

SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA PART 3 BY JEFF MCDANIEL, PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

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

The following is the final installment of a review of the Lotus Sutra chapters based on “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” (DLS) which completed serialization in *Living Buddhism* last October. This installment includes chapters twenty-one through twenty-eight. 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* (volumes one and two are now available through SGI-USA bookstores or mail order). 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 over 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 Twenty-One: “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (DLS 41)

The challenge of the transmission of the Law is enormous. This is evident from the urgent tone of the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” chapter. This chapter has great importance in Nichiren Dai-shonin’s Buddhism because it contains the transfer ceremony of the responsibility for carrying out the Buddha’s teachings after his passing. At this point in the story, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who emerged in the fifteenth chapter receive their mission.

Continuing with the flow from the previous chapter, the opening of the “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” chapter finds the Bodhisattvas of the Earth pledging to widely propagate the Lotus Sutra after Shakyamuni’s death. Before Shakyamuni entrusts them with this mission, he underscores the importance of this transfer with a display of ten supernatural powers. They are:

- (1) Shakyamuni Buddha extends his long broad tongue until it reaches the Brahma heaven;
- (2) he emits countless beams of light from every pore of his body, illuminating all the worlds in the ten directions;
- (3) other Buddhas clear their throats, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (4) they snap their fingers, causing the sound to reach the worlds of the ten directions;
- (5) all the lands in the ten directions tremble in six different ways;
- (6) all beings in the worlds of the ten directions behold the Buddhas in the *saha*

world1 and rejoice;

(7) heavenly gods proclaim to the beings in the ten directions that they should offer obeisance and alms to revere Shakyamuni Buddha;

(8) on hearing this proclamation, all the beings in the ten directions press their palms together and salute the Buddha;

(9) the beings scatter over the *saha* world offerings of various treasures, which gather together like a cloud and form a jeweled canopy over the Buddhas assembled there; and

(10) passage between all worlds in the ten directions becomes unobstructed, as though they were one Buddha land. (*Living Buddhism*, October 1999, p. 25)

In “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda refocuses the issue of supernatural powers back on the human being. He says, “There might seem to be something fantastic about this display of supernatural powers. But we should bear in mind that they represent functions of life” (*Living Buddhism*, September 1999, p. 31).

Following the demonstration of these powers, Shakyamuni addresses Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the central figure of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The World-Honored One explains that one of the purposes of the panoply of supernatural powers is to impress all in attendance with the far-reaching impact of the Wonderful Law of the Lotus. He especially wanted to demonstrate this within the context of transferring or entrusting his teachings to those successors whom he had trained. This display also creates a standard by which to measure the benefit gained from the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

The benefit is so great precisely because the Lotus Sutra is the absolute quintessence of the Buddha’s teachings. He leaves no doubt about this point in his transfer speech to Bodhisattva Superior Practices:

To put it briefly, all the doctrines possessed by the Thus Come One, all the freely exercised superna-tural powers of the Thus Come One, the storehouse of the secret essentials of the Thus Come One, all the most profound matters of the Thus Come One—all these are proclaimed, revealed, and clearly expounded in this sutra. (The Lotus Sutra, p. 274)

President Ikeda provides insight about praise for the benefit of the sutra, “Shakyamuni is not simply praising the benefit of the Lotus Sutra. He is in fact praising the benefit accrued by the person who will uphold this sutra after his passing, that is to say, the benefit of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. That is the point” (*Living Buddhism*, October 1999, p. 25). The following segment from the verse section of the chapter reinforces this:

Because they wish to entrust this sutra, they praise and extol the person who accepts and upholds it, and though they should do so for immeasurable kalpas2 they could never exhaust their praises. The benefits gained by such a person are boundless and inexhaustible, like the vast sky in the ten directions that no one can set a limit to. (LS21, 275)

Having displayed his supernatural powers as a pre-lude to the transfer of the Law,

Shakyamuni is at last ready to make his proclamation of specific bequeathal for the future propagation of the Lotus Sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and their leader, Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

“For this reason, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, you must single-mindedly accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach and transcribe it, and practice it as directed. In any of the various lands, wherever there are those who accept, uphold, read, recite, explain, preach, and transcribe or practice it as directed, or wherever the sutra rolls are preserved, whether in a garden, a forest, beneath a tree, in monks’ quarters, in the lodgings of white-robed laymen, in palaces, or in mountain valleys or the wide wilderness, in all these places one should erect towers and offer alms. Why? Because you should understand that such spots are places of religious practice. In such places have the Buddhas gained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, in such places have the Buddhas turned the wheel of the Law, in such places have the Buddhas entered parinirvana.”³ (LS21, 274–75)

With this specific transfer made at the ceremony in the air, it is important to get at its essence to understand what it might hold for us from the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. To this end, the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” contains a lively discussion about the nature of cause and effect and attributes of the Buddha existing since time without beginning. They wrestle with the idea of the identity of Bodhisattva Superior Practices as the representative of the Nine Worlds, who inherently carries the cause of Buddhahood and the means to activate it through his practice as a bodhisattva. President Ikeda returns it to the prime point of the Mystic Law.

“Shakyamuni is ultimately extolling the benefit of the ‘Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One,’ which embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law. Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment in the remote past, and Bodhisattva Superior Practices are both ‘transient manifestations’ of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One, ‘the fundamental Buddha’ of the universe. The Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One is the Buddha whose life is without beginning or end; the universal life; the origin of Buddhas throughout time and space. (*Living Buddhism*, October 1999, p. 26–27)

Chapter Twenty-Two: “Entrustment” (DLS 45)

The “Entrustment” chapter is the completion of Shakyamuni’s transmission of the Law to the remaining bodhisattvas in the assembly. In the previous “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” chapter, there was a specific transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices and all the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The general transmission bequeaths the Buddha’s teachings to all living beings. In a heartfelt way, the Buddha pats each member of the assembly on the head three times and entrusts the propagation of the Lotus Sutra to them so that its benefits will become known far and wide. Nichiren Daishonin explains the significance of this in “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings.”

“This chapter describes how the Buddha patted the head of the bodhisattvas and transmitted the teaching to them, insuring that this wonderful Law would remain in the world after he had passed into extinction.

“And since this represents the transmission of the Mystic Law, all of the living beings

of the Ten Worlds and three thousand realms are bodhisattvas to whom this transmission is made” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 800).

From Nichiren Daishonin’s perspective, everyone becomes a bodhisattva. From the perspective of the Lotus Sutra, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth received the essence of Shakyamuni’s teachings from the depths of the “Life Span” chapter, whereas what Shakyamuni transferred in the “Entrustment” chapter was the entire body of his teachings. In one sense this could be seen as providing the tools for the time periods of the Former, Middle, and Latter days of the Law of Shakyamuni Thus Come One.

This is reflected in Shakyamuni’s message of transmission. In making the entrustment of his teachings, Shakyamuni explains that he is not stingy and he does not begrudge anyone or anything. He says that being a Buddha means having compassion. He bestows wisdom on living beings. With these examples, Shakyamuni exhorts the assembly to do likewise: “You for your part should respond by studying this Law of the Thus Come One. You must not be stingy or begrudging” (LS22, 278).

He then instructs them on how to carry out the preaching of the Law:

In future ages if there are good men and good women who have faith in the wisdom of the Thus Come One, you should preach and expound the Lotus Sutra for them, so that others may hear and understand it. For in this way you can cause them to gain the Buddha wisdom. If there are living beings who do not believe and accept it, you should use some of the other profound doctrines of the Thus Come One to teach, benefit, and bring joy to them. If you do all this, then you will have repaid the debt of gratitude that you owe to the Buddhas.
(LS22, 278)

It cannot be overlooked that this is a different pledge of benefit than the earlier description of benefits that promised even a single moment of faith would create the cause for enlightenment. This is clearly a different order of transmission of the sutra. The bodhisattvas and mahasattvas rejoice and feel great joy coursing through their bodies. They raise their voices, pledging to carry out the direction of the World-Honored One.

This final entrustment signals the conclusion of the Ceremony in the Air. Even as the bodhisattvas were voicing their determination, Shakyamuni was already sending all of the Buddhas from the ten directions back to their home worlds. The Treasure Tower’s doors are closed in preparation for departure to the far reaches of the universe. With the ceremony’s conclusion, everyone heads out to fulfill his or her respective mission.

The scene returns to Eagle Peak and the original assembly of Shakyamuni’s disciples who were in attendance during the first chapter when the Buddha began preaching. Unexpectedly, they found themselves whirled into the phantasmagoric happenings of the Lotus Sutra. From the perspective of the principle of the “three assemblies in two places,” this portion of the sutra is the ending of the second assembly and the beginning of the third. It is consistent with the explanation of two places in that the location of the scene is now back to the same location as the first assembly.

The “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” participants see two meanings in the conclusion of the ceremony of transmission. The first is the pledge made by everyone, including the

Bodhisattvas of the Earth, to accept the Buddha's bequeathal of the Law to them. In addition to the willingness of the bodhisattvas and all other beings to take on the work of propagation now and in the future, there is another connection that is crucial—the mentor-disciple relationship. President Ikeda explains:

From the standpoint of those who are entrusted, this is the chapter where the disciples pledge to shoulder the hard work of propagating the Law. This defines the connection between mentor and disciple.

The mentor-disciple relationship is strict. Everything depends on how earnestly one can accept and act on even a single word of the mentor. A true disciple strives to actualize the mentor's vision—not by mimicking the mentor, but by putting into action what the mentor has taught.

(*Living Buddhism*, January 2000, p. 31)

The second major point is the fact that the Ceremony in the Air has concluded and the participants have returned to their original lands. This change of venue from the cosmic ceremony to the rocky crags of Eagle Peak signifies the mission of the bodhisattva to exercise courage, compassion and wisdom in the reality of the mundane world. This mission includes helping other human beings practice Buddhism.

Chapter Twenty-Three: "Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King"

As explained in the previous chapter, the Ceremony in the Air ends with Shakyamuni and his disciples returning to earth. Chapter twenty-three signals yet another transition in the earthly and celestial odyssey that is Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra. This transition is different because the story that began in the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra has now concluded with the "Entrustment" chapter. The mission is accomplished, so it would seem that a natural stopping point has been reached. However, the Lotus Sutra has six more chapters.

Before proceeding with the final six, there are questions to be answered: How far have we come? And, where do we go from here? In the "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," the participants discuss the significance of this transition. Each previous shift has had its own characteristics and purpose. Let us review what has emerged in the previous twenty-two chapters. The stage and the audience were set in chapter one and then grew to unimaginable proportions. Through his preaching and supernatural powers and the arrival of messengers from afar, Shakyamuni Thus Come One's message has been delivered far and wide. The tongues of a billion Buddhas have verified it beyond all doubt. On his own behalf, the Buddha has used parables, similes, metaphors and guidance to communicate the heart of Buddhism and how to live it.

Within this vast epic, the centerpiece of the major events to unfold is the unbelievable Treasure Tower. This magnificent stupa is one quarter the size of the earth that it floated above. All around this cosmic platform, awesome displays of the benefit of having faith in and practicing the Lotus Sutra were provided for the assembly. A whole new type of bodhisattvas—those whose lives are rooted in the core of existence itself—emerged upon the scene. The essential connection of the pulse of daily life to eternity was portrayed as part of the revelations in the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" chapter.

The Wonderful Law of the Lotus Sutra was transmitted and entrusted to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, then to all other bodhisattvas, voice-hearers, the four kinds of believers, humans, and all other living beings. The conclusion became clear—those who were entrusted with the Law must insure that the Buddha wisdom and the Buddha way to attain it flourish in future ages after the Buddha has entered extinction. At the end of chapter twenty-two, the participants and the audience at the Ceremony in the Air have returned to their former realms and activities.

This is an apparent ending of the sutra's primary story line. While the transmission of the Law was completed in the twenty-second chapter, fully six more chapters follow. What is the purpose of these additional chapters? From Nichiren Daishonin's view, this additional material is like gleaned remaining metaphors and behavioral models from the rich harvest of the Buddha's wisdom to further insure that the Law is propagated. President Ikeda clarifies the objective of Shakyamuni continuing, "Pervading these six chapters is Shakyamuni's spirit to show all people without exception the way to enlightenment and to accomplish the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, no matter what difficulties that task might entail" (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 32).

The participants in the "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" discuss the popular notion that these chapters might have simply been tacked on to the main body of the sutra by later editors. This notion is reinforced by the fact that each chapter can stand on its own as an illustration of the life and activities of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas from other ages and realms. Further weight for this view is that there is no narrative continuum between them. However, President Ikeda sees a deeper context uniting them.

"Even so, these six chapters are not simply an addendum. In terms of the "three assemblies in two places," the second assembly at Eagle Peak takes place in these six chapters. This section elucidates the important role of bodhisattvas in returning to actual society with the eternal Mystic Law revealed during the Ceremony in the Air deeply engraved in their hearts" (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 32).

The audience has not come back to earth the same as when they departed from the first assembly on Eagle Peak to ascend into space. Rather, they have returned with a greatly elevated life-condition and increased wisdom as a result of their experience. They are now filled with the awareness of the eternal and infinite nature of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Thus Come One.

Given this great life-condition of the original assembly, it can be construed that each of the six additional chapters offer important lessons on how all bodhisattvas can most appropriately carry out their mission to propagate the Law.

President Ikeda encourages us to look at the examples in each chapter as wonderful role models of compassion, wisdom and courage, as well as the spirit of mentor and disciple.

"The bodhisattvas, believing in and accepting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the depths of the "Life Span" chapter, show actual proof of the Mystic Law in their respective fields of endeavor. They each test and prove and then propagate the Mystic Law. That is probably why these six chapters are extraordinarily varied in their appearances and activities" (*Living Buddhism*, February, 2000, p. 32).

The bodhisattvas of the essential teaching do not have flashy attributes. They are unassuming in nature. Even the names of the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth imply their straightforward function: Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices. President Ikeda explains the reason for this

difference:

They are on a different level. The names of the four bodhisattvas represent functions of the Mystic Law itself, and they are compared to the moon in the sky [as opposed to its reflection]. Their mission is simply the propagation of Mystic Law. This is as the Daishonin indicates when he says, “The action carried out by the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching is [to propagate] Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” (GZ, 751), (*Living Buddhism*, February, 2000, p. 33)

With this perspective of finding hidden gems to enhance our propagation of the Law, we are better able to approach the happenings in the “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” chapter. The lesson in this chapter deals with the efforts to achieve the oneness of mentor and disciple. It also illustrates the spirit to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

Keeping with the mode of dialogue that has characterized the entire sutra, the chapter begins with a question from Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower to the Buddha about the life of the renowned bodhisattva Medicine King. All of the emanations of Shakyamuni have been dispersed, and Buddhas under jeweled trees with their vast retinues from innumerable worlds have returned home. The original cast of characters is back in their familiar setting. This is the first question since the events in the air. The hesitant—yet sincere—seeking spirit of this fledgling bodhisattva comes shining forth in the text of the sutra.

At that time the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower spoke to the Buddha, saying: “World-Honored One, how does the bodhisattva Medicine King come and go in the *saha* world? World-Honored One, this bodhisattva Medicine King has carried out some hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of difficult practices, arduous practices. Very well, World-Honored One, could I ask you to explain a little? The heavenly beings, dragons, gods, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kimnaras, mahoragas, human and non-human beings, and the bodhisattvas who have come from other lands and the multitude of voice-hearers, will all be delighted to hear you” (LS23, 280).

In answer to his question, Shakyamuni explains that in many lifetimes in the past, there existed a Buddha named Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue Thus Come One. Shakyamuni extols all of this Buddha’s attributes as worthy of offerings. He had disciples of eighty million bodhisattvas. Among them, there was a noteworthy bodhisattva named Gladly Seen by All Living Beings who especially delighted in the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra and applied himself assiduously to its practice. Realizing the benefit from his practice, Gladly Seen by All Living Beings used the powers that he had gained to manifest offerings for his mentor, Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue. But he still felt that this did not fully express the extent of his appreciation for the Law and the Buddha, so he decided to offer his own body. Over a period of twelve hundred years, he prepared himself with a great many perfumes and oils. Then he set himself on fire. The flames illuminated worlds greater than the grains of sand of eight million Ganges Rivers. The Buddhas of all those worlds marveled at his actions and voiced their agreement that the offering of oneself is the highest offering to be made to the Buddha. His body burned for another twelve hundred years.

Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings was immediately reborn into the home

of a king named Pure Virtue who also lived in the land of Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue Thus Come One. Following his rebirth, this bodhisattva spoke to his father of his remembrance of his past practices under Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue, telling him that this Buddha still existed in this very land. He immediately sought out Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue and engaged him in compassionate dialogue. It so happened that at this time, the Buddha was on the eve of entering extinction. With joy at re-encountering Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings, Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue Thus Come One entrusted this bodhisattva with his teachings, his disciples and his relics. With Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings keeping watch in the night, Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright Virtue entered nirvana.

Shakyamuni Buddha explained to the assembly that Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings is none other than the present Bodhisattva Medicine King. He also told them that an important meaning of this story was to show that sincere devotion to a Buddha who preaches the Lotus Sutra is infinitely more valuable than offering a massive number of treasure realms or entire worlds to other Buddhas. Referring to someone who makes such great offerings to the lesser teaching, Shakyamuni says, “the benefits gained by such a person cannot match those gained by accepting and upholding this Lotus Sutra, even just one four-line verse of it! The latter brings the most numerous blessings of all” (LS23, 285).

The “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” notes that the motivation behind Gladly Seen by All Persons was to repay his debt of gratitude to the source of his development and benefit. As President Ikeda states:

The sincerity of his efforts to repay his debt of gratitude illuminates the world. We, too, have become happy thanks to the Gohonzon. And thanks to the SGI, which has taught us about the Gohonzon, we have learned the correct path of life.

If we cherish the spirit to repay this debt of gratitude in the depth of our hearts, then our good fortune will increase by leaps and bounds. No matter how much action someone might seem to be taking outwardly, if they lack the spirit to repay their debt of gratitude, their arrogance will destroy their good fortune.

Consequently, they will be unable to genuinely transform their state of life. A subtle difference in our spirit, or *ichinen*, produces diametrically different results. (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 35)

In discussing the former existence of Bodhisattva Medicine King (as Bodhisattva Gladly Seen by All Living Beings), they point out that his appreciation for his mentor did not subside—even as his body burned for 1,200 years. And following his death, he was able to be reborn in the same Buddha land as his mentor Buddha Sun Moon Pure Bright. President Ikeda points out the significance of this occurrence:

His spirit to repay his debt of gratitude transcends even life and death. He is resolved that after his death he will come back again to be with his mentor and continue the struggle. Since he has attained the state of being in which he is able to manifest all physical forms, he can choose to be born exactly where he wishes. Those who dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to faith in the Mystic Law are completely free. (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 35)

With the subject of sacrificing one’s life for the Law, the discussion in the “Dialogue on

the Lotus Sutra” naturally turned to the subject of first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

The Medicine King Chapter essentially teaches the faith to “dedicate one’s life to the Law.” I recall that my mentor and second Soka Gakkai President Toda always used to describe Mr. Makiguchi’s death in prison as the “offering of Bodhisattva Medicine King.”

[Mr. Toda said: Why was a person of such exalted virtue made to die in prison? If he had not been a votary of the Lotus Sutra he could never have had such a destiny.]

“He gave his life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra; he is a model of dedicating one’s life to the Lotus Sutra by facing persecution. His death was the offering of Bodhisattva Medicine King. President Makiguchi is qualified to be praised by the words (used in the sutra to describe Medicine King’s self-immolation), ‘Among all donations, this is the most highly prized.’” LS23, 282) (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 36)

Shakyamuni explains that just as Gladly Seen by All Living Beings exemplified the greatest of devotions, so, too, is the Lotus Sutra the foremost of all the sutras. He continues by giving examples of the good fortune to be gained by one who carries out the practice as this sutra directs. One such merit is that the faculties of sight will become clear and pure and the person will be able to perceive Buddhas in vast unimaginable numbers and even beyond that to see the entire universe.

As he continues, it sounds as if he is restating his pronouncements from the previous chapters. However, he makes a sharp change to warn his listeners of the difficulties that will face those who propagate the Lotus Sutra following his passing and how they must be protected. There will be armies of devils, thieves, bandits and other evils that will need to be defeated to succeed in propagation. As Shakyamuni addresses Bodhisattva Constellation King Flower about the harsh reality to be faced in the future, he abruptly entrusts him with the responsibility of upholding the spirit of this chapter. One can just imagine the feelings coursing through the life of this bodhisattva as he receives this assignment. After all, he only asked a question about the former affairs of the notable Bodhisattva Medicine King:

For this reason, Constellation King Flower, I entrust this chapter on the Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King to you. After I have passed into extinction, in the last five hundred year period you must spread it abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils’ people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas or kumbhanda demons to seize the advantage!

Constellation King Flower, you must use your transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. Why? Because this sutra provides good medicine for the ills of the people of Jambudvīpa. If a person who has illness is able to hear this sutra, then his illness will be wiped out and he will know neither old age nor death. (LS23, 288)

President Ikeda reiterates the passage in the sutra where Shakyamuni is explaining to

Constellation King Flower about the benefit of spreading the Mystic Law.

“In other words, the good fortune and benefit of those who carry out the practice of propagation cannot be destroyed by the fires of suffering, or washed away by the waves of misfortune. This passage also states that the benefit of such a person is so great that even a thousand Buddhas speaking all together could not fully describe it. The person has destroyed all devils, broken the forces of the suffering of birth and death, and vanquished all enemies. And a thousand Buddhas will protect that person using their transcendental powers.

“Buddhism is victory or defeat. It is a struggle between the Buddha and the devil. Therefore we have to win. Only by realizing victory through faith can we become truly happy and accomplish kosen-rufu.

“Triumphant One” is another name for the Buddha” (*Living Buddhism*, February 2000, p. 37).

Sitting amidst the rough terrain of Eagle Peak, someone like Constellation King Flower might wonder those thousand Buddhas would come from when they were needed. But then a familiar voice speaks:

Many Treasures Thus Come One in the midst of his treasure tower praised the bodhisattva Constellation King Flower, saying: “Excellent, excellent Constellation King Flower. You succeeded in acquiring inconceivable benefits and thus were able to question Shakyamuni Buddha about this matter, profiting immeasurable numbers of living beings. (LS23, 289)

The Lotus Sutra is indeed a mysterious tale. Here we had been led to believe that the Ceremony in the Air had been dispersed. Yet, we find Many Treasures Thus Come One and his intergalactic Treasure Tower still hanging around in support of his dear friend Shakyamuni.

Chapter Twenty-Four: “The Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound” (DLS 47)

More surprises are in store as we meet bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. This chapter begins with Shakyamuni releasing a ray of light from a knob on the top of his head, which illuminates Buddha lands of an unfathomable number in the eastern region of the universe. Beyond these worlds, there lived a Buddha named Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom. Reaching into that Buddha land, Shakyamuni’s pure light puts the spotlight on a bodhisattva named Wonderful Sound. He has served millions of Buddhas and gains the wisdom of a multi-talented bodhisattva. He is huge, forty thousand *yojanas*⁴ in height. As a reference point, the Treasure Tower, which is one-fourth the size of the earth, is a mere five hundred *yojanas* in height. When the light from Shakyamuni reaches Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, he reports to his mentor, Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom, that he needs to go visit the World Honored One who is preaching the Lotus Sutra.

Hearing this, Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom Thus Come One, whose body is six million eight hundred thousand *yojanas* in height, cautions Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound to not disparage Shakyamuni’s world or the beings that inhabit it. He explains to him that the *saha* world is not necessarily a hospitable place. The beings who reside there, including Shakyamuni, are puny in stature compared to those who live in the Buddha land of Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom. Indeed, Bodhisattva Wonderful

Sound's body is much larger than earth itself and possesses the utmost in shapeliness, adornments and radiance. Hearing this, Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound assures Pure Flower Constellation King Wisdom Thus Come One that he will be journeying to that world to sincerely pay homage to Shakyamuni for all his efforts to bring enlightenment to all living beings through preaching the Lotus Sutra.

Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound causes a jeweled mass of eighty-four thousand lotus blossoms with pure gold stems to appear near Shakyamuni and his audience on Eagle Peak. This causes the Dharma Prince Manjushri to ask the Buddha about the meaning of this phenomenon. Shakyamuni answers that this is the calling card of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound and that he will be visiting very soon. Manjushri and the other bodhisattvas are in awe and want to know the causes that Wonderful Sound made to be able to display such omens. Shakyamuni calls upon Many Treasures Thus Come One to act as an intermediary to allow Wonderful Sound to manifest himself. Many Treasures speaks to Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, "Come good man, The Dharma Prince Manjushri wishes to see your body." (LS24, 293) At that moment, Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound immediately disappears from his land and travels to the *saha* world with a retinue of eighty-four thousand bodhisattvas.

The entire assembly is overjoyed at the magnificent form of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. They have never seen anything like this before. Commenting about this bodhisattva's appearance, the participants in the "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" express their own wonder about the size and grandeur of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. President Ikeda explains that the purpose of his visit is to show his splendid form to the people of this world. He is a living personification of the "wonderful sound" that reverberates through the entire universe. It is the richness of sound, fragrance and light that has as its foundation the dynamic pulse of life itself with its inherent rhythm that can turn any suffering into tremendous joy. President Ikeda explains that it is the song of the universe:

The entire universe is playing a "wonderful sound." The universe itself is a symphony of life, a chorale sung by all beings and phenomena—a serenade, a nocturne, a ballad, an opera, and a suite. The universe performs all "wonderful sounds."

The foundation of this is the Mystic Law. It is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Therefore, reciting the sutra is essentially a "wake-up song" that causes the sun to rise in our hearts, as well as a nocturne, a "Moonlight Sonata" that illuminates our hearts with the light of the moon.

Reciting the sutra is like reading a poem. And chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like singing a musical masterpiece. Our daily practice is the most cultural of activities. (*Living Buddhism*, March 2000, p. 31)

However, there is still more to be learned from the visit of this awesome creature. Shakyamuni proceeds to tell the full story of this great bodhisattva and how he has made offerings and served an immeasurable number of Buddhas. President Ikeda clarifies this by focusing on practice within the SGI:

The statement that he has waited upon the Buddha is very important. From our standpoint, this means steadfastly praying to the Gohonzon. On another level, it means serving and supporting the members of the SGI who are taking action for

kosen-rufu, or simply meeting with other members. Through such actions we can increase our life force and expand our state of life. (*Living Buddhism*, March 2000, p. 32)

As the tale continues, Shakyamuni explains that Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound has the capacity to manifest in any form in order to successfully communicate the Law to all beings. He specifically enumerates thirty-four forms that this bodhisattva employs such as king, rich man, householder, monk, nun or laywoman. President Ikeda comments on the capacity of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound to adapt himself to the needs and circumstances of each person:

Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound is completely free to adjust to the capacity of another person. This is total liberation. Buddhism is not a religion that tries to force people into a mold or create a bunch of automatons. It emancipates the lives of those who have been living robotically.

The thirty-four forms of Wonderful Sound are proof of the correctness of the multifaceted activities SGI members carry out in all sectors of society. While each of us may be exerting ourselves in a different area, we are all motivated by compassion and humanity. We should burn with a spirit and determination to become the foremost ally of those who are suffering! If we lack this spirit we are not behaving like Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound. (*Living Buddhism*, March 2000, p. 41)

Chapter Twenty-Five: "The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds" (DLS 48, 49)

Following the departure of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, there seems to be no end to the seeking mind of the assembly. Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent wastes no time jumping up from his seat to address Shakyamuni about yet another great bodhisattva: "World Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World Sounds — why is he called Perceiver of the World's Sounds?" (LS25, 298). Shakyamuni is ready with the answer:

"Good man, suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various trials and sufferings. If they hear of this bodhisattva Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds and single-mindedly call his name, then at once he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will all gain deliverance from their trials. (LS25, 298–99)

Shakyamuni cites many examples of how Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds will be able to listen and respond to the prayers of those who are suffering. He also explains the great benefit of those who offer alms and obeisance to this bodhisattva. They will all gain immeasurable benefit. The fact that a bodhisattva will hear their cries and appear in order to alleviate the suffering of humanity would seem to run counter to the spirit of the Lotus Sutra that teaches self-reliance. It is a teaching of challenging one's suffering and creating victory through correct Buddhist practice.

There are two views that expand the understanding of the function of this bodhisattva. There is the example of a compassionate mother who can truly listen from

the heart to the sufferings of children and be able to comfort them. Further, this merciful quality is equated with the stance of the SGI to treasure each member and display kindness in the face of their sufferings to give them hope. Thus, it is the courage of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds to persist in practice so as to discover the power of the Mystic Law and thus take action to save others without begrudging one's own life.

President Ikeda explains this bodhisattva's ability to transform suffering into victory and joy:

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds represents one aspect of the life of the original Buddha from time without beginning that is revealed in the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (sixteenth) chapter. He is symbolic of the boundless compassion of the original Buddha who is at one with the universe. Therefore, the life of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is not separate from that of the original Buddha from the remote past. If it were, he would be nothing but a lifeless shell. (*Living Buddhism*, April 2000, p. 32)

It is useful to remind ourselves of the thesis put forth at the beginning of the presentation about the "Former Affairs of Bodhisattva Medicine King" in chapter twenty-three. All of the provisional Buddhas and provisional bodhisattvas that appear in the final six chapters of the Lotus Sutra are illustrations of the attributes of those who practice the Mystic Law. They are attributes that are used by Bodhisattvas of the Earth to accomplish their mission to propagate the Law to all living beings. In provisional forms of Buddhism not based on the Lotus Sutra, it may be more comforting to think of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds as a kind of super guardian angel that arrives to fix all problems and keep people safe from harm.

In classic Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama is considered to be the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds. However, President Ikeda clearly explains this:

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is encompassed in the life of the original Buddha from the remote past; that is to say, in the Gohonzon. The function of Perceiver of the World's Sounds is just a small aspect of the beneficial power of the Gohonzon — of the Mystic Law.

From ancient times, no chapter of the sutra has been as widely discussed or had as much written about it as the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter. There is even a history of people placing their faith in this chapter as an independent sutra. To this day, people in various places continue to build statues of this bodhisattva.

Despite the bodhisattva's popularity, many people have misunderstood the source of his power. The source of his power is the Mystic Law. It is in the transmission section of the Lotus Sutra — which includes the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter — that people are urged to propagate the Mystic Law after Shakyamuni's passing.

Of all Buddhist scriptures in which Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds appears, the "Universal Gateway of the Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the oldest. It is here that the function of this bodhisattva is clearly established. The power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds to lead

people to enlightenment derives from the Mystic Law; from Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the depths of the “Life Span” chapter. (*Living Buddhism*, April, April 2000, pp. 32–33)

The final point to bring out is the meaning of the title of the chapter, which refers to a “Universal Gateway.” The significance of the word “universal” is that it is a portal that anyone can enter.

Chapter Twenty-six: “Dharani” (DLS 50)

The entire assembly has been stirred by the appearance of magnificent bodhisattvas. The impact on the audience of Bodhisattva Medicine King, Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound and Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds has encouraged them to make their own pledges to courageously protect those who propagate the Law following the Buddha’s passing.

The scene at the opening of chapter twenty-six gives the feeling of a continuing conversation from the conclusion of the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter. In this instance, we find Bodhisattva Medicine King in the role of questioner. He asks the Buddha to clarify how much merit and benefit can be gained by carrying out the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

Rather than answering immediately, Shakyamuni responds with a question of his own. He first asks Bodhisattva Medicine King if a man or woman makes offerings to Buddhas equal in number to the sands of eight hundred, ten thousand million nayutas of Ganges Rivers, what his estimate would be of the amount of benefit that they would receive. Medicine King expresses the feeling that it would be very great. Shakyamuni agrees and then compares this with the results of upholding even a verse of the Lotus Sutra:

The Buddha said, “If there are good men or good women who, with regard to this sutra, can accept and uphold even one four-line verse, if they read and recite it, understand the principle, and practice it as the sutra directs, the benefits will be very many.” (LS26, 308)

Beginning the chapter in this way, Shakyamuni is continuing his quest to insure that everyone will understand and appreciate that the Lotus Sutra stands apart and above all of his other teachings as the road to enlightenment. Ordinary logic would say that serving what amounts to an infinite number of Buddhas would produce much more benefit than living up to a four-line verse in a Buddhist sutra, even if it is the Lotus Sutra. Thus, the participants in the dialogue express their wonder about how remarkable it is that by accepting and upholding a single verse of the Lotus Sutra, the benefit is the same as serving an infinite number of Buddhas. President Ikeda explains that this is possible because the source of enlightenment of an infinite number of Buddhas is the actually the Lotus Sutra itself. He expands upon that to make the point that the power of daimoku—chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is unfathomable:

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

Therefore, we mustn’t try to gauge the power of daimoku with our own limited

state of life, thinking, “This must be all there is.” The sutra says that the benefit of daimoku is beyond even the Buddha to fathom. For us to suppose that we understand its full scope is nothing short of arrogance. If we underestimate the infinite power of benefit of the Gohonzon owing to weak faith, then we will only be able to tap a minute portion of the Gohonzon’s power. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 35)

Bodhisattva Medicine King and the others present at the assembly are even further moved when they hear Shakyamuni’s statement of the true benefit of practicing the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Medicine King offers a dharani. A dharani is a spell, chant or formula that is uttered, thereby benefiting and protecting that person by virtue of its mystic power. In the case of Bodhisattva Medicine King, he was giving it to those who will spread the Lotus Sutra so they can be protected.

One after another, the stalwarts of the assembly pronounce their dharanis and make their pledges. Then something surprising occurs. Beings that had been considered evil demons come forth to pledge their protection of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. The ten demon daughters, Mother of Demon Children and all her attendants come forward and speak together saying: “World Honored One, we too wish to shield and guard those who read, recite, accept and uphold the Lotus Sutra and spare them from decline and harm” (LS26, 310). However, the female demons go beyond mere spells. They make a fierce determination to severely take retribution on those who do not heed their spells. They speak this to the Buddha in verse form:

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

The participants in the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” express their wonder at the determination expressed by the members of the assembly. They especially admire the strength of women to protect the Law. President Ikeda clarifies the meaning of the phrase, “If there are those who trouble the teachers of the Law, their heads will be split into seven pieces” which is included on the upper right-hand side of the Gohonzon:

The important thing to understand about punishment is that it is not something that someone else does to us; it is our effect when we act contrary to the Law. However, when we live based upon the Law, we receive benefit. These go hand in hand. In the upper left-hand corner of the Gohonzon are the words “Those who make offerings will gain good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles [of the Buddha].” (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 37)

Using the Example of the Ten Demon Daughters and their mother, the dialogue participants expand upon the theme of the Lotus Sutra that creates the opportunity for evil demons to transmigrate into benevolent deities who protect the Law. As President Ikeda states:

Mother of Demon Children, who dotes on her own children while not the least concerned about the children of others, symbolizes the negative side of the maternal instinct. By contrast, to take the love one feels for one's own children and extend it into a love of humanity is the spirit of the merciful mother Perceiver of the World Sounds, of a bodhisattva. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 39)

President Ikeda explains why the protection of the Buddhist gods is so necessary. All the bodhisattvas, including Medicine King, as well as the Demon Mother and her children are representative of all the Buddhist gods that have joined together to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra:

Why is this? Why is their protection necessary? It's because kosen-rufu is a great struggle between the Buddha and all manner of negative forces. This *saha* world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. The "revolutionaries" who stand up and challenge this "evil sovereign" in the name of justice are Buddhas; they are the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. It is only natural that they will be attacked by the forces of evil. If this evil were allowed to persist, however, the world would remain shrouded in darkness. But the "Dharani" chapter states that the sutra's practitioners will be protected from this army of evil by an army of good. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 39)

In terms of the meaning of dharani itself, the word includes the ideas of "upholding," "able to ward off," "remember and preserve," "support" or "maintain." Thus, the entity of a dharani is something more grounded than the idea of a magical spell. President Ikeda explains the origins of oral teachings that go back to the beginning of history:

In ancient civilizations, important teachings were not recorded. It was customary to commit them to memory, carrying them always in one's heart. To deeply engrave the mentor's teaching in one's life for eternity —this is the original meaning of dharani. In short, it is to "remember and bear firmly in mind." It is to absolutely never forget the words of the mentor. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 44)

Nichiren Daishonin's concern was that while people are able to make a pledge to practice, when difficulty comes, just as they were warned, they forget their pledge. The participants relate this to dharanis by adding that there is "dharani of retaining all that one hears" and another one with the name "retaining the repetition of teachings." The "Distinction of Benefits" chapter tells of bodhisattvas that "gained dharani that allowed them to retain hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of immeasurable repetitions of the teachings" (LS17, 234). President Ikeda uses Nichiren Daishonin's "The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" to bring out the underlying truth about dharani:

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

The Daishonin further says: "The five characters of the daimoku are the secret words of the secret of all Buddhas over the three existences of past, present, and

future.” In other words they are the secret of secrets.

Among secrets, some hide evil deeds, and some veil hidden treasure. We are, of course, talking about the latter kind of secret. Simply put, dharani may be described as an example of words imbued with spirit. They do not simply convey a meaning; they are infused with the energy of life. Therefore sound and rhythm are very important. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 44)

In the last analysis, it is the strength of the practitioner’s faith that is able to pull forth the protection of the Buddhist gods.

The macrocosm of the universe is an expression of the five characters of the Mystic Law, as is the microcosm of our lives and the protection *dharani* described in the “Dharani” chapter. This means that we, as votaries of the Mystic Law, will receive the universe’s protection depending on how vibrant our lives are. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China states: “The stronger one’s faith, the greater the protection of the gods.” This is a passage that the Daishonin cites repeatedly. (*Living Buddhism*, July 2000, p. 47)

Chapter Twenty-Seven: “Former Affairs of the King Wonderful Adornment” (DLS 51)

The story of King Wonderful Adornment adds yet another dimension to the richness of benefit generated by practicing the Lotus Sutra’s teachings. This is a family drama in which the actual proof of the practice of two sons and the wisdom of a wife allow a powerful king to meet the Buddha and begin his practice of Buddhism.

Shakyamuni introduces the story that is the subject of this chapter in the usual way of setting the stage in an incalculable time period in the past. In this instance, there was a Buddha named Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom. His land was named Light Bright Adornment. In this land lived a king called Wonderful Adornment. His wife was named Pure Virtue. He had two sons. One was named Pure Storehouse and the other, Pure Eye. The two sons had been carrying out a bodhisattva practice under Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom Thus Come One.

The Buddha wished to take the next step in securing the country by attracting King Wonderful Adornment to Buddhism and guiding his practice. Sensing that the time was right, the Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. The sons, Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye, were aware of what a momentous event this was in the propagation of the Law. So, they went to their mother and beseeched her to come to where Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom Buddha was preaching. Using her mother’s wisdom, Pure Virtue knew that her sons’ real goal was to convert their father to Buddhism. So instead of going with them to see the Buddha preach, she engaged the boys in dialogue so that they could see the proper way to accomplish their goal.

The mother announced to her sons, “Your father puts his faith in non-Buddhist doctrines and is deeply attached to the Brahmanical Law. You should go to your father, tell him about this, and persuade him to go with you.”

Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye pressed their palms and ten fingernails together and said to their mother, “We are sons of the Dharma King, and yet have been born into this family of heretical views!”

The mother said to her sons, “You are right to think with concern about your father.

You should manifest some supernatural wonder for him. When he sees that, his mind will surely be cleansed and purified and he will permit us to go where the Buddha is.” (LS27, 313)

Expressing their compassion and confidence in what they had developed practicing under their mentor, they made a worthy display of their powers for their father. The powers that they displayed are unbelievable physical feats and they succeed in moving their father’s heart. He presses his palms together and asks his sons to take him to their teacher. President Ikeda explains that the supernatural powers displayed by the sons can be thought of as a demonstration of their human revolution.

“Family members in particular need to see proof for they know us best. No matter how great we may present ourselves outside the home, our family clearly sees the reality of our situation. Of course, there are most likely sides of us that our family is the last to know.

“At any rate, parents can see the growth of their children, and a wife can tell when her husband has changed for the better. It is this human revolution that amounts to ‘supernatural abilities’” (*Living Buddhism*, August, 200, p. 36).

After employing an expedient means to cause their father to seek the Buddhist Law, Pure Storehouse and Pure Eye ask permission to leave home to serve their mentor. The sons take their father and mother to see the Buddha Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom. The King arrives with his family and forty-two thousand attendants at the site where the Buddha is preaching.

The Buddha then preached the Lotus Sutra for the King. As the sutra states, “At that time that Buddha preached the Law for the sake of the King, instructing him and bringing him benefit and joy. The king was exceedingly delighted” (LS27, 315–16).

The King cedes his kingdom to his younger brother, and along with his family renounces secular life to practice Buddhism. Following a length of eighty-four thousand years of diligent practice of the Lotus Sutra, he attains enlightenment. He rose into the air to address his teacher, Buddha Thunder Sound Constellation King Flower Wisdom, to express appreciation for the action of his two sons to awaken his roots of goodness so he could enter the Buddha way. At that time, the Buddhas spoke to him about the value of having good friends. He stated:

If good men and good women have planted good roots, and as a result in existence after existence have been able to gain good friends, then these good friends can do the Buddha’s work.... Great king, you should understand that a good friend is the great cause and condition by which one is guided and led, and which enables one to see the Buddha to conceive the desire for anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. (LS27, 317)

Apart from being a teaching story that shows how a family can support each other; it reveals the deep mystic bonds that we share with our family members. As President Ikeda states:

Being members of the same family implies a deep karmic relationship. Speaking of his own family, the Daishonin says, “It is no doubt because of karmic forces that they became my parents, and I, their child” (WND, 993) And with regard to marriage, he says “This is not a matter of this life alone” (WND, 501).

Since we became a family because of a profound connection, we should help one

another become happy as good friends. (*Living Buddhism*, August 2000, pp. 41-42)

The participants in the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” discuss the potential for difficulties and even divorce that can occur in a family. They cover the issue of how parents can best encourage their children to practice Buddhism. They also stress the importance of showing respect to family members who do not practice Buddhism.

Chapter Twenty-Eight: “Encouragements of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (DLS 52–53)

The final chapter opens with the arrival of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy from the east. He pays homage to Shakyamuni and tells him that he had been in the land of the Buddha King Above Jeweled Dignity and Virtue, and from far away had heard the Lotus Sutra being preached here in the *saha* world. He asks the Buddha to preach the Lotus Sutra and explain how people will be able to acquire this sutra once he has entered extinction. The sutra has been through twenty-seven chapters. The most momentous of events have occurred. Even though Bodhisattva Universal Worthy has arrived at the very end of the proceedings, the Buddha does not make him feel uncomfortable. Quite to the contrary, Shakyamuni puts forth the four conditions for how one can acquire the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in the future following his passing.

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Universal Worthy: “If good men and good woman will fulfill four conditions in the time after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, then they will be able to acquire this Lotus Sutra. First, they must be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas. Second, they must plant roots of virtue. Third, they must enter a stage where they are sure of reaching enlightenment. Fourth, they must conceive a determination to save all living beings. If good men and good women fulfill these four conditions, then after the Thus Come One has entered extinction they will be certain to acquire this sutra.” (LS28, 320)

The previous five chapters (of the transmission portion of the sutra) have laid a foundation for Shakyamuni to be able to make his final statements about the core of the sutra and how to inherit it. President Ikeda points out that Nichiren Daishonin considered the “Encouragement of Universal Worthy” chapter to be a restatement of everything that has gone before. President Ikeda relates the four conditions to the current practice within the SGI.

“To sum up the significance of these four conditions, to be ‘protected and kept in mind by all the Buddhas’ means to be protected as a result of embracing and upholding the Gohonzon, which is the source of the enlightenment of all Buddhas—past, present, and future. ‘Planting the roots of virtue’ means to believe in the Gohonzon and chant daimoku for the happiness of oneself and others. Herein lies the source of all goodness. ‘Entering the stage where they are sure of reaching enlightenment’ means joining in solidarity a group of people who are constantly striving to advance and determined never to backslide in faith. Practically speaking, one cannot fulfill these conditions without being part of a harmonious body of practitioners who uphold the correct teaching. In modern terms, I am confident that these conditions are met by living out

one's life nobly as a member of the SGI organization" (*Living Buddhism*, September 2000, p. 33).

Regarding the fourth, President Ikeda uses a quote from Josei Toda that expresses the second president's conviction that only the faith of those who practice in the Soka Gakkai accords with the intent and spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. President Toda spoke of the fact that the Daishonin would not forgive those who worked to destroy the Soka Gakkai. President Ikeda asks the question, how Mr. Toda could make such a bold declaration? He answers that, "Only because the SGI meets the fourth condition of 'conceiving a determination to save all living beings.' Only the SGI is resolutely carrying out kosen-rufu" (*Living Buddhism*, September 2000, p. 33–34).

Following Shakyamuni's expounding of the four conditions, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy makes a lengthy and detailed vow of how he will intercede to protect those who practice. He makes specific reference to the evil and corrupt time following the final five hundred-year-period following the Buddha's demise.

What courage and hope this vow must have given to all that were present. How it must have lifted their spirits!

Bodhisattva Universal Worthy arrives from afar and calls out, "I will protect you, so do your best. Do not let anything defeat you. This is the meaning of the word "encouragements" in the title. (*Living Buddhism*, September 2000, p. 34)

Hearing Bodhisattva Universal Worthy's determination to open the road for everyone to practice the Buddhism of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni adds his own vision to what practice and results will be evident following his passing. He describes the causes practitioners have made, the virtuous lives they will live and the negative effect that will befall those who work to impede the development of those practitioners. Admiring the courage and determination of this bodhisattva, Shakyamuni concludes by giving him clear direction, "Therefore Universal Worthy, if you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha" (LS28, 324).

Nichiren Daishonin equates these final words of the Buddha in the sutra as the "ultimate transmission." These words summarize the entire message of the sutra, which was preached over a period of eight years. The passage says to revere the practitioners who will appear in the future as one would revere a Buddha. The deepest meaning of the statement is that each person who practices the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law is a Buddha. President Ikeda reinforces this.

"That point is the spirit of the entire Lotus Sutra. That's why the Daishonin calls it the 'ultimate transmission.' This means that in the Later Day, the Lotus Sutra is meaningless unless one reveres Nichiren Dai-shonin as the Buddha.

"On that premise, the Daishonin instructed that if one sees disciples with a direct connection in faith to him and are dedicated to kosen-rufu, one should "rise and greet them from afar showing them the same respect one would a Buddha." (*Living Buddhism*, September 2000, p. 39)

Conclusion

The "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" has been an incredible journey over fifty-three installments with President Ikeda leading the group on a journey to the very core of Buddhism. From this incredible panorama, there are some primary themes that have

emerged and need to be brought out at the conclusion of this summary of Shakyamuni's twenty-eight chapter Lotus Sutra.

The first is that the Lotus Sutra is the teaching of eternal life that is accessible to everyone. It is the revelation of the true cause for all living beings to reach enlightenment. It is the teaching that gives rise to unlimited hope. As President Ikeda states:

Now is eternity. Right now is the "beginning". The past is gone. The future has not yet arrived. The present moment is all that exists; we may also say that it doesn't exist. This is the meaning of non-substantiality. Life continues from moment to moment. Apart from this moment, life has no actuality. One moment we might feel happiness, the next, misery.

To view this moment of life as the direct effect of some cause made in the past is to think in terms of the True Effect. To think, in other words, "I did that, so this happened." But that perspective alone will not give rise to hope.

The key is to view one's life at the present moment as the cause for creating future effects. This is the True Cause that reaches the very depths of one's being. It is not a superficial cause.

Temporally, our lives are rooted in the life of time without beginning. Spatially, they are the True Cause that pervades the entire realm of phenomena. This is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the eternal cosmic life, the great principle that moves the entire universe and sparks constant development.

Therefore when we believe in the Gohonzon as the embodiment of that Law, chant the Mystic Law and take action, at that moment we are experiencing eternity. And it is then that the eternally pure and boundless life force that is "neither created nor adorned, but remaining in its original state" (GZ, 759) wells forth. We enjoy complete freedom in both the present and a future. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of hope. "The Lotus Sutra is precious because in its depths is the Gohonzon. If we forget that point, all of our efforts will amount to nothing." (*Living Buddhism*, October 2000, p. 32)

The Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin are not teachings of solitary enlightenment or personal happiness alone. Again and again, Shakyamuni reminds the assembly that the sutra was being preached for the sake of all beings to become happy and fulfilled. In the movement of the SGI this is called kosen-rufu. As President Ikeda states:

Kosen-rufu is itself the heart of the Lotus Sutra. It is the rhythm of the cosmic life that is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It is the endeavor to elevate the life-state of all humanity to the world of Buddhahood.

Though we might like it to stand still, time flows ceaselessly. Winter always turns into spring. In the same way, humankind is always moving in the direction of the wellspring of life that is the Mystic Law, moving toward the world of Buddhahood. As people who are taking responsibility for advancing this movement, we enjoy the highest honor as human beings. (*Living Buddhism*, October 2000, p. 39)

Karl Marx's statement that "religion is the opium of the people" raises the question of

what is the purpose of religion. Not all religions function as an opiate to drug the consciousness. There are religions that work to awaken people. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the intent is to have the "flower of the Law" bloom in the heart of each human being. However, in some cases religions that originally started out with pure intent have, over time, succumbed to corruption.

President Ikeda explains that the spirit of the mentor-and-disciple relationship is the only true insurance to prevent this from happening. President Ikeda states:

It would be terrible if this spirit were to disappear from the SGI. What is the meaning of the oneness of mentor and disciple in Buddhism? Physically, mentor and disciple are of course two different people. It is the heart, spirit and teaching that each upholds that makes them inseparable. Therefore, it is important to seek a mentor who correctly practices the Law, and to forge ahead with the aim of becoming one in spirit with that mentor.

A relationship not based on a shared principle or spirit, but where one blindly follows the orders of another in a relationship of a boss and underling, or where one claims to be the disciple of the other, but only in form, is not the correct way of Buddhism.

Buddhism is about the disciple taking on the spirit of the mentor to aspire eternally for kosen-rufu. (*Living Buddhism*, October 2000, p. 40)

1. *saha* world — A world where humans endure suffering. In pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, Buddhas did not appear in saha worlds.
2. kalpa — An extremely long period of time according to ancient Indian tradition.
3. parinirvana — A term similar to nirvana, used in reference to the apparent passing away of the physical body of the Buddha.
4. *yojanas* — A unit of measurement in ancient India, equal to the distance that the royal army could march in a day.