

## FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR A RELIGION SUITED TO THE CURRENT AGE

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! What a beautiful spring! This is the first spring of the new millennium. Everywhere I travel, I see heartfelt joy and the blossoms of benefit. People are very excited to be practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in this new century.

On April 28, we will celebrate the 748th year since the establishment of Buddhism. In 1253, Nichiren Daishonin — then a young man of 32 — first revealed “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” as the Law of the universe to a small audience in Japan at Seicho-ji temple, where he had entered the priesthood.

That moment began Nichiren Daishonin's lifelong work to propagate his teachings and refute the errors of other sects. From that moment, he sought to illuminate the Buddhahood dormant within all people and to reveal the practice that would enable them to realize their inherent enlightenment. That action of revelation was the first step on the “thousand mile journey” into the Latter Day of the Law. Our global SGI movement for peace and humanism, which is based on the philosophy taught by Nichiren Daishonin, has its origin in that very moment. From that single invocation of “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” has come wave upon wave of practice, benefit and joy. These waves now reach every continent, and the recitation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo can be heard in 163 nations and territories around the globe.

For more than 70 years, our lay movement has been dedicated to the practice and study of the Daishonin's Buddhism, and on bringing benefit and joy, which millions of people have experienced. We express our appreciation through continued dedication to faith, practice and study.

The spirit to study the Daishonin's teachings is not simply one of intellectual interest or curiosity. We seek a profound understanding of Buddhism, one born of experience rather than just doctrinal theory. Through actual practice, we can understand and appreciate the depths of Buddhism within our own lives.

We practice and study Buddhism for our own inspiration and to encourage others. The understanding we gain through practice and study enables us to communicate with other people on a fundamental, human level. Through our experiences, we can share Buddhism in a way that is true to ourselves and that touches people's lives.

Every religion and philosophy originates in a specific time and place. But not every religion or philosophy can transcend that time or place. What is the difference between teachings or ideas that we might consider universal and teachings that are only applicable or beneficial within a specific cultural context? What is the purpose of religion itself? Why did Nichiren Daishonin teach Nam-myoho-renge-kyo? Why is it only now, on the cusp of a new millennium, that Buddhism is being learned and practiced around the world?

As SGI President Ikeda stated in his lecture at Harvard University in 1993: “In an age marked by widespread religious revival, we need always ask: Does religion make people stronger or weaker? Does it encourage what is good or what is evil in them? Are they made better and wiser by religion?” (“Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization,” *A New Humanism: University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*, p. 151).

These questions point to religion's potential capacity to make people strong, to encourage them to develop their best qualities and to cultivate their wisdom. Many teachings have spread throughout the world through their connection with specific military or economic interests. In this new century, however, if a teaching fosters dependence, narrow-mindedness or

unreasonable attachment to dogma, then it is not a religion with universal validity, regardless of how widespread it may be. Only a philosophy or teaching that inspires hope and fosters true independence of the spirit can be considered universal.

In *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* (vol. 1), President Ikeda discusses Nichiren Daishonin's core teaching that everyone "has always been a Buddha from the eternal past and will always be a Buddha into the eternal future" (p. 14). This concept is the fundamental reason the philosophy of the SGI is precisely suited to the current age.

"Some say the prevailing mood in the world today is one of powerlessness. Whatever the case may be, we are all aware that things cannot continue as they are. Yet decisions about political, economic and environmental issues all seem to be made somewhere beyond our reach. What can the individual accomplish in the face of the huge institutions that run our world? This feeling of powerlessness fuels a vicious cycle that only worsens the situation and increases people's sense of futility" (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 6).

"Nichiren Daishonin, the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, made it possible for all to embody this truth within their daily lives. The Lotus Sutra teaches of the great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself, which dispels any feelings of powerlessness. It teaches a dynamic way of living in which we breathe the immense life of the universe itself. It teaches the true great adventure of self-reformation" (Ibid., p. 14).

We are so fortunate to have encountered the Daishonin's teachings. Thank you all for your continuous efforts in faith, practice and study. I hope that this month we can renew our dedication, inspire our own personal practice and take action to study and contribute to our movement based on a sense of profound appreciation.

Thank you very much!

Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director