorrow and the joy that awaits us on our triumphant journey.

Once again, thank you so much for what you have done this year, and thank you for your efforts to build our great future together!



Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director

## *POSITIVE and Negative Relationship with THE LAW*

**W**hen you first encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, what was your response? Did you happily accept most of what you heard and join the SGI right away? Or did you knit your brows in disbelief? Were you born into the practice? If so, you probably didn't make conscious decisions about practicing until you were much older. Perhaps you accept what you have heard about this Buddhism but choose to support the SGI without becoming a member. Whatever the circumstances that led us to where we are, there is no doubt that we all have a deep connection with the Daishonin's teaching based on the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin always encouraged his followers to introduce others to this practice. Most of us have done that with various levels of success. Some people understand and accept Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism right away, while others oppose it or even disparage it. Introducing others to Buddhism sows the seed for their future happiness, even if they don't take faith now or not at all in this lifetime. According to the attitude people take when they first encounter the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, they can form either a positive relationship or a negative relationship with it.

The Lotus Sutra enables those who have a connection with it to attain Buddhahood, even if that connection might not be considered positive. In "Persecution by Sword and Staff," the Daishonin recounts the story of a woman in India who, in a fit of rage toward her hus-

band, trampled the Lotus Sutra that he had been studying. She later died and fell into hell. It is interesting to note that her feet did not. The Daishonin goes on to say, "Though the wardens of hell tried to force them down by beating them with iron staves, her feet remained outside of hell as a result of the relationship, albeit a reverse one, that they had formed with the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 962). The benefit of your relationship with the Lotus Sutra lies in the fact that you will most certainly attain Buddhahood in the future, regardless of what kind of relationship you have.

There is an all-encompassing compassion in this principle. All people possess a Buddha nature, and the important thing is that the Lotus Sutra is a catalyst for bringing it out. Relating to the Lotus Sutra in any way is a good cause for enlightenment. Simply hearing a teaching is enough to lead us in that direction.

The "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra perfectly elucidates this principle. Devadatta was a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who was extremely jealous of him. He tried to kill Shakyamuni by setting wild elephants loose, and attempting to roll a boulder on him. He also spent much of his life creating a rift in the Buddhist Order and trying to destroy the community of Buddhists. Despite this, Shakyamuni predicts in the Lotus Sutra that Devadatta will most certainly attain enlightenment. Shakyamuni was very strict with Devadatta, but imagine the enormous compassion it takes to see the Buddha nature in someone who is trying

**There are two lessons we can take from “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.” First, we should understand that bodhisattva practices hold the key to our happiness. If we want to bring out our innate Buddha nature, we must see that same potential in others as well and help them bring it out. The next lesson is that no matter how a person responds to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, you have nevertheless sown the seed of their happiness, and he or she will become enlightened.**

to kill you. Further, the Daishonin says: “Whether by following it or opposing it, they will attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. This is the message of the ‘Devadatta’ chapter” (WND, 964).

**T**his principle is further expounded in the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging goes among the people and vows to everyone he meets that they will attain Buddhahood. However, the people respond to him with hostility. They throw stones at him and try to beat him with sticks. Despite these attacks, he continues to tell the people, “I would never dare disparage you, because you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” (LS20, 267). Because of this determination to respect all people, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging later attains enlightenment and leads everyone he comes in contact with on the same path.

There are two lessons we can take from “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.” First, we should understand that bodhisattva practices hold the key to our happiness. If we want to bring out our innate Buddha nature, we must see that same potential in others as well and help them bring it out. The next lesson is that no matter how a person responds to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, you have nevertheless sown the seed of their happiness, and he or she will become enlightened. It is as the Daishonin says in “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light”:

“It is because the Lotus Sutra saves those who oppose it as well as those who follow it. This is the blessing of the single character *myo*, or mystic” (WND, 457–58).

Some of us probably know people who have had a negative relationship with the Daishonin’s Buddhism. They could be friends, coworkers, spouses, parents or children. They may have been abusive toward us because of our practice. Even though we might have encountered a painful situation, our compassion for these people allows us to continue our bodhisattva practices. If someone has an incorrect notion about our faith or is critical of it, it is nevertheless important to have genuine dialogue with them. Doing so is a practice of compassion and our friends and family will blossom as a result. In many cases, these are the people who end up joining the SGI or becoming a supporter.

What is important is to speak the truth of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the truth of people’s Buddha nature. It is important to dialogue with those in opposition to the practice, warmly encouraging them at times and strictly pointing out their mistaken views at other times.

We need not be overly concerned when one shows a negative relationship. When we speak with respect for everyone’s innate Buddhahood — no matter how indifferent they are — the Buddhahood in their lives appreciates our efforts and will respond accordingly. ☸

*By Alexis Trass, staff writer, based partly on Yasashii Kyogaku (Easy Buddhist Study).*

LIVING THE TEACHINGS (3)

# An Untimely Death Does Not Diminish Life

When Fred Zaitso's mother saw the happiness in her son shortly after he began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, she decided to practice as well. For nearly four years, she created her own happy life. And then, she was gone. In this installment, Fred explains how he dealt with her unexpected death.

BY FRED ZAITSU, PUBLISHER

When he was alive, he was a Buddha in life, and now he is a Buddha in death. He is a Buddha in both life and death. This is what is meant by that most important doctrine called attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "If one can uphold this [sutra], one will be upholding the Buddha's body." Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one's own heart.

Since your deceased husband was a votary of this sutra, he doubtless attained Buddhahood just as he was. You need not grieve so much over his passing. On the other hand, to grieve is only natural for ordinary people. However, even sages are sometimes sad. ("Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 456,458)

**Background:** Written July 11, 1274 to Uenoama Gozen. She had raised nine children after the death of her husband in 1265 and was a devoted follower of Nichiren Daishonin. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of her husband's death, she had sent offerings and a letter to the Daishonin. This letter was his reply.



Shortly after beginning my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the early 60's, I returned from college in Tokyo to my hometown of Fuji City to visit my mother. She had separated from my father and was living with my brother and sister. My father was trying to make a living in Tokyo. Their marriage had experienced many hardships as they struggled financially in post-war Japan, and after they separated, he was still not able to send her much support for the family.

As I grew up, I witnessed the suffering of my mother, and I knew she was unhappy. She knew me to be an unhappy young man, especially after injuring my back just before I found the Daishonin's Buddhism. She understood I was miserable. So, when I arrived for a visit, the happy son smiling into her face shocked her. More than anyone else, she could see what a difference my practice in the Soka Gakkai had made in my life. She was eager to join immediately, in contrast to my father who angrily opposed my practice. She was so happy to receive the Gohonzon. My sister and grandmother also began practicing.

It seemed that my mother had lived with some kind of illness her whole life. In desperation to become healthy she had tried many religions including many of the so-called "new religions" that appeared in Japan after the war. But nothing could help her and she continued to suffer. But her biggest source of unhappiness was her relationship with her mother-in-law — my grandmother. They fought over little things, big things and anything.

Over the next couple of years, improving their relationship would be one of her biggest benefits.

**T**he blessings gained by practicing the correct teaching, however, are so great that by meeting minor sufferings in this life we can change the karma that destines us to suffer terribly in the future.

Ironically, it would also lead to a great tragedy. Nearly four years after my mother joined the Soka Gakkai she was killed in an accident at age 53. She had become the primary caregiver for my aging grandmother and was on an errand to get medicine. She waited for a bus, but none came, so she got a ride from a man in an old truck. Along the way, her door somehow came open and she fell onto the road to her death. I was at work in Tokyo when I received the call from my younger brother. I was facing an event that would profoundly change my understanding of Buddhism and my faith.

When I arrived home, my mother's body lay in our living room. My father arrived also. My brother was upset and said it was the Soka Gakkai's fault. I was in a state of disbelief. I could not explain intellectually what had happened. When I began practicing, I was told we could overcome obstacles and become happy. Why did she have to die this way?

I chanted to the Gohonzon long into the night and the next morning. Gradually, my mind settled and I thought about my mother and her difficult life. I came to see my mother's life in a different light. The last four years of her life had not been miserable. For the first time in her life, since she joined the Soka Gakkai, she had finally become happy. She had just been appointed a leader in her district and was dedicated to kosen-rufu. This was her life when she died. As I prayed, my grief gave way to appreciation. If it was her karma to die young, she did not die miserable. She lived long enough to change her unhappy destiny to a happy life dedicated to the Law. This is what she would carry to the next life.

Buddhism distinguishes between physical death and spiritual death. Spiritual death is the death of a person's desire to seek the Law and attain enlightenment. I realized that at the moment of her death, my mother carried the desire for enlightenment in her heart. She left the misery of this life behind having changed her destiny in the last three years of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

In "Letter to the Brothers," Nichiren Daishonin quotes

the Nirvana Sutra: "By suffering an untimely death...one can avoid falling into hell." The Daishonin explains that:

We, who now believe in the correct teaching, in the past once committed the offense of persecuting its practitioners, and therefore are destined to fall into a terrible hell in the future. The blessings gained by practicing the correct teaching, however, are so great that by meeting minor sufferings in this life we can change the karma that destines us to suffer terribly in the future. (WND, 497)

In an essay by President Toda on the subject of tragic deaths he says that from the Buddhist view of the eternity of life, a person's untimely death can be regarded as a "relatively minor hardship," enabling one to expiate negative karma.

Although my mother's death may seem like a bad death, I do not see it that way. Everyone wants a "good death," but what is more important is the quality of life when it is our time to die not the method by which we die. To me, a good life at the time of death equals a good death, which equals a good life again. An untimely death does not diminish a life; it can bring to light a person's dedication to kosen-rufu.

That is why this quote by Nichiren Daishonin consoling the widow Ueno-ama Gozen is meaningful to me:

When he was alive, he was a Buddha in life, and now he is a Buddha in death. He is a Buddha in both life and death. This is what is meant by that most important doctrine called attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. Since your deceased husband was a votary of this sutra, he doubtless attained Buddhahood just as he was. (WND, 456, 458)

I was saddened by my mother's death, but I came to a deeper understanding of death and was no longer frightened by it. The Buddhist life-philosophy and my growing conviction in the Gohonzon enabled me to deal with this tragedy correctly. In Buddhism, everything that happens can teach us about the Law. ☸

BY JOSEI TODA

# The Mystery of Life

The universe *is* itself life; therefore, when we die, our lives *melt* back into the greater life of the universe and are *nowhere* to be found. This is analogous to the interval *between* the two instances of grief when there seems to be *no* grieving, or the interval between two *moments* of rejoicing when joy *appears* to have vanished, or the interval of **sleep** when our conscious mind is *nowhere* to be found. **Our life in death** does not *flit* about somewhere *like a spirit*.

The following is a translation of an essay by second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda. The article was originally published in the July 1955 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai's study journal, and reprinted in *Collected Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 3, pp.5-22. This year marks the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth.

When the ultra-nationalist, totalitarian regime of Japan used Shinto to lead the nation to the outrage of the Pacific War, along with my teacher Mr. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and my beloved like-minded comrades, I strongly proclaimed that the government's religious policy was utterly

wrong. I explained why it was illogical and immoral to force the citizens to pay homage to the Shinto shrine. For this, I was persecuted in the summer of 1943 and spent two years in prison.

Though innocent, I spent many forlorn days pondering in a cold prison cell. One thought led to another, and I finally came to the essential issue of life, that is, the inscrutable essence of life. What is life? Does it exist only in this world? Or does it continue for eternity? These questions have long been considered mysteries. The so-called saints and sages of the past attempted to solve these problems.

Due to its unsanitary condition, the prison was infested with lice. Basking in the spring sunlight, lice

just crawled out to frolic. I put two of them on the floorboard; their legs were struggling mindlessly. I squashed one; the other kept moving about nonchalantly. The life of the squashed louse—where did it go? Did it disappear from this world for eternity?

Suppose there is a cherry tree. If you break off a branch and put it in a vase, its buds will eventually bloom and new fragile leaves will come out in time. Is the life of this cherry branch the same as that of the original tree? Or is it now different? Life is indeed mysterious.

From days long past, I have recollected the great agony and torment that I suffered when my daughter died not long after her birth. My thoughts were: Why am I suffering so much from my daughter's death? What if my wife dies? (Later she died, and her death gave me much sorrow.) What if my parents die? (They also died, and I lamented greatly over their deaths.) Then I thought: What if I myself die? I trembled at this thought and felt dizzy.

From that experience, I began studying Christianity and next relied upon the sutra of Amida Buddha, seeking the correct path through different faiths. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, I could not find a convincing solution to the quandary of life. So I brooded over this problem once again in my solitary cell. Since I was always interested in science and mathematics, I could not believe in anything illogical or unreasonable.

I devoted myself to reading the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's writings. Then I came across some mysterious passages in the Lotus Sutra. To experience the meaning of those passages, I began



Illustration by Kenichiro Uchida

When his daughter died shortly after birth, President Toda began a search for the meaning of death. He found the answer in the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, as the Daishonin taught. When I finished chanting two million times, I experienced something mystic, beholding in my mind a state of existence never known to me before. Trembling with joy, I stood in my solitary cell, proclaiming to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout time and space: "I have shaken off my delusions five years behind Confucius but came to know my mission five years ahead of him."

Through this experience, I came to understand the essential aspect of life expounded in the Lotus Sutra, which I shall discuss in the following.

## THE LIFE OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The "Simile and Parable" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states:

At that time the Buddha said to Shariputra, "Now, in the midst of this great assembly of heavenly and human beings, shramanas, Brahmins and so forth, I say this. In the past,

under twenty thousand million Buddhas, for the sake of the unsurpassed way I have constantly taught and converted you. And you throughout the long night followed me and accepted my instruction. Because I used expedient means to guide and lead you, you were born in the midst of my Law.

"Shariputra, in the past I taught you to aspire and vow to achieve the Buddha way. But now you have forgotten all that and instead suppose that you have already attained extinction.

Now, because I want to make you recall to mind the way that you originally vowed to follow, for the sake of the voice-hearers I am preaching this Great Vehicle sutra called the Lotus of the Wonderful Law, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, one that is guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas.

"Shariputra, in ages to come, after a countless, boundless, inconceivable number of kalpas have passed, you will make offerings to some thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas, and will honor and uphold the correct Law. You will fulfill every aspect of the way of the bodhisattva and will be able to become a Buddha..." (LS3, 51)

The "Parable of the Phantom City" chapter states:

[The Buddha announced to the monks: "...The Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha... addressed the



Derrell Gulin/CORBIS

“Suppose there is a cherry tree. If you break off a branch and put it in a vase, its buds will eventually bloom and new fragile leaves will come out in time. Is the life of this cherry branch the same as that of the original tree? Or is it now different? Life is indeed mysterious.”

whole of the great assembly, saying:] ‘These sixteen bodhisattva shramaneras<sup>1</sup> are of a kind very rarely to be found, their faculties penetrating and sharp, their wisdom bright and comprehending. Already in the past they have offered alms to immeasurable thousands, ten thousand, millions of Buddhas. In the company of those Buddhas they have constantly carried out brahma practices, received and embraced the Buddha wisdom, and expounded it to living beings, causing them to enter therein. Now all of you should from time to time associate closely with them and offer them alms. Why? Because if any of you, voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas or bodhisattvas, are able to take faith in the sutra teachings preached by these sixteen bodhisattvas, and will accept and embrace them and never disparage

them, then such persons will all be able to attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, the wisdom of the Thus Come One.”

The Buddha, addressing the monks, said:

“These sixteen bodhisattvas have constantly desired to expound this Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law. The living beings converted by each one of these bodhisattvas are equal in number to six hundred ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges sands. Existence after existence these living beings are reborn in company with that bodhisattva...” (LS7, 133-34)

The “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter states:

[At that time the Buddha said to the multitude of great bodhisattvas...] “Good men, the Thus Come One observes how among living beings there

are those who delight in a little Law, meager in virtue and heavy with defilement. For such persons I describe how in my youth I left my household and attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi [supreme enlightenment]. But in truth the time since I attained Buddhahood is extremely long, as I have told you...” (LS16, 226)

The verse section of the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter also states:

Since I attained  
Buddhahood  
the number of kalpas [an extremely long period of time] that have passed  
is an immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands,  
millions, trillions, asamkhya [uncountable]. (LS16, 229)

Though only a fraction of the Lotus Sutra, the above passages indicate that the entire Buddhist teaching of Shakyamuni is expounded upon the basic assumption of life’s past, present and future, that is, the eternity of life. Therefore, if the concept of eternal life was replaced with the idea that life is limited to the present, Buddhism would lose its philosophical foundation.

In this regard, it is possible to judge the depth and breadth of various Buddhist scriptures according to their views on life, whether they are profound and broad or shallow and narrow. Needless to say, Nichiren Daishonin established his teaching upon the notion of the eternity of life. The Daishonin, however, delved deeper into the existence of life than Shakyamuni; he thought of life on

its essential level.

The Daishonin states in “The Opening of the Eyes”:

Confucianism describes the Three Sovereigns, the Five Emperors, and the Three Kings, whom it calls the Honorable Ones of Heaven. ...Some say that, if we ask what existed before our ancestors were born, we will find that life was born out of the primal force, while others declare that eminence and ignobility, joy and sorrow, right and wrong, gain and loss occur simply as part of the natural order. These are theories that are cleverly argued, but that fail to take cognizance of either the past or the future. Mystery, as we have seen, means darkness or obscurity, and it is for this reason that it is called mystery. It is a theory that deals with matters only in terms of the present. (WND, 220-21)

He also states in “The Opening of the Eyes”:

This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law. Shariputra practiced the way of the bodhisattva for sixty kalpas, but he abandoned the way because he could not endure the ordeal of the Brahman who begged for his eye. Of those who received the seeds of Buddhahood in the remote past and those who did so from the sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, many abandoned the seeds and suf-



“No matter how hard I tried, I could not find a convincing solution to the quandary of life. So I brooded over this problem once again in my solitary cell.” In the print above, a prisoner ponders his fate at Newgate Prison in London.

fered in hell for the long periods of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas and major world system dust particle kalpas, respectively, because they followed evil companions. Whether tempted by good or threatened by evil, if one casts aside the Lotus Sutra, one destines oneself for hell. (WND, 280)

In “The Selection of the Time,” the Daishonin states: “No matter how the people of today may follow the teachings of the sutras in hopes of a better life in the hereafter, if the sutras they follow are in error, then they can never attain enlightenment. But that is not to be attributed to any fault of the Buddha” (WND, 555).

Passages such as these abound in the Daishonin’s writings. It is unimaginable to approach Buddhism

without understanding the concept of the eternity of life. It is the true aspect of life, and one’s understanding in this regard is the first step toward his or her sacred enlightenment. Many intellectuals may regard this as superstition, denying it with derisive laughter. From my own perspective, however, the ignorance of those in denial of the eternity of life is indeed laughable for they do not examine their own lives in a scientific manner.

Science cannot exist without recognizing cause and effect. All phenomena of the universe are invariably accompanied by their causes and effects. Attributing the appearance of life to the conception of an egg with a sperm is simply a description of the fact; it does not offer us any essential insight. While acknowledging that all phenomena have their causes and effects, some nonchalantly think that only life appears by chance and then disappears like a bubble after death. I must say that such people are exceedingly lackadaisical about their own lives.

No matter how much natural science develops or no matter how loudly people scream for the abolition of classes and for equality, the real phenomena of life can be neither explained nor fully understood by science or politics alone.

We see people, cats, dogs, tigers and giant cedar trees. Are their lives the same or are they different? Furthermore, how are they related to one another?

Although people are all humans, some are born intelligent while others are not. Some are born beautiful while others are born ugly. Some are born healthy while others are born sickly. Some people, no matter how hard they work, remain poor. Science and social institutions are utterly powerless to help people suffering

from their own greed or jealousy or people tormented by others who are greedy or jealous. Differences in our realities have their causes. Without seeking the causes on a fundamental level, the solutions to those problems will not likely be found.

While I expound on the eternity of life, I am not advocating the existence of a soul or ghost. Let me make it clear that I am not asserting that there exists a kind of ghost or soul that exists apart from one's body and mind, controls one's present life and continues indefinitely in afterlife.

## THE ETERNITY OF LIFE

**H**uman life exists throughout the three existences of past, present and future. The length of life, in this regard, is essential to Buddhism. The "Life Span of the Thus Come One" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states:

"But good men, it has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.

"Suppose a person were to take five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkha [extremely large number] thousand-million-fold worlds and grind them to dust. Then, moving eastward, each time he passes five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkha worlds he drops a particle of dust. He continues eastward in this way until he has finished dropping all the particles. Good men, what is your opinion? Can the total number of all these worlds be

imagined or calculated?"

The bodhisattva Maitreya and the others said to the Buddha: "World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable, boundless—one cannot calculate their number, nor does the mind have the power to encompass them. Even all the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas [self-enlightened beings] with their wisdom free of outflows could not imagine or understand how many there are. Although we abide in the state of avivartika, we cannot comprehend such a matter. World-Honored One, these worlds are immeasurable and boundless."

At that time the Buddha said to the multitude of great bodhisattvas: "Good men, now I will state this to you clearly. Suppose all these worlds, whether they received a particle of dust or not, are once more reduced to dust. Let one particle represent one kalpa. The time that has passed since I attained Buddhahood surpasses this by a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkha kalpas.

"Ever since then I have been constantly in this saha world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting" (LS16, 225).

The above sutra passage, among Shakyamuni's many scriptures, is the most important part, the quintessence of his enlightenment. Its meaning could be paraphrased in Shakyamuni's address to his disciples as follows: "You all think that I became a Buddha in this world. In truth, however, I became a Buddha in the distant past, numberless

major world system dust particle kalpas ago. And since then I have been active in this saha world." He reveals here that his life along with his enlightenment not only exists in this lifetime, but has also existed since the remote past.

The following passage from the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" chapter, however, may be understood from a viewpoint different from the previous passage:

[At that time the Buddha said to the multitude of great bodhisattvas...] "Good men, the Thus Come One observes how among living beings there are those who delight in a little Law, meager in virtue and heavy with defilement. For such persons I describe how in my youth I left my household and attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. But in truth the time since I attained Buddhahood is extremely long, as I have told you..." (LS16, 226)

In this passage, Shakyamuni explains that although those "meager in virtue and heavy with defilement" think that their lives are only of this present lifetime, the true aspect of life is eternal, without beginning or end.

In contrast with Shakyamuni, who viewed the nature of life from the perspective of Buddhahood attained in the distant past, Nichiren Daishonin, from the viewpoint of an ordinary person who is in the second of the six stages of practice, expounds on the intrinsic nature of life and the eternal existence of Buddhahood. That is, the Daishonin explains that within our lives as ordinary people exists the unchanging, eternal reality of life. The

moment embraces eternity while eternity is a sequence of moments. The Daishonin explains that “extremely long” [in the Lotus Sutra] means “without affectation” or “originally endowed.”

In “The Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas of Past, Present and Future,” the Daishonin states:

Shakyamuni Thus Come One realized at the very beginning of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago when he was an ordinary person that his body is earth, water, fire, wind and space. And he immediately attained enlightenment. Afterwards he appeared in world after world, lifetime after lifetime, attaining the Way in place after place through the eight phases of a Buddha’s existence<sup>2</sup> for the sake of teaching others (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 568).

The Daishonin also states in “The Entity of the Mystic Law”:

When the sage was observing the principle and assigning names to all things, he perceived that there is this wonderful single Law [*myoho*] that simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*renge*], and he named it Myoho-*renge*. This single Law that is Myoho-*renge* encompasses within it all the phenomena comprising the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms<sup>3</sup>, and is lacking in none of them. Anyone who practices this Law will obtain

both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood simultaneously.

The sage practiced with this Law as his teacher and attained enlightenment, and therefore he simultaneously obtained both the mystic cause and the mystic



President Toda states: “When seen in terms of life’s fundamental objective—to awaken and be active—sleep is merely a means. If we say that human beings are supposed to be active, then they should not need to sleep. But without sleep, one cannot dispel his fatigue or work energetically.”

effect of Buddhahood, becoming the Thus Come One of perfect enlightenment and fully realized virtues (WND, 421).

In “On the Ten Dharma Worlds,” the Daishonin states:

The theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra expounds the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds from the viewpoint that Shakyamuni attained his enlightenment for the first time in the present lifetime; the theoretical teaching has not yet revealed the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds<sup>4</sup> of the origi-

nal enlightenment that is intrinsically endowed.... The theoretical teaching, therefore, lacks in the meaning of Buddhahood that has neither beginning nor end (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 421).

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

The “three bodies<sup>5</sup> of the Buddha of absolute freedom” indicates the votary of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law. The title of the treasure of the three bodies of the Buddha of absolute freedom is Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo*. These three bodies are the three most important points in the actuality of the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter. Thus Come One of this chapter shall be described in terms of the six stages of practice as follows: Thus Come One

of the first stage is an ordinary person who then advances to the second stage when he receives upon his head Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo* as he hears the title of the Lotus Sutra for the first time. He then moves to the third stage when he starts to practice upon hearing the Law. This third stage is to observe the object of devotion of the three thousand realms in a single life moment in actuality. When he subdues the obstacle of earthly desires, he is in the fourth stage. In the fifth stage, he devotes himself to the practice for others.

When he attains the ultimate realization that he possesses the three bodies of the Buddha of absolute freedom, he is said to be a Buddha of the sixth stage. In general, instead of regarding the suppression of earthly desires as the ultimate teaching of the “Life Span of Thus Come One” chapter, one must regard the originally endowed life of an ordinary person as the ultimate teaching of this chapter (GZ, 752).

As clarified in those passages, Shakyamuni’s three thousand realms in a single life moment expounds from the viewpoint of a Buddha and is a doctrinal principle both in his theoretical and true teachings. I think that the Daishonin’s three thousand realms in a single life moment is expounded from the viewpoint of an ordinary person whose life is originally endowed with the Mystic Law. It is a practice of directly observing one’s mind and thereby attaining enlightenment; it reveals the reality of life on the most fundamental level.

In the following, I will state some of my views regarding the eternity of life, though not without trepidation that my interpretations might defile those original texts.

Life exists simultaneously with the universe. It did not precede the universe, nor did it come into being after the universe took form, either by chance or as someone’s creation. The universe itself is life; it would be a mistake to view life as exclusively limited to the planet earth. Now, bathed in the Daishonin’s vast and boundless compassion, we are devoting ourselves to the Gohonzon, the object of devotion for the direct attainment of Buddhahood. In so doing, we are in fact striving to grasp

the mystic reality of life itself.

Some may deny my view of eternal life, asserting that humans and other creatures evolved from unicellular life forms. But I would counter, why did these one-celled life forms come into being, where did they come from, when our red-hot planet had cooled?

Be it on our own earth or on other worlds, when conditions are right for unicellular life forms to appear, then they appear. And when the soil and climate are right for moss or algae to flourish, they proliferate. I am not denying the evolutionary theory of their development, but because the universe is itself life, wherever conditions are right, primeval life forms will appear. Therefore, it is in no way strange to think that thousands of billions of years ago the human race may have inhabited other stars and is now flourishing on earth. Moreover, we can imagine that somewhere on other worlds exist animals striving to evolve into human beings. I have heard from astronomers that certain forms of plant life may exist on other planets in our solar system. Not being an astronomer, I am in no position to prove it, but I am inclined to believe that it may be so.

I cannot accept the view that proteins or other substances somehow combined at a particular time to produce life. The presence of proteins and the like may provide a condition necessary for life to emerge, but life itself is forever inherent in the cosmos.

## HOW DOES LIFE CONTINUE?

Life is eternal. People often talk about the continuation of life, but we find a number of views on the subject. Some preach in the abstract that “life is eternal” and believe it vaguely, but such abstract notions elude our grasp.

We also find those who say that a person’s life is passed on to offspring, and that she therefore lives on in her descendants. But this cannot be called eternal life. If one’s descendants were to die out, would not she herself cease to exist? Moreover, a life that could perish with the destruction of the earth cannot be considered eternal. Were we to accept these people’s views, we would have to say that one’s own life is even now active within her son or daughter, just as it is within herself, which would be unreasonable in the extreme. How do these people regard their own lives after death? In effect, they view their descendants’ bodies as their own cemetery, a shallow concept of life indeed. We cannot say that they understand life’s eternity.

I remember that the famous Chogyu Takayama [novelist, 1871–1902] once said, “Men perform great works that remain even after they themselves have passed away. Thus, men live on in the great works they leave behind.” Because Takayama was such a respected man of letters, I worried greatly over his explanation. If what he said is true, then the lives of us ordinary people cannot be considered eternal, let alone the lives of dogs or cats. In this case, eternal life would not be universal. For a long time I pondered whether or not this was true. In consequence, I reached the conclusion that while Takayama was a great literary man, his views on life after death were exceptionally shallow.

Although this may become a bit theoretical, among those theories of life that depart from demonstrable fact, we find the idea that within living beings there exists such a thing as a spirit or soul, which lives on eternally after death. Because this view at first sounds quite plausible, a considerable number of scholars and many

other people embrace it. From the standpoint of Buddhist philosophy, however, it is quite worthless. Shakyamuni categorically denies the existence of the soul in his Nirvana Sutra, defining this belief as non-Buddhist and incorrect. Then in what way does the life of living beings continue? The problem of what happens after death occupies a prominent place in Buddhist thought, as it does in that of other religions. As it might easily create misunderstanding on the part of those not well versed in the Buddhist teachings, however, I will omit a detailed, doctrinal explanation at this time and rather deal with this subject in the most simple, common-sense terms. I ask for the reader's understanding on this point.

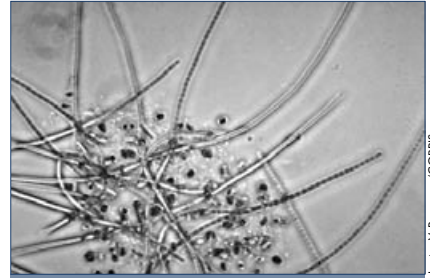
The verse section of the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra states, "as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana" (LS16, 229), thus expounding that death is a sort of expedient. For example, when seen in terms of life's fundamental objective—to be awake and active—sleep is merely a means. If we say that human beings are supposed to be active, then they should not need to sleep. But without sleep, one cannot dispel his fatigue or work energetically. In a similar way, when people grow old, fall ill or find their bodies seriously damaged, they have no alternative but to rejuvenate their life force by the means of death.

The supreme principle of Buddhism is three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Needless to say, Buddhism resolves the problem of life after death in connection with this principle. "The Opening of the Eyes" reads, "The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life begins with the concept of the mutual possession of the

Ten Worlds" (WND, 224). Concerning these Ten Worlds, "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind" states:

When we look from time to time at a person's face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times, greed appears in the person's face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of Hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asuras, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings.... The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world? Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him. Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate. But since you possess the other nine worlds, you should believe that you have Buddhahood as well. (WND, 358)

If we contemplate our state of mind over the course of a day's activities, we find that moment by moment, different states arise and vanish within us, such as greed, joy or rage. Here, parenthetically, I would like to explain a bit: The passage cited above says, "Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate," but what exactly is the relationship or external stimulus that will allow us to manifest our inherent world of Buddhahood? The ultimate truth of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the reality of three thousand realms



Anabaena blue-green algae. President Toda states: Some may deny my view of eternal life, asserting that humans and other creatures evolved from unicellular life forms. But I would counter, why did these one-celled forms come into being, where did they come from, when our red-hot planet had cooled?"

Lester V. Bergman/CORBIS

in a single moment of life, or, in terms of our practice, the Three Great Secret Laws. Thus, only by taking faith in the Gohonzon of the high sanctuary of true Buddhism can we establish the relationship that enables us to attain Buddhahood in our present form. I would like to discuss this point in detail on another occasion, however.

When we observe the workings of our mind we discover that even when we feel joy, that joy disappears with the passing of time. It has not gone away somewhere, like a departing spirit or soul, but has melted back into the recesses of the mind where we can no longer find it. Yet after several hours or days, that same joy surfaces again. Or, suppose that some circumstance has caused one to grieve. Even after several hours or days have passed, if he happens to recall his misfortune the same sorrow may suddenly overwhelm him again. In such cases we often say that one "grieves anew," but between prior and present grief there exists a mysterious continuity; there is no gap between them whatsoever.

A similar phenomenon transpires



Seattle Art Museum/CORBIS

"Soul Catcher" by Tsimshian, located in the Seattle Art Museum. Although President Toda expounds on the eternity of life, he is not advocating the existence of a soul or ghost. "Let me make it clear that I am not asserting that there exists a kind of ghost or soul that exists apart from one's body and mind, controls one's present life and continues indefinitely in afterlife."

when we sleep each night. While we are asleep, our conscious mind is nowhere to be found, but nevertheless it functions, whether we are sleeping or not. When we sleep, our conscious mind seems to vanish; when we awaken, it instantly returns. Does our conscious mind exist, or not? We can say it exists, but there are times when it vanishes. The view that defines things neither as existence nor non-existence is called the perception of non-substantiality. This dimension of life transcending the distinctions of existence and non-existence is also called that which is mystic (*myo*). When we consider the mind and its workings in the microcosm of our own being, and also study the profound teachings of Buddhist philosophy, we can reach a valid conclusion about the existence or non-existence of life's continuation after death.

As I mentioned before, the universe is itself life; therefore, when we die, our lives melt back into the greater life of the universe and are nowhere to be found. This is analogous to the interval between the two instances of grief when there seems to

be no grieving, or the interval between two moments of rejoicing when joy appears to have vanished, or the interval of sleep when our conscious mind is nowhere to be found. Our life in death does not flit about somewhere like a spirit. Even though it has melted back into the cosmos, however, it is not therefore necessarily at peace, just as sleep is not always restful. Some people sleep soundly, but others suffer from frightful dreams, and still others, plagued by worries, sleep only fitfully.

We can readily grasp this matter of life melting back into the cosmos if we study the sutra and cherish the essence of Buddhism in our hearts. When life in the state of death is aroused by some external stimulus, it reappears in the world in visible form and resumes its life-activities. And, just as one resumes his mental activities from the day before upon opening his eyes in the morning, so too are we born carrying with us undiminished our karma created in prior existences, receiving its effects as we live out our lives in this world.

In this way, just as we sleep and wake, wake and sleep, we are born

and die, die and are born anew, thus maintaining an eternal cycle of life. Because each person carries his own destiny, those who share the relationship of husband and wife, or parent and child in this lifetime cannot maintain this relationship eternally. Only those who embrace the true and pure law of Nam-myohorenge-kyo—who have faith in the Gohonzon—receive immense benefit, maintaining their bonds with one another throughout eternity.

July 1949

#### Footnotes

1. Shramanera—A male novice in the Buddhist Order who has vowed to uphold the ten precepts.
2. Eight phases of a Buddha's existence—Eight successive phases which a Buddha is said to manifest when he or she appears in the world to save people. They are: 1) descending from Heaven; 2) entering the mother's body; 3) emerging from the mother's body; 4) renouncing the world; 5) conquering devils; 6) attaining enlightenment; 7) turning the wheel of the Law; and 8) entering nirvana.
3. Three thousand realms—A philosophical system set forth by T'ien-t'ai of China based on the Lotus Sutra. The expression "three thousand" is an integration of the Ten Worlds, their mutual possession, the ten factors and the three realms of existence. These component principles may be thought of as the three thousand conditions that life may manifest in any single moment.
4. Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds—The principle that each of the Ten Worlds contains all the other nine as potential within itself. This is to be taken to mean that an individual's state of life can be changed, and that all beings of the nine worlds possess the potential for Buddhahood.
5. The three bodies—Three kinds of body a Buddha possesses: 1) the Dharma body, which indicates the Law to which a Buddha is enlightened; 2) the reward body, which indicates wisdom; and 3) the manifested body, which is the physical form the Buddha assumes to save people.

# BEYOND PRECEPTS

## *to a Full Expression of Joy and Human Revolution*

### **A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM AND THE PRACTICE OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

FAY HOVEY,  
MAUI, HAWAII



*In preparing to write this article, I used several books on Tibetan Buddhism. I found myself reading them with increased insight after thirteen years of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. All those nights studying the teachings of the Daishonin, all the sessions with seniors in faith, all the district discussion meetings and absorbing SGI-USA publications and President Daisaku Ikeda's writings proved invaluable in examining the practices and philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism. I am neither a professional scholar nor a student of comparative religions. Rather than a refutation of Tibetan Buddhism, this article is a personal perspective on this esoteric form offering numerous empowerments (initiations) and stages of practice requiring rigorous self-analysis and devotion to a teacher or guru.*

Buddhism has its origins with Shakyamuni (Gautama) Buddha, a prince in India who enjoyed a life of wealth and luxury. Buddhist tradition in China and Japan has him living between 1049 B.C.E. and 949 B.C.E. Upon the realization that every human being is confronted with the inescapable problems of birth, old age, sickness

and death, he renounced his lifestyle in order to find answers to these problems. He spent a considerable amount of time in practices of self-denial, much like the ascetics of his day.

Shakyamuni returned to a more moderate way of living after he found ascetic practices to be useless and engaged in deep meditation until he reached enlightenment. He taught what he had realized for fifty years with the desire to lead all people to the enlightenment he had achieved.

Shakyamuni had to prepare his disciples before he could reveal the truth of life because it was much too difficult for the average person to comprehend. People were caught up in the belief that material possessions and immediate pleasures provided the happiness they were seeking. Shakyamuni taught that living a life filled with pain, only to die, be reborn and repeat that process was a life lived in vain. The only logical way to escape from these sufferings was to eliminate desire by annihilating the body. People were taught to suppress desires. This was later known as Hinayana Buddhism.

As understanding among his disciples grew, Shakyamuni discouraged them from seeking nothingness. He taught that there was another happy world where one could be reborn without eliminating desires. These teachings were part of the provisional doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism.

When Shakyamuni later

In what seems to be a relatively short period of time, Buddhism in the West has become identified with the smiling, amiable monks and lamas (priests) of the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism. A prominent book and music chain

serves as the official bookseller for the Dalai Lama's latest lecture tour, "The Illuminated Path—2000." Stirred by the plight of the Tibetans, whose country has been under the domination of China since 1947, people have donated funds to the Tibetan Dalai Lama's government in exile in Dharamsala, North India for aid to refugees and for the construction of meditation centers and temples worldwide.

For many, the image of Buddhism in America is clad in burgundy and gold robes, wrapped in a mantle of elaborate mystery that is seldom examined or questioned. Few take the time to deeply consider the effectiveness of this highly ornate and ritualistic form of Buddhism in terms of their own individual quests for happiness. It appears that the sincere countenance and insights of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, and those of his followers from Tibet and in the West strike a deep chord in interested Americans: the desire for true happiness and how to live an enlightened life.

The tenets, monastic trappings and exotic nature of Tibetan Buddhism suggest that these monks



The Kumbun Stupa in Gyantse, Tibet, was the centerpiece of Palkhor Chode Monastery. The stupa's name means, "Palace of a Thousand Images."

and lamas somehow embody something rare—only obtainable through the use of deep, extended practices well beyond our everyday human existence. For most Americans, a monastic lifestyle or one that includes a periodic religious retreat may be impossible. Just how accessible are the peace, happiness and the dynamic joy of an enlightened life to those drawn to the precepts and exterior appearance of Tibetan Buddhism? As members of SGI-USA, what might our attitude and perspective be when engaging in dialogue with our friends and acquaintances when asked how the Daishonin's Buddhism differs from the Tibetan schools of Buddhism?

## ***My Life and Tibetan Buddhism***

Tibetan Buddhism touched my own life over twenty years ago when, as a lay follower, I studied in a small Tibetan temple in Hawaii. Like many others, I was drawn to the peace emanating from the temple grounds and the charming and happy ways of the monks, *geshes* (teachers) and lamas that lived and

expounded the Lotus Sutra, a change took place. He encouraged his disciples to discover the Law within their lives instead of simply following precepts. If they did that, he taught, they would find that even the turbulent land where they lived would become peaceful.

After Shakyamuni's death, many disciples propagated Hinayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism was propagated as being able to save more people from unhappiness. Gradually, Shakyamuni's Buddhism lost its glory in India. Brahmanism regained the influence it had previously lost and prospered as Hinduism. Buddhism was still propagated in various forms in the neighboring countries of India. Hinayana Buddhism took a southern route to countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Mahayana Buddhism flowed to northwest India, central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Another stream of Buddhism went into Tibet and mingled with a native Bon teaching and formed Lamaism.

During the Han Dynasty of China, Confucianism was the foundation of political ideas, but Buddhism came to be believed among aristocrats and intellectuals. Many sutras were translated into Chinese, which attracted people's attention. As a result, Buddhism flourished. T'ien-t'ai taught three major works and, based on the Lotus Sutra, completed the doctrine

lectured there. It was a simple life of service and meditation set apart from the rest of the world. I enjoyed the students who, like myself, sought something deeper and more meaningful. I sincerely hoped to find in the practice something that would resonate for me and would help me with the challenges of my life as a single mother. I cooked for many retreats and teaching sessions, slept in the little room right next to the altar and endeavored to learn the practices of Tibetan Buddhism.

My only child was born three days after the Dalai Lama made his historic visit to Hawaii to bless our small temple. Reflecting on that time, I recall how we were all swept up in preparations, working for days to make things perfect. The evening that he arrived, a long motorcade of cars made its way to the temple. Since the Dalai Lama is considered a head of state, the Secret Service arrived first followed by the Dalai Lama's limousine. As he stepped out onto the red carpet, the people gathered there and repeatedly prostrated themselves at his feet. They were worshipping him as "a divine incarnation," a manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Buddha of Compassion. Although I did not know why, the waves of prostration and the two days of ceremony and teachings that constituted his visit made me feel confused and uncomfortable.

In the following weeks, my young son received a Tibetan name from the chief lama of the temple and I tried to continue with my studies. I found myself restless with the multitude of teachings and the sheer magnitude of the steps to enlightenment. I was exasperated and felt like everything I was doing had nothing to do with my happiness or Buddhahood. The end came for me when, in the depths of a personal sorrow, I was told in a private ses-

sion with a highly respected lama that I should no longer be concerned with such a minor and transient suffering in light of the impermanence of this existence. I was told to not think about it and to be happy and was offered a cookie from his tea tray. I was stunned. I felt I had been treated like a child. I struggled to understand. Although I grasped what he said intellectually, his answer did not touch my heart—it did not help my life.

## How Many Lifetimes Must it Take?

Many years after Shakyamuni Buddha's death, the Buddhist monk scholars who crossed the Hindu Kush range in what is now Afghanistan, or chanced the dangerous seas to spread the Buddha's teachings into China and the rest of Asia, did not risk the remote Himalayan Range. They might not have known of Tibet's existence, a region embraced by a formidable barrier of mountains so high, it has been called "the roof of the world." The Lotus Sutra was translated into Chinese by the Indian scholar and teacher Kumarajiva in 406 CE, a full three centuries prior to the first appearance of Buddhist teachings in the eighth century in Tibet.

Early Tibetan Buddhist scholars had no knowledge of the landmark interpretations of the Lotus Sutra set forth by the eminent Chinese Buddhist sage and scholar, T'ien-t'ai (or Chih-i). In 594 CE, he expounded *Great Concentration and Insight*, which revealed the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena, what T'ien-t'ai termed "three thousand realms in a single moment of life." It was a

that became the theoretical basis for Nichiren Daishonin to inscribe the Gohonzon.

The T'ien-t'ai sect gradually lost followers as other sects of Buddhism gained strength. Miao-lo re-established the T'ien-t'ai sect and his disciples preached the true teaching of the sect to Japanese scholars.

Buddhism was officially introduced to Japan in 552 when King Seimei of Kudara, ancient Korea, presented the Japanese government with a Buddhist idol and scriptures. This occurred 1,400 years after Shakyamuni's death.

Nichiren Daishonin was born in 1222 in the village of Kominato in Chiba prefecture. As he grew older, he thought it was strange that so many Buddhist sects were in conflict with one another while they all preached Shakyamuni's teachings. He made up his mind to establish a correct Buddhism. He prepared himself for the priesthood and began studying Buddhism. At the age of 32, the Daishonin found that the essence of Buddhism was in the Lotus Sutra.

Shakyamuni predicted that in the future, a specific time called the Latter Day of the Law, the Law would be revealed and the Lotus Sutra widely propagated. Nichiren Daishonin's mission was to reveal the Law hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sutra as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and inscribe the Gohonzon for the happiness of all humankind.



Chris Rainer/CORBIS

Figures in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. Early Buddhism in Tibet absorbed much of the old indigenous religion known as Bon.

prevalent Chinese Buddhist belief during that age that, depending upon one's karma, an individual could occupy only one state in a lifetime. This mutually exclusive view made the attainment of enlightenment a long and arduous passage requiring many lifetimes of practice.

The mutually inclusive function revealed by T'ien-T'ai opened the door to enlightenment in one lifetime as an individual was capable of moving back and forth any number of times from one realm to another. Thus, one could reach Buddhahood without undergoing a series of rebirths. At the same time, attaining Buddhahood was not a static state or permanent condition. (*Faith Into Action*, p. 233). The Daishonin said of the Lotus Sutra: "It explains that the entity of our life which manifests either good or evil at each moment, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law...That is why the sutra states, 'After I have passed into extinction, [one] should accept and uphold this sutra. Such a person assuredly and without a doubt will attain the Buddha way.'" ("On Attaining

Buddhahood," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4)

This most important teaching of the Buddha did not reach Tibet in the early years of Buddhist propagation there. After its introduction, the Lotus Sutra was not regarded as singularly important in Tibet. By the time it was translated into the Tibetan language, earlier forms of Buddhism had already established themselves in the lives of the Tibetan people.

Early Buddhism in Tibet absorbed much of the old shamanistic, indigenous religion known as Bon. This was similar to the way early Christianity absorbed the customs and practices of the ancient nature or pagan cults of Europe. To this day, one can see the old religion in Tibetan demon mask dances and in the ancient arts and practices of divination, astrology and the consulting of oracles. As power shifted over the centuries, the warlords and aristocracy of Tibet were absorbed into the monastic class as well. In the thirteenth century (coinciding with the Daishonin's lifetime), the political title of "Dalai Lama" which means "Ocean of Wisdom" was

bestowed on a high abbot of Tibet by Chinese emperor Kublai Khan, making him Regent of Tibet. Leadership succession in Tibet, no longer a political process of building dynasties, was determined by the recognition of successive incarnations of Avalokitesvara, thereby securing the only known form of monastic governance in Buddhist history.

## Reliance Upon the Mentor ~ The Worship of the Guru

Because of its emphasis on the guidance of a qualified instructor, lama or mentor, Tibetan Buddhism was called “lamaism” for centuries in Asia. In the eleventh century, the Indian teacher Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana arrived in Tibet. A grand personage of 60, the Tibetans regarded him as a Buddha in human form and his impact upon the Tibetan form of Buddhism was very deep. He was invited to Tibet to use his encyclopedic knowledge of Buddhist literature to assist monasteries there in recovering from a period of suppression, confusion and disorganization. Atisha proclaimed that the instruction of the mentor was more important than knowledge of the scriptures since the guru, lama, master or spiritual mentor

is the key element that makes them practicable. This principle of “the priority of the mentor” is the foundation of Tibetan Buddhism

A proponent of the Tantric school, considered to be the Supreme Vehicle for enlightenment, Atisha reestablished this ritualistic path that could not be negotiated without successive initiations at the hands of a living teacher. For a Tibetan Buddhist, there is no quicker path to enlightenment than embracing the Tantric teachings with a lama. Absolute surrender and trust is required. A contemporary Tibetan teacher, Kalu Rinpoche, once said: “If you believe your guru is enlightened — he is.” (*Foundations of Tibetan Buddhism*, 79)

The mentor-disciple relationship in the Daishonin’s Buddhism is one of mutual trust in the Law where our mentor, President Ikeda, presents a model from which to learn, but holds no initiatory status or special powers. Our mentor is not the focus of our devotion or worship. What we call “seniors in faith” are lay organization leaders who encourage the members in their practice. Strengthening our faith together as equal members, we do not rely upon persons who would serve as gatekeepers to our enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings



Alison Wright/COBBIS

A Tibetan woman holds a photograph of the current fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. The title of “Dalai Lama,” which means “Ocean of Wisdom” was first bestowed on a high abbot of Tibet by Chinese emperor Kubla Khan in the thirteenth century.

and writings are a condensation of Shakyamuni Buddha’s 80,000 sutras. Immediately before his passing, Shakyamuni strictly admonished his disciples to rely on the Law and themselves. He forbade reliance upon people, gods and deities, including the worship of Shakyamuni himself. The practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism clearly emphasizes our reliance upon the Mystic Law of cause and effect and our chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. President Ikeda

## The Eighty-thousand Teachings

The entire body of teachings Shakyamuni taught during his lifetime is called the “eighty-thousand teachings.” The number eighty thousand is not to be taken literally, but indicates a large number. To clarify the relative superiority of the Buddha’s various teachings, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (538-597) of China classified them into two categories based on the order in which they were taught and the profundity of the teaching.

T’ien-t’ai refuted the scriptural classifications of

the ten major Buddhist schools of his day, which based themselves either on The Flower Garland or Nirvana Sutra, and devised the classification of the five periods and eight teachings, based on the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra.

The five time periods and eight levels of teaching classify all Buddhist sutras up to the highest teaching expressed in the Lotus Sutra.

The five periods are (1) the Flower Garland period, or the period of the Flower Garland Sutra that Shakyamuni taught immediately following his enlightenment; (2)

has written: "It should be pointed out that the 'Law,' not the 'person' is to be regarded as the proper standard in all things. Putting the person first gives you an uncertain standard; it is to let that person's mind become your master. In contrast, if you establish the Law as your standard, you will become the master of your mind." (*Faith Into Action*, 233)

## Tibetan Buddhist Practice ~ "A Rehearsal for Enlightenment"

Books written by the Dalai Lama cover many Buddhist precepts in detail in addition to certain meditations that are said to help engender states of compassion and other humanistic traits. Considered to be rules of conduct, the Latin root of "precept" indicates something that must be grasped prior to being seen. Precepts are thought to precede deeper knowledge. Few would deny that it is important to treat one another with kindness, to look within for the sources of happiness and suffering and to curb negative acts in order to avoid more suffering. All religions have precepts of some kind. Even though precepts



A Tibetan Buddhist mural depicting several Buddhas.

may be helpful or have some effect in society, if people have no way to change their deeply rooted karmic tendencies, following precepts and engaging in critical self-analysis can only be of limited help.

How does one come to embody the essence of the precepts, living them fully from the foundation of self-revelation, moving beyond precepts and self-analysis to the full expression of joy and life force? As followers of Nichiren Daishonin, we see the way to happiness, human revolution and fulfillment as something

readily accessible and easily communicated to all. In my experience, the actual hands-on practice of Tibetan Buddhism was one that was ultimately frustrating and did not result in noticeable change in my life.

The path to enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism requires a solid foundation in the teachings, sutras, renunciation, elimination of worldly desires, cultivation of Bodhicitta (the mind of compassion) and a full understanding of emptiness. There are several means toward this end. Deity yoga is practiced to "link" oneself to the form of the Buddha or teacher using deep psychological training and active visualization of one's guru. The Dalai Lama has called visualization of the Buddha, deities and bodhisattvas a rehearsal for Buddhahood. Mudras (hand gestures) are utilized as well as chanting mantras from numerous sutras with the belief that they invoke the Buddha within. The offering of prostrations is to engender humility by lowering one's body and face to the ground or floor. Qualified teachers who offer vows and prayers bestow empowerments. In brief, this constitutes the preliminary practice for lay believers who are encouraged through observing precepts to accumulate merit through good deeds in hopes for a fortunate rebirth. For most, the goal of enlightenment is considered only for those with the stamina,

The Agama ("the teachings handed down by tradition") period, or the Agama sutras, in which Hinayana<sup>1</sup> teachings were expounded; (3) the Correct and Equal period, when the Amida (Pure Land), Dainichi, Vimalakirti and other sutras were set forth; (4) the Wisdom period, in which the Wisdom sutras were taught; and (5) the Lotus and Nirvana period, an eight-year interval in which Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

The eight teachings are divided into two groups: the four teachings of doctrine and the four teachings of method. The first is a division by content, and the sec-

ond, by method of teaching. The four teachings of doctrine are: 1) Tripitaka<sup>2</sup> teaching, which corresponds to the Hinayana teachings; 2) the connecting teaching or introductory Mahayana<sup>3</sup> teachings; 3) the specific teaching, a higher level of provisional Mahayana; and 4) the perfect teaching, or true Mahayana. The four teachings of method are: 1) the sudden teaching, or those teachings that Shakyamuni expounded directly from his enlightenment; 2) the gradual teaching, or teachings expounded to gradually elevate people's capacities to an understanding of higher doctrines; 3)



Prayer flags are strung across the road and up the hill towards Potala Palace, Tibet.

ment of the principle of “three-thousand realms in a single life moment.” By chanting to the Gohonzon, we are covering all the practices of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. The Daishonin states in “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime”:

No expedient or provisional teaching leads to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment, you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless kalpas. You must never think that any of

the eighty-thousand sacred teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha’s lifetime or any of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three existences are outside of yourself. Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death unless you perceive the true nature of your life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, then your performing even ten-thousand

practices and ten-thousand good deeds will be in vain. It is like the case of a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbor’s wealth but gains not even half a coin. Unless one perceives the nature of one’s life...one’s practice will become an endless painful austerity.” (WND, 3–4)

## ***Buddhahood — a Final Destination or a Dynamic Continuing Unfoldment?***

In Tibetan Buddhism, a Buddha is one who has discovered the unity of one’s awareness with the omnipresent awareness of all beings and things. A Buddha experiences the reality of absolute voidness and integrates this experience and then manifests educational events that help others to see through their delusions thereby teaching them the way of freedom through the exact intuition of the nature of all things. (*Essential Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 11) This state, as explained previously, is only achieved through a complex system requiring years of practice with a qualified teacher. Essentially, in Tibetan Buddhist thought, once someone has attained enlightenment there is no

the secret teaching, teachings that listeners understand according to their respective individual capacities and from which they receive a different benefit without knowing it; and 4) the indeterminate teaching, teachings that listeners understand and benefit from in the same way as above but are aware of the difference.

These classifications support Shakyamuni’s statements that the Lotus Sutra is his highest teaching and thus the reason for his advent.

1. Hinayana — Literally “lesser vehicle.” It was originally a pejorative

term used by Mahayana Buddhists, who regarded the practitioners of these teachings as preoccupied with achieving personal emancipation and indifferent to the salvation of others. Hinayana teachings include the doctrines of the four noble truths and the twelve-linked chain of causation. They regard earthly desires as the cause of suffering and assert that suffering is eliminated by eradicating earthly desires.

2. Tripitaka — Three types of writings that constitute the body of Buddhist teachings: the sutras, the rules of monastic discipline and commentaries on the first two.

3. Mahayana — The “great vehicle” teaching, or the teaching that expounds the enlightenment of all and aims at the salvation of all living beings. It expounds the bodhisattva practice as the means toward the enlightenment of both oneself and others.

more to learn. That person has become omniscient — or all knowing.

President Ikeda offers his insights into Buddhahood when he states:

What does attaining Buddhahood mean for us? It does not mean that one day we suddenly turn into a Buddha or become magically enlightened. In a sense, attaining Buddhahood means that we have securely entered the path, or orbit, of Buddhahood. Rather than a final, static destination at which we arrive and remain, achieving enlightenment means firmly establishing the faith needed to keep advancing along the path of absolute happiness limitlessly, endlessly. (*Faith Into Action*, 95)

One of the things that drew me to the practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism was the refreshing idea that I could enjoy the great happiness and capabilities of Buddhahood in this lifetime. It filled my very being with renewed hope. What I have observed about my own life and the lives of other members is that this hope manifests itself as courage, confidence and the desire to push forward with the practice because of the bright light of actual proof. Experiencing the fruits of practice, I was no longer afraid of any obstacle in my environment.

No matter what door we walked through to enter the practice, regardless of the desires that surged within us, we have used our needs, our dreams, our wishes and challenges to continue moving toward an enlightened life of happiness, effectiveness and compassion for others. I was drawn to the Daishonin's Buddhism because it held more than the hope of happi-



Charles and Josette Lenars/CORBIS

At the Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, India in the Himalayas near Tibet, Buddhist monks light ceremonial lamps.

ness — it showed me a clear, understandable path to it.

## **Oh? Are You A Tibetan Buddhist?**

**W**hen someone becomes aware that I'm a Buddhist, they will ask me if I'm a Tibetan Buddhist. This has become a personal survey of mine and almost without exception, that question keeps coming up early in conversations. This question points to the continued high profile of Tibetan Buddhism on America's spiritual landscape as well as the desire to know more about Buddhism in general.

I don't mind the question because it gives me the opportunity to explain just what kind of Buddhist I am. I tell them I am a follower of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth-century Buddhist sage and teacher who based his teachings on the Lotus Sutra. When Shakyamuni Buddha offered the

Lotus Sutra to his disciples he said to put aside all of the teachings that he had taught before, because having raised them to an appropriate level of understanding, he was going to teach them the direct path to enlightenment. Today, this direct path is the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that allows us to open the palace of enlightenment as we are.

We follow the Mystic Law of cause and effect and chant before a scroll called the Gohonzon, the manifestation of the Daishonin's enlightenment, and a representation of our own innate Buddha nature. Through our practice, we awaken the Buddha nature that dwells within us and begin to live a life of enlightened wisdom using all obstacles as stepping-stones to happiness. Chanting changes a person's karma from the inside out. We worship no guru, teacher, priest or statue. This is a direct and simple practice, one that is accessible to all people, regardless of educational or spiritual attainments, gender or race. We do not have to master the Buddhist life philosophy

in the beginning but need only to chant to discover actual proof in our lives. This Buddhism goes beyond precepts. Faith enables us to carry on the heritage of the Law. We freely pass it to another without complex initiations or special powers. Faith is what really matters in the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhist precepts and the complexity of the practice necessitates a considerable gap between where people actually are in the midst of life's challenges and the Buddha they might become one day. This can serve as a hindrance to further practice. We can use dialogue as an opportunity to freely explain to people how our Buddhism differs. We have to be able to discuss these matters knowledgeably. Family members, friends and acquaintances deserve thoughtful perspectives on Buddhism and how it can impact their lives directly. We should heed the Daishonin's advice to Sammi-bo, who delivered lectures to the aristocracy in Kyoto, that we should never "be impolite or abusive, or display a conceited attitude. Such conduct would be disgraceful. Order your thoughts, words and deeds carefully and be prudent" ("The Teaching, Practice and Proof," WND, 483).

## **There Is No Buddha Existing Apart From The People**

**A**s members of SGI-USA and practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, our hearts should always be with the people. Seeing their potential and sharing our lives with them is the deepest sincerity. There



Potala Palace of the Dalai Lamas and seat of the Tibetan government in Lhasa. Construction was begun in the seventeenth century by the fifth Dalai Lama.

is no greater joy than seeing another person become truly happy and confidently moving forward in life. In this life-to-life manner—knowing that each of us can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime—we are planting seeds that will grow and blossom for thousands of years. Offering a simple, accessible practice, one that results in a direct experience of benefit and change in a person's life—for us, this is the Buddha's work. The Daishonin states in "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," "Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the five characters of myoho-rence-kyo. If we believe in these five characters, we will naturally be granted the same benefits he was" (WND, 365).

In "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," President Ikeda tells us: "Majestic Buddhas are but illusions that have nothing to do with reality. The only

actual Buddhas are ordinary people who each moment bring forth the eternal life force of time without beginning. There is no Buddha existing apart from the people. A Buddha set above the people is an expedient means. Therefore, the correct way is to live with dignity as a human being and to continue along the supreme path in life; to do so is to be a Buddha each day experiencing eternity."

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# SUMMARY

OF THE CHAPTERS  
OF THE

## *Lotus Sutra*

**Including perspectives from the “The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra — A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century”**

### PART 2

By Jeff McDaniel  
Palo Alto, California

The following is part two of a review of the Lotus Sutra chapters based on “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” (DLS) which just completed serialization in *Living Buddhism* in October. This installment includes chapters fifteen through twenty. The fifty-three installments of the dialogue appeared in the magazine from April 1995 to October 2000. The series is being published in book form as *The Wisdom of the Lotus*

*Sutra* (Volume One is now available). The dialogue was conducted between SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and representatives of the Soka Gakkai Study Department, Katsuji Saito, Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. With the fresh look at the Lotus Sutra they have provided for the past five years, the relevance of this ancient teaching to our times has been made clear. (The series installment numbers pertaining to each chapter of the sutra follow the title.)

## Chapter Fifteen: “Emerging from the Earth” (DLS 23–25)

The second half of the Lotus Sutra comprises what is known as the “essential teaching.” With chapter fifteen, the sutra’s drama intensifies. Shakyamuni shakes up the assembly with the revelation of his true identity. In the theoretical teaching of the first half of the sutra, he did not refer to himself when sharing stories and parables of other Buddhas and their lands. He was careful to discuss only his princely, ascetic or bodhisattva practices in the past. The emergence from the earth of a multitude of wonderfully adorned bodhisattvas “more numerous than the sands of sixty-thousand Ganges Rivers” changed that. When asked who trained these wonderful exemplars of Buddhist practice, he reveals that he cared for them during the entire span of their development.

In the sixteenth chapter, “Life Span,” Shakyamuni describes, to the wonderment of his audience, that since the inconceivably remote past, he has been appearing in the *saha* world<sup>1</sup> as a Buddha, teaching and converting living beings. This major revelation expands his identity from Shakyamuni the revered teacher of the Buddhist Way in ancient India to a manifestation of the eternal Buddha in the universe, opening the way for people to reform their lives and bring forth their own Buddha nature just as they are.

In terms of the events in chapter fifteen, Shakyamuni’s statement that he had trained these bodhisattvas upset the assembly’s perception of the way to Buddhist enlightenment. Yes, there were other Buddhas in attendance, seated on their lion thrones, but the majority of beings present were content to accept a prophecy of future enlightenment. As we will see, Shakyamuni’s baring of his real self created a crisis in the assembly regarding their own comprehension of his teachings. The foundation upon which they had previously felt so secure had been yanked out from under them.

To set the context of the story, let us check the highlights of the final four chapters of the theoretical first half of the sutra. The eleventh chapter features the emergence of the wondrous Treasure Tower along with the arrival of other Buddhas with retinues from their respective Buddha lands. Along with the Buddhas is a diverse selection of all kinds of beings from all over the universe. In honor of the occasion, Shakyamuni purifies the vast realms in all directions, making them Buddha lands, and

he also connects them to the happenings at the floating tower via something like a “mystic-simulcast.”

This exercise expands the audience to incalculable proportions. In the midst of this universal stage, Shakyamuni takes his seat in the marvelous Treasure Tower. Many Treasures Buddha is already seated and attests to the veracity of Shakyamuni’s statements as he describes how the Lotus Sutra should be propagated after the Buddha’s passing. Chapter twelve lays out the exploits of the evil Devadatta but ends with a prophecy of his enlightenment. This shows that the practice of the Law, as revealed in the Lotus Sutra, enables one to overcome any kind of evil past. Chapters thirteen, “Encouraging Devotion,” and fourteen, “Peaceful Practices,” present the many vows by the assembly to spread and teach the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni shows his appreciation for these bodhisattva vows.

At the opening of the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter, it is the turn of the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas<sup>2</sup> who had assembled to hear the Lotus Sutra, and who numbered more than the sands of numerous Ganges Rivers, to make their pledge to propagate the Lotus Sutra. However, something had changed in the Buddha’s readiness to accept their determination. In a seeming turnabout, Shakyamuni emphatically responds:

Leave off good men! There is no need for you to protect this sutra. Why? Because in this *saha* world of mine there are bodhisattvas and mahasattvas who are as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges, and each of these bodhisattvas has a retinue equal to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. After I have entered into extinction, these persons will be able to protect, read, recite and widely preach this sutra. (LS15, 212–213)

At that moment the earth trembled like jelly and many fissures open. From the empty space below pour multitudes of overpoweringly radiant bodhisattvas. Emanating light and graciousness, these “bodhisattvas-that-looked-like-Buddhas” cause a significant stir among the assembly. As a natural expression of their dignified character, these bodhisattvas proceed to the magnificent Treasure Tower to offer greetings and ask about the well being of Thus Come One, Shakyamuni, as well as Many Treasures Buddha. They rotate to perform obeisance to the full assembly: Buddhas in the lion seats with their attendants, Maitreya and other bodhisattvas, voice hearers and disciples of the two vehicles, dragons kings, humans and other beings.

The four leaders of the bodhisattvas address themselves to Shakyamuni Buddha who is seated at the top of the Treasure Tower. This scene, with its caring discourse, has become a true example of behavior that befits the mentor-and-disciple relationship:

Among these bodhisattvas were four leaders. The first was called Superior Practices, the second called Boundless Practices, the third was called Pure Practices, and the fourth was called Firmly Established Practices. These four bodhisattvas were the foremost leaders and guiding teachers among the whole group. In the presence of the great assembly, each of these pressed his palms together, gazed at Shakyamuni Buddha, and inquired: “World-Honored One, are your illnesses few, are your worries few, are your practices proceeding comfortably? Do those whom you propose to save readily receive instruction? Does the effort not cause the World Honored One to become weary and spent?” (LS15, 214)

Shakyamuni answers them, “just so, just so, good men!” (LS15, 214). After replying in kind to their various questions, the Buddha observes: “Excellent, excellent, good men! You know how to rejoice in your hearts for the Thus Come One” (LS15, 215). The deeply caring dialogue between Shakyamuni and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is a profound lesson for the whole assembly. It sets a tone of gravity and awe for the revelation in the next chapter of the wonder that is life. Yet, this is not the end of the amazement to come.

It is appropriate to add some further depth about the leaders of these Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The characteristics of the Four Leaders of the Bodhisattvas who emerged from beneath the earth (Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices, Firmly Established Practices) are equated with the four virtues of humanity: true self, eternity, purity, and happiness. From the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, all of these virtues are combined within the Mystic Law (*Seikyo Times*, May 1988, pp. 64–65).

In the unfolding drama, these bodhisattvas were something completely new and different from anything that the assembly had ever encountered. In particular, Bodhisattva Maitreya and the numerous bodhisattvas were set on their heels by this encounter. They approached the Thus Come One and inquired about the meaning of what had just transpired. Maitreya made the request in the context that what everyone had just witnessed was beyond anything they



Convinced of their own insignificance, people have ceased even to question things. The teachings of the Lotus Sutra breaks down limitations people have set on their lives.

had experienced. They had never seen such well-developed and beautiful bodhisattvas. He asks of Shakyamuni, “This host of Bodhisattvas with their great dignity, virtue and diligence—who preached the Law for them, who taught and converted them and brought them to this?” (LS15, 217).

There are tones of consternation in the conclusion of Maitreya’s verse soliloquy about the conspicuous nature of their arrival and their origins:

The earth in four directions trembles and splits  
and they all emerge from out of it.  
World-Honored One, from times past  
I have seen nothing like this!  
I beg you to tell me where they come from,  
the name of the land.  
I have constantly journeyed from land to land  
but never have I seen such a thing!  
In this whole multitude  
there is not one person that I know.  
Suddenly they have come up from the earth—  
I beg you to explain the cause.  
The members of this great assembly now,  
the immeasurable hundreds, thousands, millions  
of bodhisattvas,  
All want to know these things.  
Regarding the causes that govern the beginning and end  
of this multitude of bodhisattvas,

possessor of immeasurable virtue, World Honored One, We beg you to dispel the doubts of the assembly! (LS15, 217–218)

Before he answers Maitreya and the numerous bodhisattvas, Shakyamuni warns everyone that he is going to bring forth a powerful teaching:

Excellent, excellent, Ajita, that you should question the Buddha about this great affair. All of you with a single mind should don the armor of diligence and determine to be firm in intent. The Thus Come One wishes now to summon forth and declare the wisdom of the Buddhas, the freely exercised transcendental power of the Buddhas, the power of the Buddhas that has the lion's ferocity, the fierce and greatly forceful power of the Buddhas. (LS15, 218)

Everyone is poised for the answer and Shakyamuni doesn't disappoint them. These brilliant bodhisattvas are his disciples. It is he who has trained them after attaining enlightenment in the *saha* world. He further explains that up until this time, these bodhisattvas had been dwelling in the realm of potentiality. It was in the "empty space" below the *saha* world. The empty space beneath the *saha* world refers to the ultimate depths of life or the ultimate reality. Nichiren Daishonin points out that the bodhisattvas who appeared from the earth in the fifteenth chapter, "are people who possess the fundamental Law. This 'fundamental Law' is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (GZ, p. 751).

Maitreya and his fellow bodhisattvas are even more perplexed with this answer. Far from clarifying things, it creates a quandary quite challenging for their minds and hearts to grasp. They do the math. Given the length of his life in this world, how could Shakyamuni have trained these innumerable legions of brilliant bodhisattvas? As they contemplate this impossibility, doubts in their mentor begin to stir. Straightforwardly, though, they challenge these doubts with a question to Shakyamuni:

"World Honored One, it is not long since you attained Buddhahood, and yet you have been able to carry out this great meritorious undertaking! We ourselves have faith in the Buddha, believing that he preaches in accordance with what is appropriate, that the words spoken by the Buddha are never false, and the Buddha's knowledge is in all cases penetrating and comprehensive. Nevertheless, in the period after the Buddha has entered extinction, if bodhisattvas who have just begun to aspire to

enlightenment should hear these words, they will perhaps not believe or accept them but will be led to commit the crime of rejecting the law. Therefore, World Honored One, we beg you to explain so we may put aside our doubts, and so that, in the future ages when good men hear of this matter, they will not entertain doubts!" (LS15, 221–222)

Shakyamuni reserves his answer for later, so the chapter ends on this questioning note. One can imagine the buzz in the audience about how Shakyamuni could have trained this huge number of disciples in the fifty or so years since he sat beneath the bodhi tree and attained enlightenment. There is a sense of expectancy in the air. It was mentioned earlier that the intensity of the drama heats up in this chapter. Can the assembly handle any more surprises? Looking back, the sutra's story has had a magnificent assembly come to attend Shakyamuni's preaching, a nearly earth-sized tower appeared in the air, and the whole assembly was lifted as well. Once the stage is set, the amazing multitude of Bodhisattvas of the Earth made their appearance. Shakyamuni topped it off by telling the assembly that it is he who has trained all of these magnificent bodhisattvas. What could be next?

The confusion of the assembly is to be expected. Those who believed in teachings previous to the Lotus Sutra naturally would not understand how the Bodhisattvas of the Earth attained this wonderful state and would certainly balk at seeing themselves equated with the ranks of this kind of bodhisattva. This is precisely why Shakyamuni uses this kind of shock treatment to awaken the minds of those disciples still captured by former doctrines. President Ikeda explains:

Their surprise, shock and doubt represent the reaction of all those believing in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings as well as the Lotus Sutra's theoretical teaching. "Upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" indicates a sudden overturning of the beliefs and convictions that people have held up to that point. It is a decisive blow to the foundation of an existing worldview. Through this dramatic overturning of the values that people were familiar and comfortable with, Shakyamuni reveals his true identity, his true state of life. (*Living Buddhism*, October 1997, p. 35)

Thus, the confusion in the minds of those at the assembly extends beyond the visual impact of the appearance of these respectable bodhisattvas. Up to that

point, the various categories of disciples have placed their faith in the traditional model of the world and the causes that lead to Buddhahood. But their views are sent spinning. Shakyamuni’s declaration that he had trained and developed these myriad of bodhisattvas shakes the foundation of what the audience believes. In the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” President Ikeda says:

When we come to the essential teaching, everything Shakyamuni has taught up to that point is fundamentally overturned. The theoretical teaching reveals a succession of important doctrines; these include the true entity of life, the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles (the voice-hearers and pratyekabuddhas), the enlightenment of women, and the enlightenment of evil people. In addition, predictions of future enlightenment were bestowed upon Shariputra, the disciple reputed to be foremost in wisdom, and Shakyamuni’s other disciples who had comprehended these doctrines.

But in an instant, all of this becomes meaningless. That’s because the very foundation of these teachings, the entire premise upon which they were based, has fallen apart. (*Living Buddhism*, October 1997, p. 44)

Shakyamuni refutes what he has previously taught — that one becomes a Buddha, if at all, only after aeons of austere practices. There is the beginning of a new vision that enlightenment is a condition that is always an intrinsic characteristic of life. The impact of Shakyamuni’s revelation compares to that of the Copernican revolution of the heliocentric view of the solar system. President Ikeda points out that the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the sign of human liberation everywhere. It is the call to awaken people from resignation and powerlessness. It is also to recognize ultimate value in every person. President Ikeda paints this picture of human liberation:

Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, they become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental power we have as human beings to break through all of the differences — whether of ethnicity, race, gender or social standing — and lead people to happiness. We are plain and unadorned ordinary people; we are thoroughly human and infinitely courageous. This is the pride of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the



Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, people become attached to unimportant details.

Earth is an earth-shaking event attesting to the greatness of the underlying power of life. We have to convey this to people throughout the world. The transformation of the perception of the Buddha in the essential teaching amounts to a fundamental transformation in the perception of human beings. (*Living Buddhism*, October 1997, pp. 47–48)

## Chapter Sixteen: “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (DLS 26–36)

The “Life Span of the Thus Come One” chapter is the bridge over the waters of doubt and uncertainty. It is a revelation of the kernel of eternal life in every living being as well as the means to realize it. We have the Buddhist sages in central Asia, China and Japan, including Nichiren Daishonin, who categorically assert that without the pivotal teaching of the “Life Span” chapter, all of Shakyamuni’s teachings would be rendered false. The “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” series devotes more than ten installments discussing the many facets of the “Life Span” chapter. These include the metaphor of the lotus flower blooming and seeding at the same time for the simultaneity of cause and effect; the full implication of the eternity of the Buddha’s life for all people; activating the doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life by

showing the mutual possession of the ten worlds; the relationship between the life of the common mortal in the “nine worlds” with the “tenth world” of Buddhahood; and the oneness of mentor and disciple.

The essence of the “Life Span” chapter is beyond grasp intellectually—the actuality of the eternal Buddha nature inscribed in Nichiren Daishonin’s Gohonzon.

With this preface, let us rejoin the story at the end of the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter. There is a whole assembly, who had experienced the full length of Shakyamuni’s preaching and is now on the verge of doubting him.

Sensing the tumult in the minds of his listeners, Shakyamuni exhorts his audience three times that “You must believe and understand the truthful words of the Thus Come One” (LS16, 224). The Bodhisattvas asked Shakyamuni to explain the truth to them and vow to deeply hear his words. Shakyamuni explains that while everyone believes that he sat underneath the bodhi tree in Gaya and attained supreme enlightenment, he in fact had originally attained supreme enlightenment an unimaginably long time ago. President Ikeda states:

The purpose of the “Life Span” chapter is to explain that all living beings, not just Shakyamuni, have in fact been Buddhas since the remote past; and to cause people to become aware of this. Its purpose is to open people’s eyes to see the great and eternal life of the universe. And it is Nichiren Daishonin’s revelation of the implicit teaching of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] that makes it possible on a practical level for people to do so. (*Living Buddhism*, February 1998, p. 37)

Returning to the scene at the assembly, those present not only had to grapple with the new awareness that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment a long time ago, but also with the notion that the Buddha’s life is present in the world all the time. This world of Buddhahood is always present in life as part of its integral make-up. This creates both awe and confusion about who the real Shakyamuni is. In the eyes of those at the gathering, he has certainly become something more than the man they knew, preaching the sutra as they walked from town to town in their homeland of India. Beyond the issue of how long ago Shakyamuni attained enlightenment is the struggle to understand the manifestation of an eternal Buddha.

Buddhist practice exists so that we can purify our lives to a point where we can experience, even if par-

tially at first, our own lives as eternal. In the “Life Span” Chapter, Shakyamuni explains that those who are deluded and in agony cannot see the Buddha, even when he is close by. President Ikeda comments about the Shakyamuni of the “Life Span” chapter and on the nature of enlightenment:

Suffice it to say that the Buddha to which this refers is Shakyamuni as the original Buddha enlightened since the remote past. The Buddha is called the “Thus Come One,” indicating the state of life of one in whom the Mystic Law manifests at each moment without effort or affectation.

This eternal pulsing dynamism of the Mystic Law is itself eternal life. It is the true identity of the Buddha; it is the original Buddha. Furthermore, it is the wellspring of the benefit that all Buddhas enjoy. Just as President Toda realized, the Buddha is life itself. In addition, this original Buddha is in fact the very wellspring of our lives. It is in this sense that the sutra speaks of the original Buddha as being nearby. In their befuddlement, however, people fail to perceive this Buddha. (*Living Buddhism*, January 1998, p. 36)

Even though the Buddha has constantly been present in one world or another, teaching the Law and converting living beings, he emphasizes how rare it is to encounter a Buddha and the true teaching. He explains that the Buddha senses that people are not ardently seeking the Buddha Way, so he seems to enter extinction. This action is yet another variation of “expedient means” to ignite a seeking mind for the Buddha wisdom. Then the Thus Come One reappears to teach the Law. He explains why he has undertaken this great endeavor:

Why do I do this? The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb and flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction. It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse. Nor is it what those who live in the threefold world perceive it to be. All such things the Thus Come One sees clearly and without error. (LS16, 226)

In the sutra, Shakyamuni states: “Good men, the Buddhas and Thus Come Ones all preach a Law such as this. They act in order to save living beings, so what they do is true and not false” (LS16, 227). To better communicate this profound intent of the Buddha, Shakyamuni recounts the “Parable of the Excellent Physician and His Sick Children.” Situated in the cen-

ter of the “Life Span” chapter, it has become one of the most famous stories in the Lotus Sutra.

This physician has a large number of children, as many as one hundred. He departs from his home one day on an errand. While he is gone, the children drink poison because they don’t know that it is dangerous. The father returns home to find them in a painfully toxic condition. He is a renowned physician, so he creates a medicine that will be the perfect antidote to the poison. Those who are not too far gone accept the medicine and are cured. However, most of the children are completely deluded by the effects of the harmful substance they have ingested and they refuse the medicine that their father has prepared. As an expedient means, the compassionate parent leaves, explaining that he has grown old and cannot remain at home. Hearing that their father has died in another land, the children are overcome by grief. This suffering over the loss of their father brings them to their senses enough to take the medicine, which this excellent physician has left behind for them. They are quickly relieved of the poison in their bodies and minds. When his children are healthy, the father returns and is reunited with his family.

On one level Shakyamuni uses this story to explain why the Thus Come One uses the expedient means of his death to bring living beings to the Buddha Way. He wants all those in the assembly to understand his deep compassion, through which they are able to free themselves from their erroneous views that prevent them from actually experiencing their own Buddha nature. He explains that his actions are like that of the father, who left in order to have his stricken children miss him and drink the antidote to the terrible poison they ingested.

On a deeper level it is the story of unrelenting compassion, and the willingness to do whatever it takes to allow human beings to realize and act upon their true nature. It is also a metaphor for the function of death within the overall flow of life. This is rendered poetically by Shakyamuni in the verse section that concludes the “Life Span” chapter:

For if they see me constantly,  
arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds.  
Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to the  
five desires  
and fall into the evil paths of existence.  
Always I am aware of which living beings  
practice the way, and which do not,  
and in response to their needs for salvation  
I preach various doctrines for them.



Larry Ashton

The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth breaks through all differences — ethnicity, race, gender or social standing — and leads people to happiness.

At all times I think to myself:  
How can I cause living beings  
to gain entry into the unsurpassed way  
and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?  
(LS16, 231–232)

There are no further questions from Maitreya or the other provisional bodhisattvas. The members of the assembly vow to believe what the Buddha has preached about his life span and his expedient means of entering extinction. The expression of their willingness to believe has become somewhat of a footnote since the focus has shifted to the practice and propagation of the Lotus Sutra following the Buddhas passing. The torch is passed to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

At this stage of the sutra, we have to think about its structure and movement. The next three chapters deal with the various benefits that will accrue from practicing and teaching this sutra in future ages. As a prelude to this, the participants in the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” exchange their views about the historical accuracy of the drama that has occurred through sixteen chapters. They put forth the view that the over-the-top events described in the sutra were an experience taking place in Shakyamuni’s life and are not meant to be taken literally. President Ikeda responds by saying, “While not historically factual, the events described in the sutra do express the truths about life and the nature of existence” (*Living Buddhism*, January 1998, p. 38).

He goes on to explain that the Lotus Sutra is a teaching that shows Shakyamuni's true self. It was this intent that dictated the need for the two halves of "theoretical teachings" and "essential teachings" in the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni's true self is the eternal self that is one with the Mystic Law. This means that all the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are also included in Shakyamuni's eternal self. The happy truth is that this eternal self is at the core of each person's life. As President Ikeda states:

But this is not only true for Shakyamuni. The Daishonin says, "The example of one person represents the impartial truth inherent in all living beings" (*Gosho Zenshu*, 564). Shakyamuni's "eternal self" is the "eternal self" of all living beings. In a broad sense, all beings are original Buddhas. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are therefore "eternal bodhisattvas" existing in the lives of all people. The Daishonin explains this saying: "The enlightened life Shakyamuni Buddha is our own flesh and blood. His practices and the resulting virtues are our bones and marrow." (WND, 365); "The Shakyamuni Buddha within our lives is the eternal Buddha since time without beginning" (WND, 365) and "The bodhisattvas Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices represent the world of the bodhisattva within ourselves." (WND, 366) (*Living Buddhism*, January 1998, p. 39)

## Chapter Seventeen: "Distinctions in Benefits" (DLS-37)

The next three chapters have a similar theme, documenting the immense benefit that will be obtained by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and all who practice, study and propagate the heart of the Lotus Sutra revealed in the "Life Span" chapter. One might think that having reached the high point of the Buddha's declaration in the sixteenth chapter, the following chapters would be anticlimactic. However, this is not so. Everything that follows the "Life Span" chapter takes on a much-deepened hue, bathed in the glow of the "Land of Tranquil Light." We sense a significant change in the sutra's direction.

The "Distinction of Benefits" chapter is a shining example of this transformation. It depicts a massive celebration that is kicked off by Shakyamuni regaling the audience with the fantastic rewards to be gained by living up to the spirit of the sutra. He presents a long dis-

sertation addressed to Maitreya, reminding him of the exceedingly long life of the Thus Come One. He then points out that the practice of the Law has enabled "living beings numerous as the sands of six hundred and eighty ten thousands, millions, nayutas of Ganges attained the truth of birthlessness. And bodhisattvas and mahasattvas a thousand times more in number gained the dharani<sup>3</sup> teaching that allows them to retain all that they hear" (LS16, 233-234). The telling of the benefits is extensive, detailed, and overwhelming. The varying result of what each group attains is where the chapter's title the "Distinction of Benefits" originates. It is not meant so much to say, "these people received this and those people received that," but rather to lay out a very wide spectrum of benefits that can be received. Also, the cumulative effect of detailing the massive number of recipients of benefits is to leave no room for doubt about the roots of goodness and every other virtue that will implant themselves in all those who adhere to and propagate the Lotus Sutra.

Upon the completion of the description of this awesome tableau of rewards, a gigantic party starts up as if in a convention hall the size of the Grand Canyon. Mandarava flowers fall from the heavens all over the audience. It is crucial not to lose contact with the tone and fervor of the actual text. In order to sense the level of joy in the assembly and the response from the heavens, we need to put ourselves right in the midst of the hyperbole of the Lotus Sutra:

When the Buddha announced that these bodhisattvas and mahasattvas had gained the great benefits of the Law, from the midst of the air mandarava flowers and great mandarava flowers rained down, scattering over the immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of Buddhas who were seated on lion seats under jeweled trees, and also scattering over Shakyamuni Buddha, and over Many Treasures Thus Come One who long ago entered extinction, both of whom were seated on lion seats in the tower of the seven treasures. They also scattered over the all the great bodhisattvas and the four kinds of believers. In addition, finely powdered sandalwood and aloes rained down, and in the midst of the air heavenly drums sounded of their own accord, wonderful notes deep and far-reaching. And a thousand varieties of heavenly robes rained down, draped with various necklaces, pearl necklaces, mani jewel necklaces, necklaces of wish-granting jewels, spreading everywhere in nine directions. In jewel-encrusted

censers priceless incense burned, their fragrance of its own accord permeating everywhere as an offering to the great assembly. Above each one of the Buddhas there appeared bodhisattvas holding banners and canopies reaching up to the Brahma heaven. These bodhisattvas employed their wonderful voices in singing immeasurable hymns of praise to the Buddhas. (LS16, 234–235)

This is a celebration of joy caused by Shakyamuni taking the audience through his transformation from transient identity to true identity. A turning point is reached. The audience, along with all the heavenly gods, celebrates mightily, but it goes on for less than half a chapter. The focus shifts quickly to the Buddhas' and bodhisattvas' prime concern of how to enable all living beings to enter the Buddha Way. It is clear from what follows that the compassion of the sutra extends limitlessly forward in time. Maitreya delivers an extended verse response to Shakyamuni's descriptions of the benefits. Shakyamuni's response is phrased differently from his earlier pronouncements of all the wondrous effects of being present at the revelation of the Buddha's eternal teaching. Now looking to the future, he speaks of living beings who might come to hear this teaching of the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" and the limitless benefits that they will gain.

The participants in the "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" devote considerable discussion to determine the true nature of benefit in Buddhism. President Ikeda explains a fundamental point about benefit in Buddhism: "The bottom line is, positive action has inherent benefit. Benefit is definitely not something that comes from the outside; rather, it wells forth from within our lives, manifested through our own actions. It gushes out like water from a spring. That's what benefit is" (*Living Buddhism*, April 1999, p 31). Moving into the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and the meaning of the Japanese word for benefit, President Ikeda states:

Nichiren Daishonin says, "The element *ku* [in the word *kudoku*, or benefit] means eliminating evil while the element *doku* means producing good." (GZ, 762). Benefit in the Daishonin's Buddhism means getting rid of the fundamental darkness in one's life and bringing forth goodness. To manifest benefit we need to carry out the practice of propagating the Daishonin's teaching. Doing so means refuting mistaken beliefs that cause people to suffer and enabling them instead to live based upon the



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It was the efforts of the first and second presidents the Soka Gakkai and the phenomenal growth under the third president that have brought the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and the message of the Lotus Sutra to millions of people. Above, second president, Josei Toda (right) and third president, Daisaku Ikeda, share a moment from the 1950's.

Mystic Law. (*Living Buddhism*, April 1999, p 31)

Their discussion confirms the benefit that is received from a valid religion or life philosophy. It must strike a balance between the inner spiritual result of a high life condition and the power to improve the material and social environment. It must be fully applicable to the realities of daily life. It also must fuse the personal desires of each person with the happiness of all people.

President Ikeda explains that it comes down to the practice of faith based upon the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" chapter and the confidence that can be had from the power of the mentor-disciple relationship:

All benefit that can be attained through bodhisattva practice comes from faith in the "Life Span" chapter. That's because those bodhisattvas who reach the stage of enlightenment almost equivalent to the Buddha's when they hear the "Life Span" chapter simultaneously awaken to the Mystic Law of time without beginning. It is from that moment that they make the transition from the stage of common mortals who have just embraced the Lotus Sutra to that of a Buddha.

It is as though they are steadily climbing a

mountain with their sights set on reaching the state of enlightenment, the life-state of the Buddha. But when they arrive at the top, at the summit of the “Life Span” chapter, what do they see, what kind of scene unfolds before them? They perceive that the true Buddha enlightened from time without beginning is constantly and tirelessly carrying out activities in the world to lead all beings to enlightenment. They understand that they themselves once received his instruction. And they realize that they themselves were originally united in a relation of mentor and disciple with the Buddha who is one with the universe. (*Living Buddhism*, April 1999, pp. 37–38)

## Chapter Eighteen: “The Benefits of Responding With Joy” (DLS–38)

Chapter Eighteen is entitled “The Benefits of Responding With Joy” because it describes, in detail, the immense benefit received by those who hear the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, respond with joy and teach it to others. President Ikeda states this simply:

When we respond with joy, we receive benefit—that, in essence, is the meaning of the title. In other words we receive great benefit to the extent that we joyfully exert ourselves in faith. Here, again, we see that the heart is the all-important factor. If you’re going to practice Buddhism anyway, you might as well enjoy it rather than complain about it!

When you are faced with a challenge, do you sigh deeply and say, “Oh no, not again”? Or do you confront it head-on, determined to use the situation to accumulate still more good fortune? This slight distinction in attitude makes a world of difference in the end. (*Living Buddhism*, June 1999, p. 20)

In keeping with the model of dialogue to reveal Buddhist truths, the chapter opens with Maitreya asking about the benefits that can be obtained from hearing about the Lotus Sutra and rejoicing. Shakyamuni uses this opportunity to discuss the potent power of the Law to reach the fiftieth person with ever-broadening merit as it impacted the first person to hear of it and then share it. This is a chain of joy that teaches two points. First, the degree of benefit of hearing the Law is up to the joyful response of the listener, and second is the action to share this joy with others. Shakyamuni explains that the pure Law insures that

the benefit flowing to the fiftieth person is in no way abated. This is in contrast to the telling of stories or gossip in which the content becomes changed as it passes from one person to the next. President Ikeda explains that the sharing of the kernel of the Lotus Sutra transcends the theoretical teaching and seeks to reform the human and natural environment as well:

Kosen-rufu also includes the struggle to transform the “realm of the environment.” This is the meaning of actual (as opposed to theoretical) *ichinen sanzen* [three thousand realms exist in a single life-moment].

At any rate, propagation from one person to the next and so on to the fiftieth person is the democratic path of dialogue. Democracy is definitely not simply a matter of setting in place certain forms and institutions. Without content, democracy is an empty vessel that is easily crushed.

What is this content? It is individual self-reliance and self-improvement. It is individual happiness. Democracy must enable each person in society to live to the fullest. Without valuing the sanctity of the individual, democracy is a mere shell. (*Living Buddhism*, June 1999, p. 25)

Shakyamuni continues to give specific examples of how a person should effectively propagate the heart of the Lotus Sutra. President Ikeda explains that this chapter gives clear guidelines on the transmission of Buddhism and who is actually putting them into action:

Transmission is kosen-rufu, the spread of the Law. The transmission section is full of guidelines pertaining to the propagation of the Mystic Law. It is remarkable that in the three thousand years of Buddhist history, we of the SGI, virtually alone, can understand this chapter based on actual experience. (*Living Buddhism*, June 1999, pp. 21–22)

## Chapter Nineteen: “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” (DLS–39)

The nineteenth chapter explains that the benefits of those who carry out the five practices of embracing, reading, reciting, teaching, and transcribing the Lotus Sutra will receive the benefit of the purification of the six sense organs. The Buddha speaks to Bodhisattva Constant Exertion, enumerating the benefits accruing to the sense organs:

If good men or good women accept and uphold this

Lotus Sutra, if they read it, recite it, explain and preach it, or transcribe it, such persons will obtain eight hundred eye benefits, twelve hundred ear benefits, eight hundred nose benefits, twelve hundred tongue benefits, eight hundred body benefits, and twelve hundred mind benefits. With these benefits they will be able to adorn their six sense organs, making all of them pure. (LS19, 251)

One by one, the Thus Come One proceeds to explain the function and effect of the major benefits for each of the six sense organs. The amount of detail makes for a chapter of extended length. An example of a tongue benefit is that any flavor, whether bitter or not, would be transformed into something superb. Furthermore, if the person who has attained these tongue benefits uses his tongue for preaching, it will cause all the listeners to rejoice and delight. Beings of all categories will come to hear the teaching of the Law. The attributes of the user of the voice with tongue benefits are awesome to contemplate. The final attribute is one that should not be overlooked, “And in addition he will be able to emit the deep and wonderful sound of the Law” (LS19, 260).

The purification of the six sense organs is not a ritual cleansing. It is set into motion by undertaking bodhisattva action. It is the change of karma that we experience in propagating Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. When we are rebuked talking to others about Buddhism, our life is purified. President Ikeda cites the guidance of the second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, who told members to be appreciative of rude responses when carrying out propagation because it cleanses negative karma that has held them back from happiness.

The benefits of the sixth sense are those of the mind. President Ikeda ties it together by linking the mind to all the other functions:

Through purifying the mind, practitioners become wiser. In lifetime after lifetime, they may become great scholars or people of unsurpassed insight.

In short, purifying the six sense organs means transforming one’s entire being into a vehicle of kosen-rufu. It’s not a matter of shrewdness or calculation; when we work selflessly and wholeheartedly



Today, SGI members carry out the vow made in the Lotus Sutra by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to propagate the Law.

for kosen-rufu without begrudging our lives, then our entire being overflows with boundless life force. Wisdom, vitality, and compassion all well forth.

No matter what worries or sufferings we might have, we can change them all into value and benefit. Such great life force is the benefit gained by a teacher of the Law.

In conclusion, those who live out their lives together with the SGI, an organization that is dedicated to actualizing the Buddha’s will and decree, and who single-mindedly work for peace and the happiness of humankind, are on the ultimate path in life.

A person who steadfastly moves forward is certain to win. A person who chants daimoku through everything will absolutely win in the end. (*Living Buddhism*, July 1999, p. 38)

## Chapter Twenty: “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (DLS – 40)

Shakyamuni addresses Bodhisattva Great Authority about the era of Buddha Awesome Sound King Thus Come One who existed in the incredibly distant past. In fact, there was a lineage of twenty thousand million Buddhas of this same name. After the initial Thus Come One had entered extinction and his Law had become corrupt, evil monks gained great authority and power. At this time, there was a bodhisattva called Never Disparaging. He suffered considerable abuse at the hands of arrogant monks and laity. They spoke

negatively about him and assailed him for this behavior of never disparaging them. They considered it to be vain and irresponsible that he would predict their eventual Buddhahood despite their behavior.

Many years passed in this way, during which this monk was constantly subjected to curses and abuse. He did not give way to anger, however, but each time spoke the same words, “You are certain to attain Buddhahood.” When he spoke in this manner, some among the group would take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him. But even as he ran away and took up his stance at a distance, he continued to call out in a loud voice, “I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” And because he always spoke these words, the overbearingly arrogant monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen gave him the name Never Disparaging.

When this monk was on the point of death, he heard up in the sky fully twenty thousand, ten thousand, a million verses of the Lotus Sutra that had been previously preached by the Buddha Awesome Sound King, and he was able to accept and uphold them all. Immediately he gained the kind of purity of vision and purity of the faculties of the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind that have been described above. Having gained this purity of the six faculties, his life span was increased by two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of years, and he went about widely preaching the Lotus Sutra for people. (LS20, 267)

With his dignified appearance and wonderful voice he was able to convert all those who previously opposed him. Shakyamuni reveals that this Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was in fact himself in a previous lifetime. He also explains that all those who had previously treated him with disrespect were now in the great assembly in the air witnessing all that has transpired. He explains how the Lotus Sutra can benefit all people, even those who are at first against the teaching.

This is a lesson Shakyamuni wished to transmit to the future so that after his extinction, no one would hesitate to propagate the sutra, even though they will face strong and unjust opposition. “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter represents a new phase of the transmission portion of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha has been as expansive and detailed as he could in painting a picture of the benefits to be received from carrying out propagation. Now it was time to prepare his disciples for

the obstacles and hardships they would face in propagating the wonderful Law of the lotus. The story of his incarnations as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and his current role as Shakyamuni Thus Come One shows the great good fortune to be obtained from not being defeated by the obstacles to propagation.

The declaration of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is often called the Twenty-Four Character Lotus Sutra. It is a compact statement that contains the compassion to care deeply for another life and the confidence that all living beings possess the Buddha nature. In “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda discusses the essence of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s Lotus Sutra:

Just what does the Lotus Sutra teach? The sutra is condensed into this twenty-four-character passage: “I deeply respect you. I would never slight you or behave arrogantly toward you. For if you carry out the bodhisattva practice you can become a Buddha without fail.” All living beings have this Buddha nature, the world of Buddhahood. It is this world of Buddhahood that Never Disparaging reveres.

The twenty-eight chapter Lotus Sutra does not explicitly state that all people have the Buddha nature, but this is without a doubt what it is affirming. This is the highest philosophy of the sanctity of life.

While there are any number of religions that preach equality, often what they mean by that is human beings are equally sinful. But the Lotus Sutra teaches that all people are noble children of the Buddha, that they are equal as entities in the world of Buddhahood. This is a very important difference. (*Living Buddhism*, August 1999, p. 20)

This chapter depicting the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is a declaration of religious revolution through non-violence. As President Ikeda states, “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the Lotus Sutra directly oppose all forms of violence. The Lotus Sutra is a teaching of struggle on a spiritual plane, not of violence” (*Living Buddhism*, August 1999, p. 20).

Finally, the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is the courage to propagate the Law.

(*To be continued*)

1. *saha* world—A world where humans endure suffering. In pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, Buddhas did not appear in *saha* worlds.
2. *mahasattvas*—A “great being,” another term for bodhisattva.
3. *dharani*—A spell or formula said to protect the one who recites it and benefit the person by virtue of its mystic power.



Saikyō Press

Dr. Aurelio Peccei, meets SGI President Ikeda under beautiful, spring skies at the SGI center in Paris. Dr. Peccei insisted that a renaissance of the human spirit, a revolution of human beings themselves, was needed to utilize the fruits of external revolutions.

## *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 characters of those memorable figures. President Ikeda is the founder of Soka University and the Soka school system.*

### Dr. Aurelio Peccei, Co-founder of the Club of Rome

There is a famous riddle. Water lilies are growing in a pond. Large lily pads are floating on the surface and they double in number each day. The first day there is one lily pad, the second day there are two, the third day there are four, the fourth day there are eight, and so forth.

If the entire surface of the pond were to be covered by lily pads on the thirtieth day, on what day would it be half-covered?

The answer, of course, is the day before—the twenty-ninth.

One day before the pond is completely covered, half of its surface will be free. Everything seems to be all right — there’s still plenty of room. But by the very next day, in just a brief interval of time, it’s all over — there’s no more room left.

Anyone might notice that the end is near if they saw the pond on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth day.

However, there is one individual who noticed the danger much earlier and who cried out: “If we don’t do something right away it will be too late!” That man was Dr. Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), first president and cofounder of the world-renowned global think tank, the Club of Rome.

He warned of the devastating consequences of exploding population growth, environmental degradation, the waste of natural resources, and the tragic gap in wealth between the developed and developing nations. All these factors were intertwined, he said, and if left unaddressed would trigger a chain reaction leading to the day of destruction.

## WE’RE OUT OF TIME

Dr. Peccei said to me that world leaders today are irresponsible. If we allow things to continue as they are, the world will become a barren place in the twenty-first century, and both nature and humanity will be destroyed. Though this truth is right before our eyes, he asserted,



Kirk Conroy/ep

Dr. Peccei warned that irresponsible leaders who are concerned only with preserving their own lifestyle and immediate self-interest will leave this world a barren place for future generations.

political leaders, business leaders, scientists, scholars, and bureaucrats do nothing; they think only of their immediate self-interest. They place a higher priority on preserving their own lifestyle than thinking about what kind of world they will leave to their children and grandchildren.

That is why, he stated, humanity itself must undergo a revolution. And a speedy one at that — there is no time left.

## AN OUTDOOR SALON

I first met Dr. Peccei under the blue skies of Paris. White apple blossoms shimmered in the spring breeze. Dr. Peccei came all the way from Italy to meet me at our SGI center in Paris. At first we sat together in a reception room, but I asked to be permitted to make an “urgent motion.” Apologizing that the room was small and cramped, I said: “The garden is very pretty. Why don’t we go outside?” Dr. Peccei thought that was a splendid idea, and he smiled warmly. He seemed to share my dislike for empty formality.

He stood up and his energetic movements immediately struck me as those of a man of action. Dr. Peccei was a survivor of decades in the harshly competitive business world. When we met, on May 16, 1975, he was sixty-six.

## THE CLUB OF ROME

The Club of Rome is a global think tank cofounded by Dr. Aurelio Peccei in 1968. As a non-profit, non governmental organization (NGO), it brings together scientists, economists, businessmen, international high civil servants, heads of state and former heads of state. They are people who are convinced that the future of humankind is not fixed and that each human being can contribute to the improvement of the world’s societies.

The Club of Rome seeks solutions to what it calls the “world problematique,” the complex problems facing humanity in the political, social, economic, technological, environmental, psychological and cultural arenas. It takes the perspective of a growing interdependence of nations and that global problems are beyond the capacity of individual countries.

For more about The Club of Rome, visit their website at: [www.ClubOfRome.org](http://www.ClubOfRome.org)

Though it was his wife Marisa's birthday, he arranged his schedule to fit mine and came to visit me on that important day. I sensed a warm and sincere spirit filling his sturdy frame.

The rays of the sun were strong, so we set up an orange parasol on the green lawn and carried some armchairs outdoors. In a flash our impromptu salon was complete.

## WE NEED A "HUMAN" REVOLUTION MORE THAN AN "IT" REVOLUTION

As Dr. Peccei spoke, he sometimes leaned forward in his chair with great intensity. The human race, he said, has experienced three revolutions so far: the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution, and the technological revolution. All of these were external revolutions. The problem was that the wisdom needed to decide how to use the fruits of those revolutions was as yet undeveloped.

The human race, which possesses an astonishing amount of knowledge, is astonishingly ignorant of how it should behave, he continued. Though our technology is developing quickly, culturally our development has stopped and petrified. To bridge that gap, he insisted, we need a renaissance of the human spirit, a revolution of human beings themselves.

This was in 1975. I am sure that today Dr. Peccei would also say that the human revolution is more important than the IT (information technology) revolution we are now experiencing.

## LIMITS TO GROWTH

In 1972, three years before Dr. Peccei and I had our meeting in Paris, the Club of Rome had published its first report, "The Limits to Growth," which stirred up great controversy. It warned that if population and industrial growth continued to increase at the present rate, natural resources would be depleted, the environment would be polluted, and there would be widespread food shortages in less than one hundred years.

A year later, in 1973, the oil shock occurred. "No oil!" Stoppages in oil supplies made the entire world tremble. The Club of Rome report's warning took on a very real dimension in far less than a hundred years. Everyone was concerned that the wealth of the present was indeed short-lived.

But Dr. Peccei's main point was not that we must develop alternative resources because the old ones are running out; he was trying to elevate the discussion to an entirely different level. He asserted that the frantic pursuit

of ever-greater wealth, ever-greater development, ever-greater economic growth as humanity's sole objective was itself profoundly mistaken. As long as we proceeded on that path, then regardless of the energy resource, it would be rapidly depleted and pollute the environment.

As he pointed out, the present generation will consume more natural resources during their lifetime than all generations preceding them. And all to what end? Dr. Peccei believed that humanity had been spiritually corrupted by the myth of economic growth.

This myth insists that we must always produce and consume more this year than last. Otherwise, we will lose the economic race and businesses will collapse. Political leaders will fail to get reelected. There is no choice—we must stay on the treadmill. If the planet goes to ruin or the exploited "have-not" nations starve, it can't be helped. That is the prevailing mentality.

The word development has become the mantra of our age, and behind the false hopes it offers lies the reality of future catastrophe, from which we continue to avert our eyes.

## AN AGE OF INSANITY?

In the developing world, where there is a lack of even enough clean water just to survive, more than thirty thousand infants die each day. That's one child every two seconds. In contrast, the developed nations, despite basic material needs being more than sufficiently met, must still keep on producing and selling new goods in order to maintain economic growth—in the process, wasting an enormous amount of natural resources.

Isn't this mad?

The cost of three of the latest fighter planes would pay to vaccinate all the children of the world and protect them from disease. And yet fighter planes take priority. Do we have the money to kill people but not to keep them alive?

Isn't this crazy?

When future generations look back at our time, surely they will call it an age of insanity. In spite of this, we pride ourselves on having the most highly developed societies in human history.

Isn't this bizarre?

## THE STARTING POINT OF A LIFE OF STRUGGLE

It was the great British historian Arnold Toynbee who in fact recommended that I talk with Dr. Peccei. Likewise, Dr. Peccei knew of my dialogue with Dr. Toynbee. He brought

a copy of my novel *The Human Revolution* with him to our meeting, and he made it a point to mention that he knew the Soka Gakkai had fought against fascism. He was well aware of the death of our first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in prison and the struggles of our second president, Josei Toda, there.

“You, too, Dr. Peccei,” I said, “are a warrior who has endured the trials of prison.”

From his bearing, I could sense the iron conviction that resided in his breast.

I wanted to ask him about the source of his spiritual strength, what lay deep in his heart that made him stand up and fight when no one else would.

When Dr. Peccei joined the antifascist resistance in Italy, he was already a successful businessman with international experience in France, China, and Russia. He returned home from abroad and joined the underground movement.

He was arrested in February 1944. Mussolini’s power was already crumbling and Italy’s ally, Nazi Germany, was in virtual control of the country. Dr. Peccei was thirty-five. In his dark prison cell, Dr. Peccei recalls, he came to know who he was for the first time in his life. Assaulted by ceaseless anxiety, he focused on the future. He thought solely about one thing: Under no circumstances must such a tragedy be repeated.

## ENDURING TORTURE

When Dr. Peccei was arrested, he was in possession of top-secret codes and documents detailing the Italian Resistance’s military plans. This placed him in a very bad predicament. His captors decided that if they could make him talk, they would know everything the opposition was planning, and so they tortured him mercilessly. They employed horrible violence, Dr. Peccei said, their hatred and fanaticism only making them more cruel.

The torture continued, but Dr. Peccei would not talk. One morning, a woman from the village came to the



In 1972, the Club of Rome published its first report, “The Limits of Growth” which warned that if population and industrial growth continued at its present rate, pollution, depletion of natural resources and wide spread food shortages would jeopardize the planet’s future.

prison looking for her son who had disappeared. She saw someone being led through the prison courtyard and gasped in recognition. “Could that be Signor Peccei?” She could not tell from his face, it was beaten so badly, but she thought she knew his overcoat. “I have to tell his comrades right away,” she thought.

When they learned of his whereabouts and how he was being treated, they presented the fascists with a demand: Unless the torture of Dr. Peccei stopped, they would pass a death sentence on the fascist militia commanders. The fascists stopped their torture on the condition that their commanders remained unharmed, otherwise they would immediately shoot Dr. Peccei. The dangerous balancing act went on.

A friend who had spoken up for Dr. Peccei in jail was also tortured repeatedly in the hope that he might say something that could be used against Dr. Peccei, but he protected his friend to the end.

Dr. Peccei recalled that in jail all one can fall back on are one’s beliefs and one’s humanity. He said he learned that people who are used to giving orders crack easily. It’s the quiet, hardworking types who turn out to be strong in extreme circumstances. He said he hated traitors most of all.

He remained in prison for eleven months. Gradually, the tide of war turned against fascism. Though the danger of vengeance loomed over Dr. Peccei’s head, he was



The interdisciplinary think tank known as the Club of Rome began when Dr. Peccei realized that what was needed in this age of specialization was a sense of responsibility to act based on a holistic approach for the future of humanity. In 1968, he invited leading intellectuals to a conference in Rome with this purpose in mind. Above, stairs to a church in Rome.

saved by a hair's breadth. One fascist faction, fearing retaliation after their side's defeat, released Dr. Peccei on a freezing morning in January 1945.

## LEARNING FROM ADVERSITY

Dr. Peccei conceded that he suffered terribly, but also acknowledges that the ordeal he underwent strengthened his convictions. He also found friends whom he knew he could trust absolutely. Ironically, he learned a lot from his fascist captors, he said. He smiled, shrugged, and added that, for that reason, he was now prepared to forgive them.

I was deeply moved by the human triumph of Dr. Peccei, who counted himself fortunate to have undergone those eleven months of captivity.

In prison he experienced the foulest depths of human evil and, at the same time, the loftiest heights of human nobility. He realized that there was a tremendous force within us seeking good. It may be asleep, but it is there. That was his great awakening.

## A NEW DEPARTURE AT AGE SIXTY

After the war, Dr. Peccei devoted his efforts to the economic revival of his homeland and was a great success as a businessman. But as he traveled around the world, crossing the equator more than three hundred times, a dark cloud of doubt began to grow in his heart.

Was he really right to be working so hard for growth and development for their own sake? If all his efforts were only leading toward the destruction of the world, weren't they essentially meaningless?

The population of the planet was growing by a hundred million a year. By the mid-twenty-first century it would reach ten billion. Agricultural production could never keep up with that. If deforestation continued at its present pace, all the forests on earth would disappear in the next hundred years. Global warming was also progressing at an alarming rate.

The Nazis had been guilty of genocide, but now all of humanity was guilty of the crime of ecocide, the destruction of the natural environment. Dr. Peccei had vowed in prison to never let such barbaric events occur again. In 1968, he invited leading intellectuals to a conference in Rome. The world was full of specialists, he thought, but what was needed was a sense of responsibility based on a grasp of the whole picture — the future of humanity. What was needed were people who felt that responsibility and were prepared to act on it.

Thus began the interdisciplinary think tank that is the Club of Rome. Thus also began the "golden years" of Dr. Peccei's life, a new departure at the age of sixty.

## MEMORIES OF FRIENDSHIP

Our discussions, which began at that outdoor salon in Paris, continued for about ten years, until Dr. Peccei's death. I met him in person five times.

At our second meeting, in Tokyo, he visited me at the offices of the *Seikyo Shimbun* in spite of his tight schedule, arriving in Japan one day and departing the next.

When we met in Florence, he drove four hours from Rome in his own little car. I was deeply humbled when I learned he had only just returned home from London the day before! Dr. Peccei also gave his heart and soul to our published dialogue, *Before It Is Too Late*, which we discussed at that meeting.

I next met him at our International Friendship Center in Shibuya, Tokyo, where we walked around the small garden side by side. We were so engrossed in our conversation that we had to be careful not to fall into the pond! Dr. Peccei murmured, as if to himself, that while the garden was beautiful, nothing in the world was more beautiful than friendship. He seemed to be saying it more to confirm his own feelings than to me.

Our last meeting was once again in Paris, in June 1983, a mere nine months before he passed away. On

that day he had just flown into Paris after attending a conference in the United States and came directly from the airport to see me at my hotel. Unfortunately, all his luggage had been stolen. He realized this, of course, but he delayed filing a claim and came directly to me, not wanting to be late for our meeting. Appearing at my hotel without a necktie, in the clothes he had worn on the plane, he seemed to glow with an almost divine energy.

During that meeting he said he was determined that our friendship would grow stronger, no matter what kinds of criticisms or attacks the mass media might launch at us. These were his last words to me.

## TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Dr. Peccei abhorred the shortsightedness of journalists; that perspective was poles apart from his own. The Club of Rome cofounder always emphasized that unless one adopted the long-term view, all arguments and efforts were essentially useless. When it is clear that a ship is on a collision course, shouldn't you immediately change course? What can you learn by just staring at the waves crashing against the helm?

Much of the mass media heaped ridicule and sarcasm on the activities of the Club of Rome, and they lampooned Dr. Peccei as a prophet of doom. There were also scholars who derided the Club and countered its warnings with all kinds of irresponsible arguments. For instance, a certain Japanese scholar likened the Club of Rome's concerns about runaway population and industrial growth to people in the eighteenth century fearing that the increase in carriages would bury the world in horse manure. He said they hadn't taken advances in technology into account.

Communists called the Club of Rome "capitalist," and capitalists denounced it as "communist." Developing countries said the Club's ideas were a plot to stop their development, leveling the accusation that the rich are unable to understand the feelings of the poor.



Mimmo Jodice/CORBIS

Dr. Peccei asserted that unless we view things from a long-range point of view, all our efforts are fruitless. As humanity awakens from its obsession with material affluence the significance of Dr. Peccei's pioneering efforts have become increasingly evident. Pictured above is a view of The Forum and Piazza Venezia in Rome.

But gradually support for the Club of Rome's position grew, and today the fact that the earth has a limited capacity to support human life is recognized by all. Humankind is waking from its single-minded obsession with material affluence at all costs. In 1992, the United Nations held an Earth Summit, and since then many international organizations, national governments, and private groups have begun to try to deal with the many global issues confronting us today.

Dr. Peccei's lonely first step became a giant step for humanity.

## A LIFE OF CONTINUOUS WORK AND INVOLVEMENT

On March 14, 1984, this great pioneer passed away at the age of seventy-five. It was a life of continuous work and involvement. Twelve hours before his death, he was dictating from his bed. He was a determined man. His

last unfinished manuscript was titled *Agenda for the End of the Century*, and it was published posthumously. Dr. Peccei didn't live to see it in print.

One passage of it reads:

Progress, as it is now understood, certainly cannot be stopped. Therefore, humankind's only recourse is to enhance the quality and qualities of its members all over the world so that, by learning how to ride the technological tigers they have unleashed, humans and not machines will be tomorrow's protagonists.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Peccei at first called this enhancement of the quality and qualities of humanity a "humanistic revolution," but he later changed it to "human revolution." In a manuscript written a month before his death, he wrote, "What we need is a new philosophy of life."<sup>2</sup>

## INHERITING THE SPIRIT OF A GREAT INDIVIDUAL

After Dr. Peccei's death, I met his sons Roberto Peccei (a physicist) and Riccardo Peccei (a sociologist). I met Riccardo in England. As we spoke of our memories of his father, I said: "When a great individual dies, we tend to forget his ideals and his spirit and allow our own egos to assert themselves. This is a mark of human weakness and ugliness. I believe that the most important thing is for us to carry on Dr. Peccei's ideal and goals without wavering."


Today, carrying on the ideals of Dr. Peccei, the Club of Rome continues its influential activities under the leadership of President Ricardo Diez-Hochleitner.

Riccardo Peccei told me that his father, in his later years, often used to say that it was up to youth to change the world, and they would do it through their human revolutions. When he was alive, Dr. Peccei praised the Soka Gakkai's youth division, saying it was leading the way in this effort and spreading friendship around the world.

Dr. Peccei was a man of immense character, like a loving father. While looking far into the future, like a true philosopher, he also possessed the keen practical judgment and decisiveness of a businessman. His greatness was that both of these characteristics arose from his love of humanity.

When I recall Dr. Peccei, I remember those blue skies over Paris, and the voice of that dauntless warrior who fought so ardently to create a future as bright and clear as those skies.

I can still hear him saying that, while there is a limit



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By Aurelio Peccei & Daisaku Ikeda

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to economic growth, there is no limit to human learning. Our external resources are limited, he said, but our inner wealth unlimited. It is untapped, and human revolution is what allows us to bring it forth. We must make use of every available means to advance that human revolution, he said.

"We are agreed. Let's do it!" he declared, and extended his hand, so that we could shake on it. "Let us do it," he said, "for the sake of the twenty-first century, for the sake of our children and grandchildren, before it is too late!" ❁

1. *The Club of Rome: Agenda for the End of the Century* (March 1992), a pamphlet to commemorate the holding of the Club of Rome's Fukuoka Conference, pp. 38–40.

2. Daisaku Ikeda and Aurelio Peccei, "Appendix," *Nijuisseiki e no Keisho* (Sounding a Warning for the Twenty-first Century) (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1984), p. 334.

# LIVING BUDDHISM

# INDEX FOR 2000

<b>Article</b>	<b>Month/Page</b>	<b>Article</b>	<b>Month/Page</b>
<b>SGI President Ikeda</b>			
New Year's Poem: Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Community and the World . . . . .	Jan/2	Founder and Chancellor . . . . .	May/44
Become a Model for the World—President Ikeda's Speeches in the United States (1990) . . . . .	Feb/8	President Kocheril Raman Narayanan of India . . .	June/45
2000 Peace Proposal: Peace Through Dialogue: A Time to Talk—Thoughts on a Culture of Peace . .	May/16	President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria . . . . .	Sep/44
Dialogue Bridges Different Religious Traditions . .	Oct/10	Mayor Le Hoa Lam of Auburn, New South Wales, Australia . . . . .	Oct/45
<b>Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra</b>			
(45) The Completion of the Ceremony of Transmission . . . . .	Jan/30	Dr. David P. Roselle—President of the University of Delaware . . . . .	Nov/43
(46) True Health Lies in Bodhisattva Practice . . . .	Feb/29	Dr. Aurelio Peccei—Cofounder of the Club of Rome . . . . .	Dec/40
(47) Cultural Activities Based on the Mystic Law Are “Wonderful Sounds” . . . . .	Mar/28	<b>General Director's Message</b>	
(48) Develop the Compassion and Wisdom to “Perceive the World's Sounds” . . . . .	Apr/30	Caring for Each Person . . . . .	Jan/5
(49) Kosen-rufu Is the Ultimate Path in Life . . . .	June/29	A New Common Sense for the Twenty-first Century . . . . .	Feb/3
(50) Those Who Devote Themselves to Kosen-rufu Receive the “Benefit of Protection” . . . . .	July/33	Transforming the Land . . . . .	Mar/3
(51) The Victory of a “Family Revolution” . . . . .	Aug/31	A Matter of the Heart . . . . .	Apr/3
(52) Treasuring Each Person is the Conclusion of the Lotus Sutra . . . . .	Sep/30	Victories Founded on the Mentor-Disciple Relationship . . . . .	May/4
(53) The Lotus Sutra is a Teaching of the Oneness of Mentor and Disciple . . . . .	Oct/29	People of Creativity and Diversity . . . . .	June/4
A Summary of the Lotus Sutra—Part One . . . . .	Nov/19	A Report from Alaska . . . . .	July/3
A Summary of the Lotus Sutra—Part Two . . . . .	Dec/28	Creating the Highest Value . . . . .	Aug/4
<b>Recollections of Leading World Figures</b>			
President Jerry John Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana . . . . .	Jan/46	A School to Develop “Leaders and Scholars” . . . . .	Sep/4
Qian Weichang—Chancellor of Shanghai University . . . . .	Mar/43	Founding Spirit Determines Everything . . . . .	Oct/4
Brazilian Poet Amadeu Thiago de Mello—Guardian of the Amazon . . . . .	Apr/45	A Grand Drama is Unfolding Within the SGI-USA . .	Nov/4
Dr. Choue Young Seek—Kyung Hee University		Victory Over Violence . . . . .	Dec/4
<b>Publisher's Commentary</b>			
		Greet the New Era With Hope and Wisdom . . . . .	Jan/7
<b>The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin</b>			
		The Meaning of Faith . . . . .	Jan/11
		The Gods Same Birth and Same Name . . . . .	Mar/7
		The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life . . . . .	May/10
		Letter to Misawa . . . . .	July/7
		On Prolonging One's Life Span . . . . .	Sep/10
		The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Cross Reference to the Major Writings . . . . .	Oct/23

Article	Month/Page
The Fourteen Slanders .....	Nov/10

## Buddhist Concept for Today's Living

(9) The Three Realms .....	Jan/9
(10) Happiness in this World .....	Feb/5
(11) The Three Powerful Enemies .....	Mar/5
(12) Buddhist Compassion .....	Apr/5
(13) Gratitude: A Hallmark of Humanity .....	May/6
(14) Making the Best of Everything: The Ten Factors of Life .....	June/6
(15) How to Live As Humans: The Six Paths and the Four Noble Worlds .....	July/5
(16) The Oneness of Body and Mind .....	Aug/6
(17) Perfect Imperfection: Aspiration for Buddhahood .....	Sep/6
(18) Practicing for Oneself, Practicing for Others ..	Oct/6
(19) The Bodhisattva .....	Nov/6
(20) Positive and Negative Relationship With the Law ..	Dec/6

## Living the Teachings

(1) Be Neither Influenced Nor Frightened By Obstacles .....	Aug/8
(2) The Good Medicine for All Ills .....	Oct/8
(3) An Untimely Death Does Not Diminish Life ..	Dec/8

## Passages to Victory

(1) The Path of Difficulties Leads to Enlightenment, Alexis Trass .....	Sep/8
(2) The Prayers of the Practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, Maiya Murphy .....	Nov/8

## Historical Buddhist Figures

Myoichi—"My Story" .....	Mar/13
My Story—Nichigen-nyo .....	Apr/27
My Story—Sairen-bo .....	June/26

## President Toda's Essays

Faith .....	Jan/15
Almsgiving of the Law .....	Feb/7
Live Diligently and Proudly As Soka Gakkai Members .....	Apr/7
Religious Revolution .....	May/8
The Powers of Faith and Practice .....	June/8
On Life .....	Dec/10

Article	Month/Page
<h2 style="color: #004a87;">Making A Difference</h2>	

Exploring the Hidden Depths, Phil Becque, United Kingdom .....	Jan/44
Taking Human Revolution to the Hill, Paula Hendry, Washington, D.C. ....	Mar/25
Pediatrician Learns to Face Reality, Marie-Claude Angelique, France .....	June/25
Opening My Heart, Vincent Garreau, Japan .....	Oct/28
Little Victories, Mark Bennion, Vashon Island, Washington .....	Nov/47

## Conversations on Education With Friends From Around the World

For the Future of Our Children—Part One .....	June/10
For the Future of Our Children—Part Two .....	July/15
For the Future of Our Children—Part Three .....	Aug/10

## Features

Buddhism and Human Rights: Points of Convergence .....	Jan/16
Parliament of the World's Religions .....	Feb/45
Victory Over Violence 2000 .....	Mar/15
SGI Activities in the Community .....	Mar/48
Beyond Idolatry and Self-Worship .....	Apr/9
Social Architecture for the Grand Main Temple ..	Apr/17
South American Journey .....	Apr/49
SGI Presentations at World Parliament of Religions .....	June/18
Making Peace: International Civility and the Question of Culture .....	July/23
Tsunesaburo Makiguchi—Founder of Soka: Value Creating Education .....	Aug/18
The Object of Devotion—The Gohonzon: Its Meaning, Words and Imagery .....	Sep/17
Learning from the Principle of "Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life" .....	Sep/22
What is Faith and How Do We Strengthen It? ....	Oct/16
Ten Points to Derive Maximum Benefit from Our Practice .....	Nov/34
A Personal Perspective on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism .....	Dec/19

*(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)

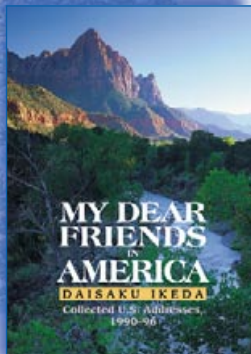
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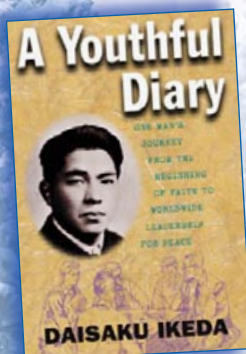
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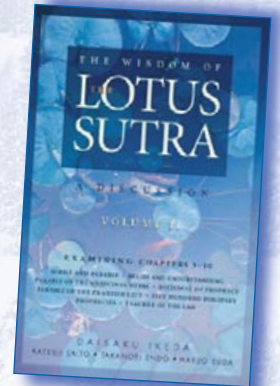
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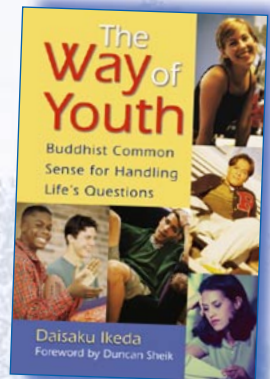
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# living

## BUDDHISM

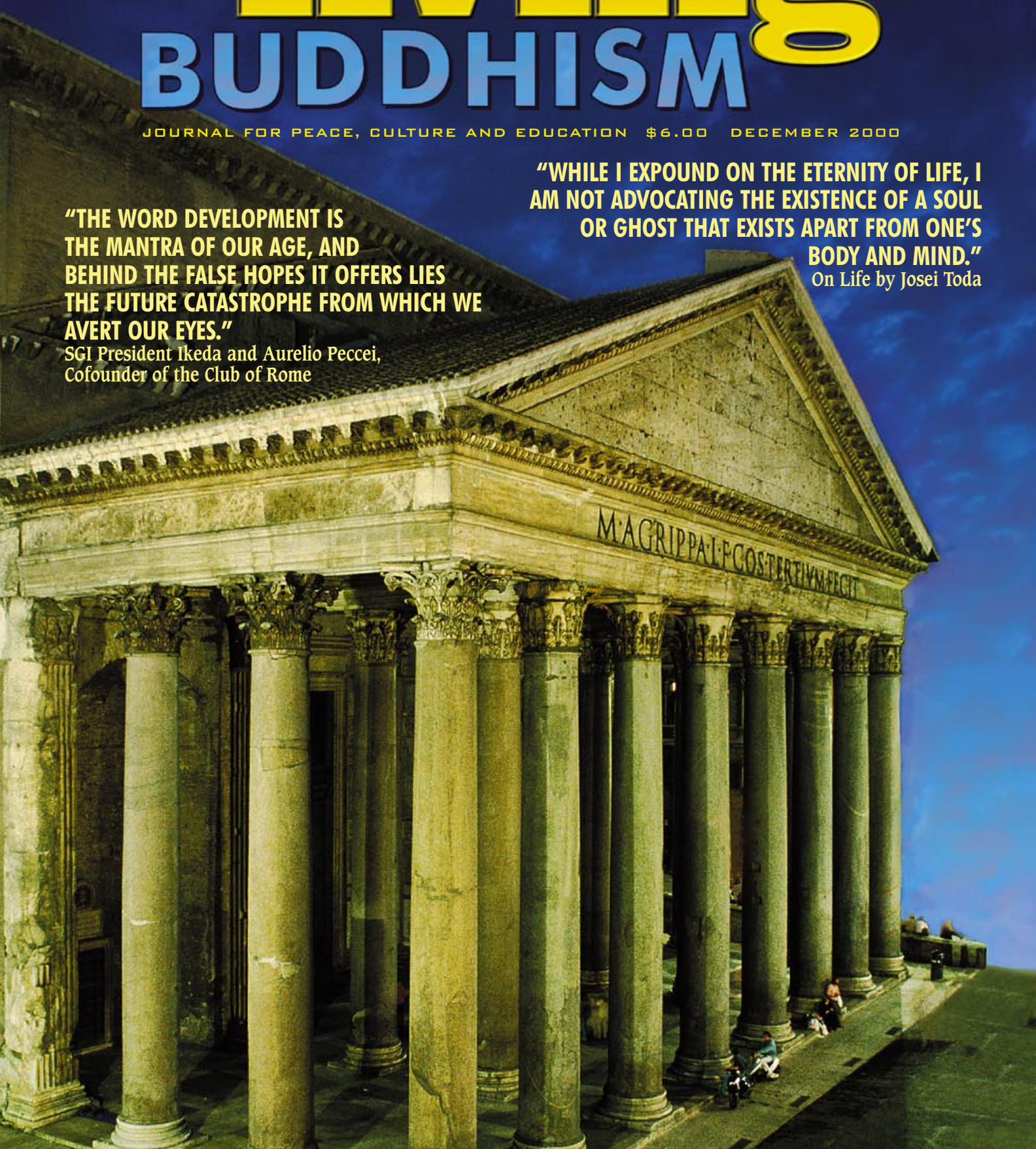
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**"THE WORD DEVELOPMENT IS THE MANTRA OF OUR AGE, AND BEHIND THE FALSE HOPES IT OFFERS LIES THE FUTURE CATASTROPHE FROM WHICH WE AVERT OUR EYES."**

SGI President Ikeda and Aurelio Peccei,  
Cofounder of the Club of Rome

**"WHILE I EXPOUND ON THE ETERNITY OF LIFE, I AM NOT ADVOCATING THE EXISTENCE OF A SOUL OR GHOST THAT EXISTS APART FROM ONE'S BODY AND MIND."**

On Life by Josei Toda





## ***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)*