

# living BUDDHISM

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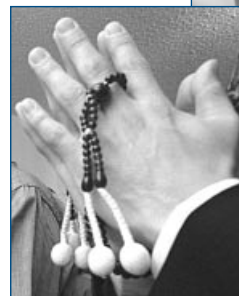
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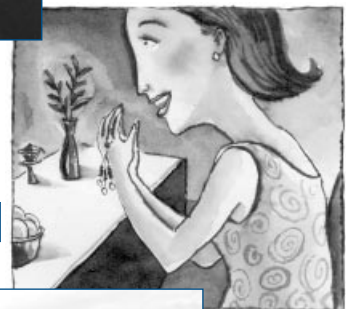
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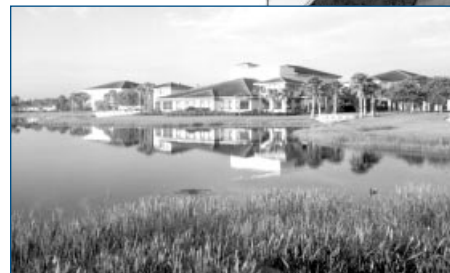
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# GLOSSARY

## 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-enge-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.

## 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-enge-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-enge-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-enge-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.

## Do You Have ‘Way of Youth’ Stories?

People are sharing all kinds of stories with us about *The Way of Youth*. The book is turning out to be a great way for teens to get encouragement about personal problems themselves and to share President Ikeda’s philosophy with their friends. And the book isn’t just for teens—leaders have found it invaluable resource when giving guidance and parents use it as a starting point for discussions with their kids. We’d like to know your experience with *The Way of Youth* as:

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Thanks for your support!

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### EDITORIAL STAFF:

**Publisher:** Fred M. Zaitso

**Assistant Publisher:**

Greg Martin

**Editor in Chief/Managing**

**Editor:** Ted Morino

**Assistant Managing Editor:**

Dave Baldschun

**Staff Writer:** Alexis Trass

**Publications Translation**

**Department:** Jeff Kriger,

Shin Yatomi

**Graphic Design:**

Stephanie Sydney

**Research:** Erica Ogihara

**Volunteer:** Mark Koral

### WRITTEN/ARTISTIC

### CONTRIBUTIONS:

Send all written, photographic

or fine art submissions

to Living Buddhism, 606

Wilshire Boulevard, Santa

Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail:

[LivingB1@aol.com](mailto:LivingB1@aol.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.

## FROM OUR READERS

Due to the volume of letters we receive, not all can be printed, and all are subject to condensation. Letters printed here do not necessarily reflect the views of SGI-USA or *Living Buddhism*. Please include signature, mailing address and telephone number with all correspondence. Mail to: Letters, *Living Buddhism*, 606 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail: [livingb1@aol.com](mailto:livingb1@aol.com)

### Always Good

Despite falling asleep at a planning meeting yesterday, I managed to read the November issue, and was quite impressed. *Living Buddhism* is always good, but this one is superb. The first article I read was on the Fourteen Slanders, and that was interesting. However, two that grabbed my attention were the “Ten Points to Derive Maximum Benefit From Our Practice” by Jeanny Chen, and “Little Victories” by Mark Bennion. It doesn’t mention whether or not his wife practices, but I take it from the description that she doesn’t. Both were excellent articles.

Amy O’Donnell, Houston, TX

Mark Bennion replies: “*She practices. How do you think she put up with me all these years! Actually, practicing Buddhism together has been one of the keys to building a life together.*”

### What Is Truly Important

I just read Mark Bennion’s experience in the November *Living Buddhism*. I want to thank him so much. My life as an artist (musician and graphic artist) seems to have been similar in some ways but also different in some ways.

I had the opportunity to work as a musician for some eighteen years and then two years ago I found that I could not continue. Although I had had many opportunities during all those years to play the music I wanted, I also had to support myself by playing anything that came along. Well, I just decided I could not do it anymore.

I kind of fell into doing computer graphics and realized I had artistic talents that I never realized before. Anyway, I still have struggled in the last few years with the idea of making my living as an artist. I still play but not full time. I just wanted to thank you for pointing out what is truly important in life, and also for sharing President Ikeda’s guidance on accomplishing things on a daily basis in society.

I have been chanting to understand what it is I should be doing with my life. In a small way your experience was an answer to my prayer. I don’t need to worry so much about what it is I am doing on a daily basis, it is more how I do it, and my vision for my life and the life of those around me.

Mike Walters, New York

### Much-needed Dose of Medicine

I want to thank Jeanny Chen for opening up her life to us. [November issue] Jeanny’s experience was a much-needed dose of medicine for me. Although I am not a new member, I recognize that sometimes we tend to forget the basics of our practice. Then we start to practice out of formality instead of practicing with the determination to change our lives to show actual proof to ourselves and the world. Reading Jeanny’s experience brought that home for me. This practice is not a magic wand! It is just a matter of looking at yourself in the mirror and facing your reality! This is so difficult to do. However, with the power of faith in the Gohonzon we can do it! We can do our human revolution!  
Connie Brooks, Atlanta

### Bangkok

I am practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with Soka Gakkai Thailand (SGT). The article in the November issue of *Living Buddhism*, “Ten points to Derive Maximum Benefit From Our Practice” impressed me very much. I made my own copy in Thai and presented it at our district discussion meeting. The members loved it and asked me for copies (in Thai). Thank you, Jeanny, for writing such a wonderful article!

Pornchai Pornchai Kingwatanakul, M.D.

Bangkok, Thailand

### London

We are Buddhists who practice in London and subscribe to *Living Buddhism*, we have read “Ten points to Derive Maximum Benefit From Our Practice” and we were very inspired by it. So much so, that we have copied it and distributed it to members in our district to encourage them to come to meetings and make more effort for kosen-rufu in England. Jeanny, if ever you come to London, please let us know, you can come to our discussion meeting and inspire us in person Thank you for sharing your life experience with us, you have not only inspired us, but others as well.

Martin & Robert, Streatham District, South London

# CROWN *the New Year With* *Joyous* VICTORY

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

**G**reetings and Happy New Year to all the readers of *Living Buddhism!* The year 2000 was exciting because all of you were determined to close the twentieth century and greet the new millennium with victories in your personal lives as well as in SGI-USA activities. Thank you so much and congratulations!

I have been reporting to SGI President Ikeda about our activities and he has repeatedly expressed his high hopes for us. He feels the United States has an important role to play in world peace. He told me that America has now entered the era of the true teaching—the widespread propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. He also expressed that in his messages and poems to us last year. The time has come for us to display our great talents and abilities. As he said in his poem, “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” “The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have started to stir, to move!”

I believe these words mean we have come to a deeper understanding of our mission—a mission that includes the great contributions each of us can make to the organization and to society at large. There is no America other than its people: “America” means each of us. As we reveal our true abilities, overcome difficulties and strive to create happy families and more peaceful communities, America will realize its great potential.

I am truly amazed at the idealism of SGI-USA members. Each person is grappling with real-world issues and life-and-death matters. In the midst of these struggles, each person cherishes great dreams and works altruistically for the happiness of others.

I traveled all over the country last year and met many of you. I also participated in various activities from large-scale cultural events to small and intimate discussion meetings. As I witnessed the culmination of your hard work and spoke with you, I felt more deeply than ever that we are producing a grand human drama of

transforming suffering into joy and compassionate action to help our friends. This is the drama of human revolution.

The twentieth century has been described as the bloodiest and most violent century in human history. SGI members are confident, however, that the highest creative potential of humanity will be expressed in the new century. The SGI has proclaimed the twenty-first century to be the Century of Life. For the past 40 years, we have been working to set the stage and make all the preparations. The curtain is about to rise.

The heroes—the lead actors—are each one of you. From this perspective, all our efforts and all our difficulties become meaningful. We can concretely change lives of suffering into lives of joy; we can change a century of war into a century of peace.

The SGI has adopted the theme for 2001: The Year of Total Victory for the New Century. Total victory means showing the benefit of our faith in every aspect of our lives—in our professional lives, our families, and our relationships. I hope you are convinced that challenging yourself to accomplish your goals is the very best cause you can make toward victory in the new millennium.

We have been saying for many years that 2001 is the year when 100,000 voices will join in singing “Ode to Joy.” Beethoven wrote this song while going through personal struggles. It was first performed on May 7, 1824, and it was revolutionary in the musical world at the time. The critics did not appreciate what he was trying to do, but the people embraced his work enthusiastically. Written at the end of his career, it is said that Beethoven was completely deaf by the time of the first performance of the song. He could not hear the cries and shouts of “Bravo” from the audience.

Through his long struggle, Beethoven revealed the triumph of the human heart. He opened up a new stage not only for himself, but for the development of music



and culture. His hardships produced profound joy that was expressed in his music. Therefore, “Ode to Joy” is not just a song; it is a symbol of victory and human effort misunderstood by many but ultimately embraced by the people.

How exciting! This year will only happen one time. I hope that each of us, as a lead actor for kosen-rufu, will fully use the stage of our lives and create our own drama, our own history, our own accomplishments. I hope each of us can sing “Ode to Joy” as our anthem, as proof of our victory.

So far, I have had the honor of serving as your general director for one year. I want to express my humble appreciation for your efforts in faith. Without your continued support, we would have no SGI-USA. I want to convey my sincerest determination to work even harder with you to build the new century with our mentor.

Once again, congratulations and Happy New Year!

Daniel K. Nagashima

SGI-USA General Director

## Good FRIENDS and BAD Friends

**I**n the Buddhist concept of what constitutes a good or bad friend, a good friend is one who leads people to the correct teaching. These are honest people who guide others to faith in the Gohonzon. Conversely, an evil friend is one who deceives and causes people to fall into the evil paths, into suffering. An evil friend deludes others with false doctrines in order to obstruct their Buddhist practice.

Regarding the importance of having good friends in our Buddhist practice, Nichiren Daishonin states: "When a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up. But even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak. Even a feeble person will not stumble if those supporting him are strong, but a person of considerable strength, when alone, may fall down on an uneven path" ("Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain," WND, 598).

The human mind is easily swayed by environmental influences. That is why it is valuable to associate with good friends who support our practice to attain Buddhahood.

Buddhism explains this age of the Latter Day of the Law as a time filled with people who oppose the heart of the Lotus Sutra, an age where views and teachings that run counter to life's inherent dignity prevail. In this regard Nichiren Daishonin quotes the Nirvana Sutra, "Bodhisattvas, have no fear of mad elephants. What you should fear are evil friends! ... Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil

paths. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them" ("On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," WND, 11).

In modern terms, the tragedy of a traffic accident might be equated with a stampede of mad elephants. But should Buddhist practitioners die in a traffic accident, or through some other sudden cause, they will certainly not be led into the three evil paths of hell, hunger or animality. The Daishonin strictly cautions us that one who dies with incorrect faith as the result of influence from "evil friends," will surely fall into the three evil paths in future existences. The essential point here is that we seek out good friends.

Buddhism describes this time as a defiled age. It is at such a time, when we are surrounded by the influence of so many evil friends, that we require the wisdom to perceive who they are. We must develop the strength of faith to continually improve ourselves to guide even evil friends to the correct teachings.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin states: "Devadatta was the foremost good friend to the Thus Come One Shakyamuni. In this age as well, it is not one's allies but one's powerful enemies who assist one's progress" ("The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra," WND, 770). Devadatta was once Shakyamuni's disciple but because of arrogance, he later backslid in faith and betrayed his mentor. He then went about creating his own following, misleading some of the disciples of Shakyamuni and thereby disrupting the harmonious association of Buddhist prac-

*In the course of our practice, we may encounter the type of evil friends that hold the potential to sway us from the correct path in life. However, through continuous devotion to faith, practice, and study we will definitely not be swayed and can turn any negative influences into profound causes for happiness for ourselves and others. With strong faith, we can even guide evil friends toward enlightenment and kosen-rufu.*

tioners. He even went so far as to conspire with Ajatashatru, the king of Magadha (a large state in ancient India), to do away with the Buddha. However, it was through Devadatta's treachery in persecuting Shakyamuni and the Buddha's tremendous victory in widely spreading Buddhism, while enduring and defeating such evil, that Shakyamuni was able to prove the greatness of his teaching. The power of Buddhism is such that even people of evil influence can function to prove its validity and become "good friends."

**T**he Daishonin further states: "For me, Nichiren, my best allies in attaining Buddhahood are Kagenobu, the priests Ryokan, Doryu, and Doamidabutsu, and Hei no Saemon and the lord of Sagami. I am grateful when I think that without them I could not have proved myself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 770). As the Daishonin indicates here, it is our strong opponents that can act as good friends, making it possible to strengthen our weaknesses, improve our character and prove the power of faith. In this writing, the Daishonin refers to Ryokan, a priest of the True Word Precepts school, who was at that time regarded as a sage. In truth, he was a powerful enemy, obstructing the propagation of the Mystic Law. Using his status and position, he colluded with government authorities in persecuting the Daishonin and his disciples. He was also instrumental in causing the Daishonin's near-execution at Tatsunokuchi Beach. From

the standpoint of Buddhism, Ryokan was indeed an evil person. Nonetheless, the Daishonin lists him among those who, because of their powerful opposition, made it possible to prove himself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra. We can see through the Daishonin's own example that we can cause every influence in our lives to work for us, like a good friend when we devote ourselves to Buddhist practice.

In the course of our practice, we may encounter the type of evil friends that hold the potential to sway us from the correct path in life. However, through continuous devotion to faith, practice, and study, we will definitely not be swayed and can turn any negative influences into profound causes for happiness for ourselves and others.

We embrace the Gohonzon that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed for the happiness of all humanity. We also have the SGI organization which is itself a gathering of good friends—of fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth—who inspire and encourage one another in the correct practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism. What great good fortune we possess. The whole purpose of our Buddhist practice is to establish an invincible self, impervious to any negative influence, like the beautiful lotus flower that emerges from and is nourished by a muddy swamp. Filled with joy, purity, self identity and creativity, we are able to dynamically turn even evil friends into good ones—into sources of growth and happiness.

*By Mark Koral, based on Yasashi Kyogaku (Easy Buddhist Study).*

# Battling Fundamental Darkness

BY DAVID EISENBERG, SAN FRANCISCO

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

Believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions – even more than invasion by the Mongols. This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. (“Letter to the Brothers,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 495)

**Background:** Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the Ikegami brothers, Munenaka and Munenaga. Their father was a follower of Ryokan, one of the leading priests who opposed the Daishonin. The father disowned Munenaka, creating a situation that made it nearly impossible for him to survive economically and socially. Though vehemently opposed to the beliefs of his two sons, the brothers eventually succeeded in converting their father to the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

**W**hen I first read “Letter to the Brothers,” I instantly identified with the two brothers because I, too, had struggled for many years with my father over my Buddhist practice. I began my practice as a teenager and my father, with whom I had not lived for several years after my parents’ divorce, was dead set against this new development in my life. I believe that although deep in his life he could accept that Buddhism was valuable, he wasn’t prepared to admit it at that time. I also began practicing with my mother and sister, and I’m sure he felt that he would lose his children to her and her new religion! He tried everything he could think of to discourage me from practicing. While his opposition helped create a difficult and

stressful time for me, I certainly was not in the tenuous position of Munenaka and Munenaga, the recipients of “Letter to the Brothers,” who literally had their survival threatened by their father’s hostility toward the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

I was, however, still immature and really didn’t possess enough of an understanding of Buddhism to explain myself to my father without getting into a big fight. Many times he would engage me in debate, often trying to confuse me or back me into a corner. During those exchanges, he would ask loaded questions or query me for documentary proof that I simply did not yet have. I was often intimidated by these arguments and had a very difficult time maintaining control and poise. I remember storming out of his house or a

**A**ccording to the Buddhist concept of the three obstacles and four devils—forces that



oppose one's practice—the third obstacle is that of opposition from one's parents.

restaurant on several occasions, so angry and frustrated I was shaking.

## There are forces that will oppose our practice

According to the Buddhist concept of the three obstacles and four devils—forces that oppose one's practice—the third obstacle is that of opposition from one's parents. My father was a manifestation of this principle. It would actually take me quite a few years and many experiences in faith before I could understand the significant role he played in the development of my practice.

For the past twelve or thirteen years, I have been very involved as a youth division leader in the SGI-USA, participating in activities, commemorative events and behind-the-scenes efforts. Through those activities, I have seen so many aspects of my life change and develop and I have so much appreciation for the fortune I now have in my life. But that does not mean I have not experienced setbacks and struggle! It is precisely when I am struggling the most that I read "Letter to the Brothers" and am reminded about how precious my Buddhist practice is and how I must not allow obstacles or difficulties to sway me from striving toward enlightenment.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin goes into great detail to explain to the brothers how valuable our

practice is and what a tragedy it would be to abandon it. The

Daishonin gives the brothers many

examples of terrible causes, the consequences of which are still not as harmful as abandoning the Lotus Sutra, imploring them to not give up. The Daishonin's great concern and care for these two young men literally leaps off the page. I was so touched by that compassion when I first read "Letter to the Brothers." I quickly realized that it was my nature to get frustrated when I didn't receive quick results and that deep in my heart, I harbored doubt about the Gohonzon. Of course, when things were going smoothly, or when I was involved in a big activity where I could get caught up in the rhythm of the event and benefits were just rolling in, I was fine. But at those times when I had to work hard to elevate my life condition and big problems appeared, I was whining and complaining inside.

In "Letter to the Brothers," Nichiren Daishonin goes on to say, "The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near-perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra's blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice!" (WND, 496). I understand that it is part of my fundamental darkness—blindness to the true nature of my own life—to be so easily swayed by problems and difficulties. Because of this, I have made a serious determination to fight through all obstacles and use my victories and fighting

spirit as a source of encouragement to others. This means sharing those struggles, which in and of itself is my human revolution.

## Taking responsibility for his life

Over these past few years, I have had to look inside myself and see if I am really behaving as a disciple of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and Nichiren Daishonin. That was not always easy, and as I learned, I cannot really look if I am not willing to see what's there. As I chanted daimoku and challenged myself to understand President Ikeda's spirit, I came to realize that I had to courageously develop my sense of justice and the willingness to stand up for what is right. I had to do this even if that meant someone might not like me or I might not be popular. That also meant I had to be willing to be challenged and not always be right myself. One thing I have learned is that I have the potential to be both authoritarian toward others and to give in to authoritarian behavior myself. I believe that in order to truly develop our lives, we must make a commitment to ridding ourselves of this authoritarian nature, both in how we treat others and how we allow ourselves to be treated.

After several years of total estrangement from my father, we have repaired our relationship and treat each other with mutual respect and appreciation. I say mutual because I realized that over the years, I was not simply the victim in our relationship difficulties. His opposition to my practice was very real and he did many things to try to disrupt it. He wasn't able to respect the choice I was making. However, I can now see how I used my practice to exclude him from my life and hurt him. I had to acknowledge my role in our problems before I could even begin to repair the relationship. Now I feel a great sense of appreciation toward him. My Buddha nature was also able to grow through this process.

I believe that our human revolution is an internal battle between our Buddha nature and our fundamental darkness. President Ikeda is constantly encouraging us to develop our intellect and our ability to perceive the true reality of all circumstances. When we do this, we cannot be fooled and are able to recognize why we experience difficulties and what we need to do to change our suffering into joy. He reminds us that

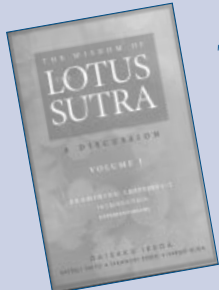
Buddhism is win or lose. Any situation or circumstance can become a victory or defeat. It is up to us to decide which it will be.

In *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda says, "Many negative and evil states of mind arise from that fundamental darkness, including distrust, hate, jealousy, the desire to dominate others and the impulse to kill. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo cuts this fundamental darkness off at the root and allows the light of true wisdom—that is, fundamental enlightenment or the inherent Buddha nature—to illuminate our lives and thus transform hate into compassion, destruction into creation, and distrust into trust. We also call this human revolution" (*World Tribune*, 8/28/98, p. 5).


More than ever I am determined to challenge my life and my fundamental darkness through continuous practice. I have seen a direct connection between my personal growth and the effect I have on those around me. As my sense of mission grows and I find greater capacity in my life to work for the sake of others, I know that I will show unquestionable actual proof of this great philosophy. If I am to encourage others to fight for their dreams, I myself must be in the forefront of that battle. President Ikeda has shown that all of our dreams can become reality. All we have to do is believe it in our hearts. ☸

*David Eisenberg is Northwest Zone Youth Leader*

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# NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS

## “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude”

*(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 736; Goshō Zenshu, p. 329)*

The following is an excerpt from Nichiren Daishonin's treatise titled “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.” This is the study material for February study meetings in the SGI-USA.

**I**f Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. Its benefit surpasses that of Dengyo<sup>1</sup> and T'ien-t'ai,<sup>2</sup> and is superior to that of Nagarjuna<sup>3</sup> and Mahakashyapa.<sup>4</sup>

A hundred years of practice in

the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day's practice in the impure world. Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. This is in no way because of Nichiren's wisdom, but simply because the time makes it so. In spring the blossoms open, in autumn the fruit appears. Summer is hot, winter is cold. The season makes it so, does it not?

## Background

This lengthy treatise is one of Nichiren Daishonin's five major writings. [The above passages are excerpted from the concluding section of "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude."] It is dated the twenty-first day of the seventh month, 1276, a little more than two years after the Daishonin had taken up residence at Minobu. It was prompted by the news of the death of Dozen-bo, a priest of Seicho-ji temple in Awa Province, who had been the Daishonin's teacher when he first entered the temple as a boy of twelve. Nichiren Daishonin wrote this treatise to express his gratitude to Dozen-bo and sent it to Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, senior priests at the time he entered the temple, who later became his followers. He entrusted this text to Niko, one of his disciples, and requested that it be taken to Seicho-ji on his behalf and read aloud at Kasagamori on the summit of Mount Kiyosumi where he had first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and again in front of the tomb of his late teacher.

In 1233, Nichiren Daishonin entered Seicho-ji temple to study under Dozen-bo. At that time, temples served as centers of learning as well as religion. During his stay at this temple, the Daishonin developed his extraordinary literary skills that later proved so valuable in propagating his teachings. He also embarked on a lifelong journey to find and proclaim the unique truth of Buddhism, which had been all but obscured by the emergence of various misleading schools.

On the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, 1253, the Daishonin proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be the sole teaching leading directly to enlightenment in the Latter Day of the Law, while denouncing the doctrines of the then-prevalent Pure Land school. Tojo Kagenobu, the steward of the area and a fervent Pure Land believer, became furious on hearing of this and sent his men to the temple to arrest the Daishonin. Dozen-bo, a devotee of the Pure Land teaching, could not defend him openly, but instructed the two senior priests, Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, to guide his young disciple to safety.

Nichiren Daishonin and his former teacher met again in 1264, when the Daishonin visited his home in Awa after returning from exile on the Izu Peninsula. He later wrote that Dozen-bo had asked him on this occasion if his practice of the Pure Land teachings would lead him into the hell of incessant suffering. In reply, the Daishonin told Dozen-bo that he could not free himself from the effects of his slander unless he revered the Lotus Sutra as the fundamental teaching. Afterward, though Dozen-bo did not entirely abandon his belief in Amida, he carved a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Daishonin rejoiced that Dozen-bo was apparently beginning to see his error because he felt indebted to this man who had initiated him into the priesthood and earnestly desired to lead him to the correct teaching. (From "Background," WND, 738)

## Commentary

Upon hearing of the death of his former teacher Dozen-bo, Nichiren Daishonin penned this treatise. In it, the Daishonin traces the history of the transmission of Buddhism from India to China and Japan and explains the significance of his efforts to spread the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the Lotus Sutra. He concludes the treatise by stating: "The benefit that I have been speaking of will surely accumulate in the life of the late Dozen-bo" (WND, 737). Less than two years later, the Daishonin reiterated his feeling toward his late teacher when he wrote, "The blessings that Nichiren obtains from propagating the Lotus Sutra will always return to Dozen-bo" (WND, 909). Under the

tutelage of Dozen-bo, the youthful Daishonin began his quest for the essential truth of Buddhism. Although Dozen-bo was unable to fully embrace the Daishonin's teaching, his support for the Daishonin enabled him to accumulate good karma. At the end of "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," the Daishonin makes it clear that those who support the practitioners of the Mystic Law will gain immense benefit although they may be ignorant of the Daishonin's teaching.

In the passages excerpted above from the concluding portion of the treatise, the Daishonin alludes to the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent—the virtues with which a Buddha is said to protect, guide and nur-

ture all living beings. In his extensive commentary on “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” Nichikan (1665-1726), the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, explains that “Nichiren’s compassion” refers to the virtue of parent, “the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living creature in the country of Japan” to the virtue of teacher, and “it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” to the virtue of sovereign.<sup>5</sup>

Stressing the importance of compassion as the foundation of the spread of Buddhism, the Daishonin declares, “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more.” Despite the repeated government persecutions, the Daishonin continued to spread his message: All people have the potential for

Buddhahood, or absolute happiness, and the key to unlocking this hidden potential is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in it. The Daishonin’s compassion for the people sustained his seemingly futile efforts in the face of great adversity.

The very source of the global spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism that we see today is his compassion, just like that of parents willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children. Immediately preceding the excerpted passages, the Daishonin compares the spread of Buddhism to a river: “The farther the source, the longer the stream” (WND, 736). The “source” of the stream of Buddhism depends not on how far back into the past it originated, but rather on the depth of compassion in the life of each practitioner and the profundity of the teaching itself. The Daishonin clarifies that compassion is the inexhaustible spring from which Buddhism will flow for all eternity. Like a river without its water source, a Buddhist movement without compas-

sion will eventually die out. On the other hand, sincere prayers and efforts for others’ well-being, no matter how small they may seem, will grow into a mighty flow of hope and happiness, as demonstrated by the history of the Soka Gakkai International. Also, the

further spread of the Daishonin’s teachings in the twenty-first century is certain as long as each of us continues to develop compassion for others.

“The beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being” refers to the virtue of teacher. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has the power to awaken people to their innate wisdom and help them overcome their fundamental ignorance of their own Buddhahood. Many people are, in a sense, blind to their own nature. One of the most difficult things for us to do is to



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Nichiren Daishonin alludes to the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent—the virtues with which a Buddha is said to protect, guide and nurture all living beings.

see ourselves as a whole—not only our potential for evil, but also our potential for good that enables us to overcome any hardship. The Daishonin states in this regard: “We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance. Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts” (“New Year’s Goshō,” WND, 1137). Self-knowledge is one of the greatest things we can learn. Without a sound understanding of self, the glorified progress of science and technology could only increase people’s suffering and misery, as the existence of nuclear weapons is proof of human “devolution.” In this sense, the Daishonin is one of the greatest teachers for humanity since he left us with the universally accessible way to see our true self—chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with faith in our innate Buddhahood.

The Daishonin goes on to state that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo “blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering.” According to the Buddhist cosmol-

ogy of India, the hell of incessant suffering is located at the bottom of the world of desire where living beings are controlled by selfish desires. The hell of incessant suffering is so called because its inhabitants must suffer without a moment's respite. The Daishonin, however, sees this "place" as an analogy for the "state" of our lives. He explains: "Closer examination, however, reveals that both [hell and the Buddha] exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother" ("New Year's Goshō," WND, 1137). The practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism allows us to see "the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering" — the path of greed, anger and foolishness — and choose instead the path of the Buddha within us. The Daishonin's teaching ultimately protects humanity from its own folly by pointing out an alternative to the road toward self-destruction. As more and more people embrace the Daishonin's view of life and use it as the basis of their lives — from speaking up for a bullied classmate to signing a peace treaty with an old enemy — the world will surely be spared from falling into "the hell of incessant suffering." In this sense, the Daishonin was a great protector of humanity, and SGI members function in the same capacity as they help others awaken to life's inherent dignity through sharing the Daishonin's Buddhism with them.

The passages from "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude" also show that the Daishonin had a rare ability to see the importance of one's present action with an understanding of the past and a vision for the future. He was aware of his place in the history of Buddhism as it migrated from India to China and then to Japan. The Daishonin saw the transmission of Buddhism in those three countries according to the "three periods" of the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law, that is, the three stages of the development, maturity and decline of a Buddhist teaching. To represent the development of Buddhism in India during the Former Day are Mahakashyapa and Nagarjuna. The Daishonin also cites T'ien-t'ai of China and Dengyo of Japan to represent the maturing phase of Buddhism during the Middle Day when Buddhist teachings were increasingly formalized in both doctrine and ritual. During the Latter Day, the period of decay and confusion, the Daishonin uses himself as a figure to represent the efforts to revive the original teaching of Buddhism. (Please see the sidebar for more on the Daishonin's view of the "three time periods.")

To clarify the confusion of Buddhism and restore its original spirit, the Daishonin delved deeply into the



To clarify the confusion of Buddhism and restore its original spirit, the Daishonin delved deeply into the Lotus Sutra and revealed the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo as the sutra's essence. Above, the bodhgaya stupa at the site where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment.

Lotus Sutra and revealed the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo as the sutra's essence. To spread this teaching was no easy task for the Daishonin because the people during the Latter Day of the Law were profoundly confused about Buddhism and the nature of their own lives. The Daishonin faced numerous persecutions, including near-execution and exile to a distant island. But he never gave up on his efforts to lay the foundation for the future spread of his teaching, probably because he viewed the act as a historical necessity, rather than a matter of choice, that it was as natural as summer being hot and winter being cold.

The Daishonin defined his role in the history of

Buddhism as a restorer of its original spirit and fixed his gaze on the distant future of “ten thousand years and more,” envisioning humanity’s peace and happiness. A profound awareness of history leads to a far-reaching vision for the future. It is important, however, to note that the Daishonin was never absent from his immediate reality. In the midst of hardship, the Daishonin was keenly aware that the future spread of his teaching depended on his compassionate practice in the present. This is why the Daishonin stresses the significance of “one day’s practice in the impure world” or “an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.”

The Daishonin says, “A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in the impure world,” because the purpose of our Buddhist practice is to develop our inner strength with which to overcome any obstacle, not to eliminate life’s problems, which is merely a fantasy. The Land of Perfect Bliss, according to the Pure Land school, is a place of Amida Buddha, located in a western region of the universe. The Pure Land devotees are said to go to this paradisiacal place in the afterlife. As Sir Thomas More named his imaginary island “Utopia” (“no place” in Greek), a play on the word “Eutopia” (“good place”), the Land of Perfect Bliss is nowhere to be found in the reality of our “impure world.” To practice Buddhism in the imaginary Land of Perfect Bliss is like lifting weights in the space where there is no gravity; it takes no effort and produces no result. When the Daishonin says, “A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in the impure world,” he is not exaggerating. He is making a point: To practice Buddhism is to challenge our immediate reality and change it for the better. Buddhahood or absolute happiness is not a state of “perfect bliss” to be attained in an afterlife; it is the process of ongoing self-improvement in the imperfect world. The Daishonin here cautions us against an escapist desire to be somewhere else. The place of our Buddhist practice is nowhere but where we are now, and that is also where we can enjoy unshakable happiness.

The Daishonin also states, “Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.” In the Latter Day of the Law, people are filled with confusion and suffering and therefore in need of the profound teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The efforts of those who propagate a superior teaching is of greater significance, and their benefit is naturally greater.

In those passages, the Daishonin teaches us that our actions now are most important, not only for our present lives, but also for the future spread of Buddhism. The Daishonin encourages us to live in the here and now, in the midst of “the impure world.” What we do today is what counts. It is easy to dwell on past mistakes or daydream about the future; it is also tempting to be everywhere but here. Wisdom, however, is to see the past and the future existing in the present, for the present is the effect of the past and the cause for the future. And happiness is to challenge one’s immediate circumstances and still enjoy the present.

As the Daishonin says, “the time makes it so,” our efforts to practice the Daishonin’s teaching and share it with others in today’s ailing society are extremely significant, and the positive effects stemming from such efforts are immense on both our lives and the lives of others. Immediately after the passages we are studying, the Daishonin quotes from the Lotus Sutra: “After I [the Buddha] have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa and never allow it to be cut off” (WND, 736). From Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation of this passage the Daishonin made a frequent use of the phrase *kosen-rufu*, which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters here rendered as “spread it [i.e., the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely.” The Daishonin understood that the spread of Buddhism or *kosen-rufu* is like a flow, not a stagnant pool. It is a movement continuing through time and space, not a state to be achieved once and for all. In this flow of *kosen-rufu*, each practitioner moves ever forward, so each present moment is self-purifying and fulfilling.

*“Commentary” by the SGI-USA Study Department*

1. Dengyo (767-822)— The founder of the Tendai school in Japan.
2. T’ien-t’ai (538-597)— The founder of the T’ien-tai school in China.
3. Nagarjuna (n.d.)— A Mahayana scholar who lived in southern India between 150 and 250.
4. Mahakashyapa— One of Shakyamuni’s ten major disciples; he was known as the foremost in ascetic practices. After Shakyamuni’s passing, he became head of the Buddhist Order.
5. *Nichikan Shonin mondan shu* [The Collected Commentaries of High Priest Nichikan]. Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun Press, 1980. p. 438.

# The Three Virtues of Sovereign, Teacher and Parent and the Significance of the SGI's Efforts for Peace, Education and Culture

By Daisaku Ikeda

*The following is an excerpt from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's book Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin (pp. 60-64), published in 1997.*

Nichiren Daishonin says that he is “sovereign, teacher, father and mother to all the people of Japan.” The three virtues—sovereign, teacher and parent—indicate the state of life, brilliant as the sun, of a true person of justice.

A passage from “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” comes immediately to mind:

“If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” (WND, 736).

High Priest Nichikan interprets this passage as referring to the Daishonin’s three virtues. “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity” indicates his immense compassion, or virtue as the parent. “It has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan” indicates the power to open people’s minds or inner eyes, i.e., the teacher. And, “it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” indicates the sovereign who struggles to ensure that the people do not slip into misery. [...]

In a general sense, the sovereign, teacher and parent might be thought of—to put it in modern terms—as the three necessary attributes of leaders. The virtue of the sovereign lies in protecting people; this corresponds to an unwavering sense of responsibility. The virtue of the teacher lies in guiding people; this is the shining wisdom to guide people along

the path of happiness. And the virtue of the parent lies in lovingly raising people; this is a warm, if strict, compassion.

A sense of responsibility, wisdom and compassion—are not these the most important qualities for leaders, and for all people, to possess? If even a few more leaders possessed these three attributes, it would contribute immensely to easing tension and the general happiness of humankind. But the fact of the matter is that the tendency of all too many leaders in society is just the opposite.

The antithesis of the virtue of the sovereign is irresponsibility. We have leaders who carry on in a self-aggrandizing and high-handed manner, but who avoid addressing difficult issues, using the rationale that “someone else will take care of it,” or that “things will somehow work themselves out.” They order other people around, and then try to shirk responsibility. Even though they may have the appearance of leaders, they do not qualify as such. They lack the requisite virtue.

The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains the three virtues of the essential teaching. “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” (LS16, 230) indicates the virtue of the sovereign who works resolutely to ensure the peace and tranquility of the land or community for which he or she is responsible.

“Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting” (LS16, 229) indicates the virtue of the teacher. As indicated by the word constantly, meaning “without rest or interruption,” a teacher unstintingly uses his or her voice to help others.

The virtue of the parent is indicated by the line, “I am the father of this world” (LS16, 231). The parent loves people because they are children of the Buddha who will one day become Buddhas, and takes action on their behalf.

Leaders also must have the ability to provide training, protection, guidance and instruction. When someone has a problem, they need to provide kind guidance as well as necessary instruction. By so doing, they can

ensure that people do not become deadlocked.

A genuine leader protects people when they are tired, and nurtures them by providing training appropriate to their levels of development. If people are given strict training under circumstances that require protection instead, they will go under. And if they are protectively coddled when instead they need guidance, they will stop growing.

If we relate these desirable leadership attributes to the three virtues, the ability to protect corresponds to the virtue of the sovereign, the ability to provide guidance and instruction to the virtue of the teacher, and the ability to provide training to the virtue of the parent. The determination, prayer and strength to help people become happy are the keys to outstanding leadership.

In connection with the characterization in “Repaying Debts of Gratitude” of the virtue of the sovereign as “blocking off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering,” High Priest Nichikan asks, “How could the opening or closing of roads be left up to a retainer? [Matters of such importance must be attended to by the sovereign.]” The virtue of the sovereign lies in closing off paths of evil and opening up paths of good.

“I want to close off the path leading to Hell.” This was the spirit with which Josei Toda declared his opposition to the use of nuclear weapons: “Anyone who threatens the right to live is a devil, a Satan and a monster.” To resolutely close off the path to war and open up the path to peace — this is the virtue of the sovereign, and the responsibility of leaders.

The SGI, as the true inheritor of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, has opened a path of peace spanning the globe. Twenty years ago, when China

and the Soviet Union were in conflict and the Americans and the Soviets were mired in the Cold War, who could have imagined the state of the world today? The Soka Gakkai, despite storms of criticism, has bravely taken action to close off the path to confrontation and open the path to friendship.

“There must never be World War III!” We have prayed and taken action with a sense of responsibility to see that such a calamity never comes to pass. Toward that end, we have developed a movement of peace, culture and education based on Buddhism.

Broadly speaking, creating a land of peace and tranquility—as in the passage, “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” — indicates the virtue of the sovereign. Education represents the virtue of the teacher. And culture, because it fosters people’s inner lives, relates to the virtue of the parent. We are extending this path of the three virtues throughout the entire world.

Once a path is opened, those who come after can travel along it with composure and ease. Nichiren Daishonin, as the Buddha of the Latter Day possessing the virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent, opened a path to the enlightenment of all people. For this we owe him our eternal gratitude.

To extend and expand the path that the mentor has graciously opened is the mission of disciples. And the path that the Daishonin opened now spans the entire world. Through the struggles of our fellow members — the wondrous Bodhisattvas of the Earth — the great path of happiness now runs through 163 countries. The sun of justice has begun to rise. I am absolutely convinced that the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, accords the highest praise to those who dedicate themselves to this noble task.

## Nichiren Daishonin and the Three Periods of the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law

In “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “Two thousand years of propagating Buddhism during the Former and Middle Days of the Law are inferior to an hour of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law” (WND, 736). He is here

referring to the concept of the three periods of Buddhism—the Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law (or Shakyamuni’s teaching). These are the three consecutive stages into which the time after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death is divided.



The Former, Middle and Latter Days of the Law are the three stages of the development, maturity and decline of a Buddhist teaching. The Law will be propagated in the chaotic times of the Latter Day, which is characterized by greed, anger and foolishness.

During the Former Day of the Law, the pure spirit of Buddhism remained intact, and people could attain enlightenment through its practice. During the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism became firmly established in society. However, the emphasis was on formalities, and fewer people could benefit from it. In the Latter Day of the Law—the present age—the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness taint people’s lives and Shakyamuni’s Buddhism has lost the power to lead them to happiness.

There are several views on the length of the three periods. The Daishonin adopted the explanation found in the Sutra of the Great Assembly (Jpn Daishutsu Sutra), which describes five consecutive five-hundred-year periods following the Buddha’s death. The first two five-hundred-year periods are regarded as the Former Day of the Law, and the following two five-hundred-year periods as the Middle Day of the Law. The fifth five-hundred-year period is regarded as the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, which continues indefinitely. The concept of the three time periods explains that as time passes, the conditions and capacity of the people also change and an appropriate teaching must be spread

for each of the three periods.

There are several views regarding the date of Shakyamuni’s death and when the Former Day of the Law began. Old legends and theories set it somewhere in the range between the eleventh century B.C.E. to the sixth century B.C.E. Chinese historians adopted 609 B.C.E. Recently, scholars have estimated Shakyamuni’s death to have been around 480 B.C.E.

or 380 B.C.E. This estimate is based on the discovery of a monument to King Ashoka in India. Inscriptions on the monument indicate the year when King Ashoka was enthroned. Since King Ashoka is believed to have been enthroned either 100 or 200 years after Shakyamuni’s death, there is a 100-year variance in this estimation. Generally, it is now accepted that Shakyamuni lived in the fourth or fifth century B.C.E.

Nichiren Daishonin adopted the generally accepted view of his day—that of 949 B.C.E.—and estimated his time period, the thirteenth century, as 2,200-some years after Shakyamuni’s death; this was 200-some years into the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. But if we base our calculation on recent findings, the Daishonin’s time would be only 1,600 or 1,700 years after Shakyamuni’s passing. When examining this discrepancy, it is important to note that the Daishonin took a close look at the conditions of religion and society in light of statements in various sutras. This fact is more significant than simple arithmetic. Therefore, it can be said that the Daishonin was living in the midst of conditions that could best be characterized as those of the Latter Day of the Law. Thirteenth-century Japan presented

many characteristics of the Latter Day as described in the sutras—a strife-ridden period when the essence of Buddhism is lost and Buddhist priests become corrupt. The Sutra of the Great Assembly states that it will be an “age of conflict” when monks will disregard the precepts and feud constantly among themselves, erroneous views will prevail and Shakyamuni’s Buddhism will perish.

It was under these circumstances that the Daishonin spread the Mystic Law contained in the Lotus Sutra—*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*—and faced numerous persecutions as predicted in the sutra. He spread the Mystic Law in an age of corruption and confusion, following Shakyamuni’s injunction in the Lotus Sutra: “After I have passed into extinction, in the last five hundred year period you must spread it abroad widely and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils’ people ... to seize the advantage!” (LS23, 288). In contrast to other sutras, the Lotus Sutra views the Latter Day as the time when the essence of the Lotus Sutra, transferred to Bodhisattva Superior Practices at the Ceremony in the Air, will be propagated. It is important to keep in mind that whatever hypothesis we adopt regarding the date of Shakyamuni’s passing, the time period in which the Daishonin lived was a reflection of predictions characteristic of the Latter Day. It was under horrific conditions that the Daishonin spread the Mystic Law and established the true object of devotion, the Gohonzon. In 1273 he wrote, “At this time the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear and establish in this country the object of devotion, foremost in Jambudvīpa” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period After the Thus Come One’s Passing,” WND, 376).

The Daishonin’s view of the Former and Middle days is not simply based on the number of consecutive years following Shakyamuni’s death, but rather on the migration of Buddhism through India, China and Japan. In “The Selection of the Time,” the Daishonin explains that the Former Day of the Law is the period in which Shakyamuni’s Buddhism is spread by the twenty-four successors in India—those who inherited the lineage of his teachings (“The Selection of the Time,” WND, 544-45). It was a time when Buddhism flourished in

India—a view in accord with historical records. Aryasimha, the last of the twenty-four successors, is believed to have lived in central India during the sixth century. From around the seventh century, Buddhism became more esoteric and began to decline in that country.

In his discussion about the migration of Buddhism into China in “The Selection of the Time,” the Daishonin explains that in the fifteenth year of the Middle Day of the Law, Buddhism was brought to China and that for one thousand years thereafter, it spread in China and Japan (WND, 545). Buddhism was imported into China in 2 B.C.E. or 65 C.E. So the beginning of the Middle Day, according to the Daishonin, falls around the beginning of the Common Era. Therefore, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (538–597) lived around the middle of the Middle Day of the Law.

From his description in “The Selection of the Time,” the Daishonin clearly did not view the transition from the Former to the Middle Day as a simple time-line. Rather, he thought of the Former and Middle days as the migration of Buddhism through India, China and Japan. Although the last several centuries of the Former Day in India and the first several centuries of the Middle Day in China overlap, this does not discount the merit of the Daishonin’s view of the 2,000-year period of the Former and Middle days.

In “On the Buddha’s Prophecy,” the Daishonin states: “The moon appears in the west and sheds its light eastward, but the sun rises in the east and casts its rays to the west. The same is true of Buddhism. It spread from west to east in the Former and Middle Days of the Law, but will travel from east to west in the Latter Day” (WND, 401). According to the Daishonin, the Latter Day of the Law is when *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* will spread from Japan to the rest of the world. The SGI is fulfilling the Daishonin’s prediction for the Latter Day of the Law as its members are introducing Buddhism to their friends the world over.

By the SGI-USA Study Department

BY GREG MARTIN,  
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER

# FAITH AND PRACTICE ACTIVATE THE GOHONZON'S POWER—

*“Opening the Eyes of Wooden  
and Painted Images”*

Is An Ancient Religious Rite  
Relevant to Nichiren Daishonin's  
Object of Devotion?

“The Buddha possesses thirty-two features. All of them represent the physical aspect. Thirty-one of them ... belong to the category of visible and non-coextensive<sup>1</sup> physical characteristics. They can therefore be depicted in tangible form, such as pictures or statues. The remaining feature, the pure and far-reaching voice, belongs to the category of invisible and coextensive physical attributes. It therefore cannot be captured either in a painting or wooden image.

Since the Buddha's passing, two kinds of images,

wooden and painted, have been made of him. They possess thirty-one features but lack the pure and far-reaching voice. Therefore, they are not equal to the Buddha. They are also devoid of the spiritual aspect.... When one places a sutra in front of a wooden or painted image of the Buddha, the image becomes endowed with all thirty-two features. Yet even though it has the thirty-two features, without spiritual aspect it is in no way equal to a Buddha...” (“Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 85).

## Customs of the Day

In 1264 Japan, when Nichiren Daishonin wrote the letter, “Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images,” it was a Buddhist custom to pray to wooden statues or paintings of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It was believed that a religious rite known as an “eye-opening” ceremony could endow a religious object with the spiritual properties of the Buddha it represented, thus enhancing its power as an object of devotion. Images of Amida<sup>2</sup> Buddha, for example, were popular at the time, and were thought to be infused with his spirit through ceremonies that involved placing either the Flower Garland Sutra or the Mahavairocana<sup>3</sup> Sutra before it.

Nichiren Daishonin refuted the value of these ceremonies, declaring these rituals using various sutras could not infuse a statue or painting with either the voice or the spiritual aspect of the Buddha. Therefore, the object could “in no way equal a Buddha.” He went on to offer proof from the writings of T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo that the Lotus Sutra alone manifests the Buddha’s mind, affirming that “those words are in themselves the Buddha’s mind” (WND, 86).

Thus, only the Lotus Sutra was useful in performing eye-opening ceremonies for statues or paintings.



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In Nichiren Daishonin’s day, it was thought that prayer to Buddhas—like Shakyamuni and Amida—would enhance their powers as an object of devotion.

## A Step Toward Establishing the Gohonzon

That “the Buddha’s mind found expression in the written words of the Lotus Sutra” was a key point in the Daishonin’s instruction to his followers. Prayer to Amida Buddha—based on the provisional, pre-Lotus Sutra teachings of Shakyamuni—represented the belief that happiness could only be achieved through rebirth in the “Land of Eternal Bliss,” with Amida Buddha acting as an intermediary. In contrast, the Lotus Sutra—Shakyamuni’s essential teaching—contains at its heart the prom-

ise that, through the Mystic Law, everyone can attain enlightenment in this lifetime—where they are and as they are, through their own faith and efforts.

Nichiren Daishonin defined the core of the Lotus Sutra as the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which he later manifested in the mandala called the Gohonzon. However, when he wrote, “Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images,” the Daishonin had yet to inscribe the Gohonzon bestowed upon the entire world. And, although he provisionally approved the act of making images of Shakyamuni Buddha in this letter, with the instruction that the Lotus Sutra be used in the ceremony to “open its eyes,” it was not his ultimate intention. It was, at least, a step away from people’s attachment to Amida Buddha, and toward a better

understanding of Buddhism. However, considering subsequent events in his life—the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and Sado Exile that led to his inscription of the Gohonzon—we can understand this letter to be preparation for conceiving the Gohonzon, the true object of devotion.

## No need for statues or paintings

Once the Gohonzon had been established, there was no longer a need for statues and paintings as objects of devotion. According to Nichiren Daishonin, this is because

each of us has the potential to reveal our own Buddhahood. Praying to a statue or painting, however, tends to mislead people to exalt and worship the being it represents while diverting them from their own inherent enlightenment. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that people and the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are one.

Statues or paintings glorify an external phenomenon rather than the law of life. The Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin represents both his enlightened life state and the Law, depicting the inseparability of the Person and the Law. Therefore, in an age when we have the Gohonzon—the blueprint for the enlightenment of ordinary people—the worship of statues and paintings is mistaken.

In the writing “Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “The daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] of the Lotus Sutra should be the object of devotion” and “We should employ as an object of devotion that which is superior” (*Gosho Zenshu*, 365-66). The Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin is the very essence of the Lotus Sutra.



Jonathan Wilson

Possessing a Gohonzon does not bring benefit. We activate the Gohonzon's power only when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it.

## Enlightenment Inherent in the Gohonzon

By inscribing the words “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren” down the center of the Gohonzon, Nichiren Daishonin made it very clear that the Law exists within his life as well the lives of all people. In another letter on this subject, “On Consecrating an Image of Shakyamuni Buddha Made by Shijo Kingo,” written in 1276, the Daishonin writes:

It is the power of the Lotus Sutra that makes it possible to infuse such paintings and statues with a ‘soul’ or spiritual property.

This was the realization of the great Teacher T’ien-t’ai. In the case of living beings, this doctrine is known as the attaining of Buddhahood in one’s present form; in the case of painted and wooden images, it is known as the enlightenment of plants and trees. (WND, 684)

[For “the enlightenment of plants and trees”, see sidebar, this page]

Nichiren Daishonin also wrote, “Now in the Latter day of the Law, the ‘eye’ is the great Mandala [the Gohonzon] that was never before revealed. There is no ‘eye’ apart from this Gohonzon” (GZ, 841).

From these explanations it is clear

## The Enlightenment of Plants

The enlightenment of plants, trees, rocks, the land itself or all insentient beings derives from the principle of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life.” One of its components is the realm of the environment or objective world. A living being and its nonliving environment, or sentient and insentient beings, are one and both manifest the same true entity of life. Both have the same potential for Buddhahood. There are two ways insentient beings can attain

Buddhahood. The first is when a sentient being attains Buddhahood, the same state of life is simultaneously induced in its surroundings in accordance with the principle that life and its environment are inseparable. The second is by being made into an object of devotion. When the Buddha’s life is embodied in paper or wood, that paper or wood becomes an entity that manifests the Buddha nature from within itself. This is the principle underlying the inscription of the Gohonzon as an object of devotion.

that the Gohonzon does not need to be empowered, given a ‘soul,’ or otherwise enhanced by a special person or ritual. Rather, it releases the power of our lives by allowing us to open our eyes to our inherent Buddhahood. No action or ceremony is required to further infuse it. The Daishonin’s Gohonzon is a “perfectly endowed” object of devotion.

Historically, it was thought that only a priest or person with exceptional status could perform the ‘eye-opening’ ceremony to empower an otherwise inanimate object with the Buddha’s spiritual property, to make it an object of devotion. The Daishonin’s Gohonzon, however, by his own definition, needs no such process.

### Our practice activates the beneficial power of the Gohonzon

According to Nichiren Daishonin, it is also true, though, that the Gohonzon’s beneficial power does need to be activated by the faith and practice of the individual practitioner. This is explained by the principle of the four powers, the powers of faith, practice, Buddha and Law. We manifest the powers of the Buddha and the Law inherent in the Gohonzon through the power of our own faith and practice. In other words, simply having a Gohonzon does not bring benefit. Practice to the Gohonzon does. We activate the Gohonzon’s power when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it.

With this knowledge, let’s take another look at the passage in “Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images” where the Daishonin writes, “Since the Buddha’s passing, two kinds of images, wooden and painted, have been made of him.

They possess thirty-one features but lack the pure and far-reaching voice. Therefore, they are not equal to the Buddha. They are also devoid of the spiritual aspect” (WND, 85).

We know through experience that without our own efforts in the practice of faith (to the Gohonzon) — morning and evening prayers and the chanting of *d a i m o k u* — although perfectly complete as an object of devotion, the powers of the Buddha and the Law in the *G o h o n z o n* remain in a state of potentiality.

Without sounding too Zen-like, is a TV a TV without someone watching it? A TV may be complete in all respects and ready to perform its function, but unless it is plugged in, turned on and watched, the purpose for which it was made cannot be fulfilled. In that sense, for a TV to be a TV it requires someone watching it. Without a practitioner the Gohonzon cannot fulfill the purpose for which it was inscribed. Although the Gohonzon is still a Gohonzon, practice to it is necessary in order for its influence to be experienced in our lives.



Stephanie Sydney

Non-living beings can become enlightened when the state of Buddhahood is manifest in to sentient beings around it or when it is made into an object of devotion.

### When Prayer Is Not Enough

By inscribing the Gohonzon, making it widely available and instructing us to faithfully chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it, the Daishonin gave us both the means and responsibility to activate it. In a sense, we complete the work that the Daishonin began when he inscribed the Gohonzon. The Daishonin states that the voice does the Buddha’s work. Hence, chanting to the Gohonzon can be understood as adding the far-reaching voice of the Buddha.

But is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo enough? There are many other Nichiren sects whose practice and that of the SGI appear to be the same — chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, reciting the sutra to the Gohonzon, studying the Daishonin’s writings, and spreading the teachings.

At the time of Nichiren Daishonin’s death in 1282, there were five senior priests in addition to his successor, Nikko Shonin. They also continued to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and yet according to Nikko, they betrayed the Daishonin’s intent. Nikko Shonin denounced their practice. How can that be? They all chanted the same Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, yet we consider only Nikko Shonin to have correctly inherited the purity of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. What’s the difference?

## Our Faith Makes the Difference

In “On Attaining Buddhahood,” Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

Nevertheless, even though you chant and believe in Myoho-renge-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are

embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching. “Inferior teaching” means those other than this [Lotus] sutra, which are all expedient and provisional. No expedient or provisional teaching leads directly to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless kalpas. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime is then impossible. Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*, you must summon up deep faith that *Myoho-renge-kyo* is your life itself. [A]lthough they study Buddhism, their views are no different from those of non-Buddhists. (WND, 3,4)

This is a remarkable passage because it says that one can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and practice Buddhism and still not be a Buddhist. Actions alone are not enough. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not a magic formula that produces benefit for every person every time they pray. Most of us have experienced times when in spite of our prayers we were not changing things

positively. How is this possible? What else is required of us?

Nichiren Daishonin explained, “When you chant myoho and recite renga, you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-renge-kyo is your life itself” (WND, 3). The attitude, confidence or intention with which we pray — what might be called the mind of faith — is also extremely important. In other words, the quality of our prayer is important. As Nichiren Daishonin wrote in the “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (WND, 385). When we pray with “the same mind as Nichiren” — adding the spiritual aspect of the Buddha’s life — we can receive benefit, change our karma, and attain Buddhahood. Practicing with faith based on a strong desire to achieve kosen-rufu is what “the same mind as Nichiren” means.

In “On Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images,” Nichiren Daishonin states: “Even though it may resemble the Buddha in appearance, in reality it remains the same insentient plant from which it originated” (WND, 87). For those praying without the same

## Contradicting Nichiren Daishonin

In contrast to the Daishonin’s letters and treatises affirming the enlightenment inherent in the Gohonzon, the priests of Nichiren Shoshu persist in teaching a different view of the eye-opening ceremony. Furthermore, they claim that “one should never worship anything as a Gohonzon that has not been authorized as such by the high priest, who has inherited the Heritage of the Law, even if it was inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself.” (translation of an article from Japanese-language publication Daibyakuho, autumn 1993).

In making this statement, Nichiren Shoshu asserts that unless an eye-opening ceremony has been conducted on the Gohonzon by the high priest, it is a counterfeit. Nichiren

Shoshu believes that the Gohonzon must be infused with power. They believe only the high priest can accomplish this. And they believe that the high priest can reverse the process of infusing. These beliefs are consistent with the provisional understanding of the eye-opening ceremony refuted by Nichiren Daishonin in this letter.

Furthermore, they assert that the high priest can deactivate a Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself. This is an obvious contradiction of the Daishonin’s own words and attempts to place the high priest above the Daishonin by asserting that the high priest has the power to override, so to speak, the Daishonin’s own efforts. To accept this one must discard all of the Daishonin’s teachings about the eye-opening ceremony.

mind as Nichiren, the Gohonzon remains a piece of paper—its full power is never activated. But those who chant daimoku with the same intent as the Buddha are able to activate the Gohonzon’s power and simultaneously tap into the Buddhahood originally inherent within their own lives.

## The Buddha’s Voice and Heart Activate the Object of Worship

Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for us to chant to and taught us to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (the far-reaching voice of the Buddha) with the same mind or heart as the Buddha (the spiritual aspect). When we do so, we are activating the Gohonzon’s latent power. Hence, his statement that “it is the heart that is important” (WND, 1000).

We are then practicing in exact accord with the Daishonin’s intent behind the inscription of the object of devotion. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with trust in the power of the Gohonzon, the Buddha state in our environment (Gohonzon) and the Buddha state inherent in the depths of our lives rise to greet each other. By striving, so to speak, to pull the life of Buddha out of our Gohonzon, we pull it up from the depths of our lives. This fusion of objective reality with our subjective wisdom is the significance of the Daishonin’s inscription of the Gohonzon and our practice to it. We, in fact, complete the Buddha’s work; work that only a Buddha could do. SGI President Ikeda writes:

“The Gohonzon is in truth the entity of the life of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. It is

endowed with the inexhaustible powers of the Buddha and the Law. Therefore, it is not some formality, but the powers of faith and practice of those who revere the Gohonzon that count.

“The power of the Buddha and the power of the Law of the Gohonzon become manifest in accordance with the powers of faith and practice, correct and strong, that we exert.

“Eye-opening ceremonies performed by (slandorous) priests who lack the powers of faith and practice have absolutely no meaning. There is no need whatsoever for such ceremonies.

“Rather, the practice of us who live for kosen-rufu, who morning and evening sit up straight before and pray to the Gohonzon, is one that accords with Nichiren Daishonin’s original teaching of the ‘opening of the eyes.’” (*Selected Speeches*, 10)

It is the prayers of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, chanting daimoku infused with a dedication to propagating the Law, with the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, which can activate the Gohonzon’s power. To the extent that the Gohonzon needs to be activated, it is the power of each believer’s faith and practice which can, in practical terms, “open the eyes” of the Gohonzon.



Owen Franken/CORBIS

Is a TV a TV without someone watching it? It may be complete, but unless it is being watched, its purpose cannot be fulfilled. It is the same with the Gohonzon. Someone needs to be practicing to it in order for it to perform its function.

*One of the sources for this article was “Opening the Eyes of Wooden or Painted Images” by Kazuo Fuji, which appeared in the March, 1999 UK Express.*

1. coextensive—adj., having the quality of extending equally in time and space.
2. Amida Buddha—The Buddha of the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss worshipped by followers of the Pure Land sect.
3. Mahavairochana Sutra—One of the three basic scriptures of esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric teachings are revealed secretly or exclusively, intended for the specially initiated alone.

# 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 3

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

By Jeff McDaniel  
Palo Alto, California

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* world<sup>1</sup> 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



Carl Lawton

At 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.

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 supernatural 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 kalpas<sup>2</sup> 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 prelude 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



While each of us may be exerting ourselves in a different area, we are all motivated by compassion and humanism. We should be the foremost allies of those who are suffering!

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.”<sup>3</sup> (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-enge-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-enge-kyo Thus Come One, ‘the fundamental Buddha’ of the universe. The Nam-myoho-enge-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 gleaning 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 Dais-honin 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.



Larry Nelson

Reciting the sutra is like reading a poem. And chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is like singing a musical masterpiece. Our daily practice is the most cultural of all activities.

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*<sup>4</sup> 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



The statement that Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound waited upon the Buddha is very important. From the standpoint of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism today, this means praying to the Gohonzon. President Ikeda explains that, "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."

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 suffer-

ings. 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-enge-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 determina-

tion 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 Daishonin 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.

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April 19–22	Chinese Language Conference #1	September 20–23	Theme: Mentor and Disciple Relationship Conference #2
May 3–6	Korean Language Conference #1	October 4–7	Spanish/Portuguese Language Conference #2
May 10–13	Women’s Division Conference #1	October 11–14	Chinese Language Conference #2
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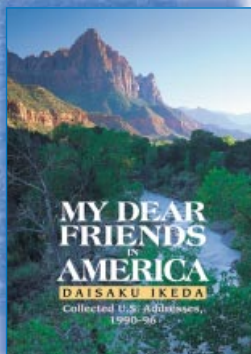
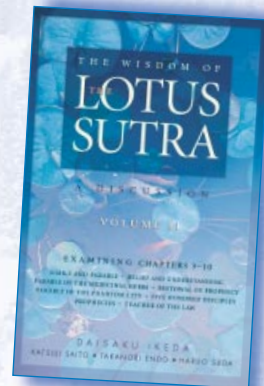
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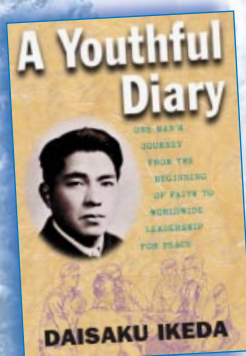
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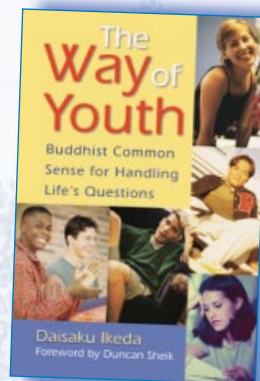
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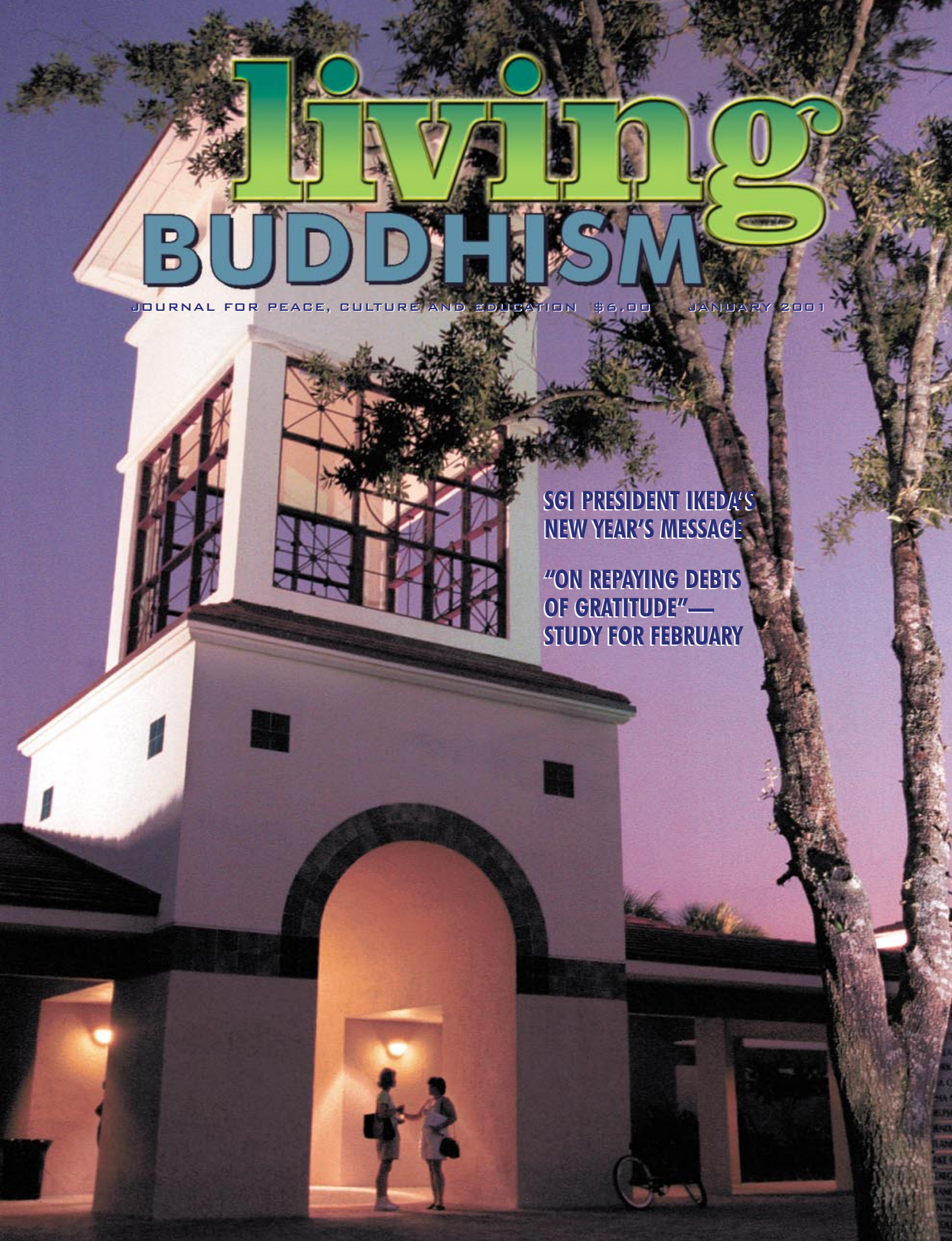
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# Living BUDDHISM

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**SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S  
NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE**

**"ON REPAYING DEBTS  
OF GRATITUDE"—  
STUDY FOR FEBRUARY**



*An architect's drawing of renovations to the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium scheduled to open in 2001.*

## ***What is the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?***

*Living Buddhism* is the study journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the inseparable link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life.

Through their Buddhist faith and practice, our members aim to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to create value, to live without fear, to take responsibility for their circumstances, to care for their families and to live with compassion for others.

### ***What we believe...***

Our core philosophy is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation.

### ***The Buddhist tradition...***

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlightenment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated in the Lotus

Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

In the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the truth hidden in the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren Buddhism, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. By putting their lives in rhythm with this Law, individuals can unlock their hidden potential — the Buddha nature — and achieve creative harmony with the environment. Nichiren Buddhism is a vehicle of individual empowerment — that is, individuals have within themselves, the power to transform the inevitable sufferings of life into happiness and to be a positive influence in the community.

### ***The SGI Heritage...***

The SGI organization has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Here, he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings. The term soka gakkai (value-creation society) was first used by Makiguchi in 1930 when he founded the lay organization. During World War II, Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda were imprisoned for their opposition to the war. Makiguchi died in prison within eighteen months at the age of 73. After the war, Toda rebuilt the organization and it achieved remarkable growth until his death in 1958. On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to its present membership of 12 million in 128 countries.

Based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda has founded the Soka School System which includes universities in Japan and the United States. He is also the founder of the Toda Peace Institute, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, and more. He is the author of numerous books that have been translated into many languages and has received world-wide recognition for his peace efforts.

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*Raise High the  
Banner of Humanism  
and Advance Toward  
Lasting Peace!*

The brilliant sun of New Year's Day, 2001!  
The dawn of a momentous new page in history!  
The commencement of the second phase  
Of worldwide kosen-rufu!  
My beloved fellow members across the globe,  
Congratulations on the start of the  
new century!

Now, at this moment,  
President Toda's passionate call for peace  
Resounds in my heart:  
"We must allow no people to be sacrificed.  
We must eradicate all misery from the face of  
the earth!"

Yet, untold tragedies  
Continue to rack the world.  
We have not yet clearly replied  
To the fundamental question  
Put by the sage Erasmus  
In his plea for peace:

Why cannot human beings  
Have goodwill toward one another?

This is our goal:  
A world in which we can all live  
Together in peace,

Sharing only the one common designation —  
Human being.

Now, let us go back and begin again  
From the essential starting point  
Of the human being.

My mentor's advocacy  
Of global citizenship, too,  
Was a ringing declaration of humanism,  
Transcending all differences  
And respecting the dignity and  
equality of all —  
How brilliant was his vision  
Of the 21st century!

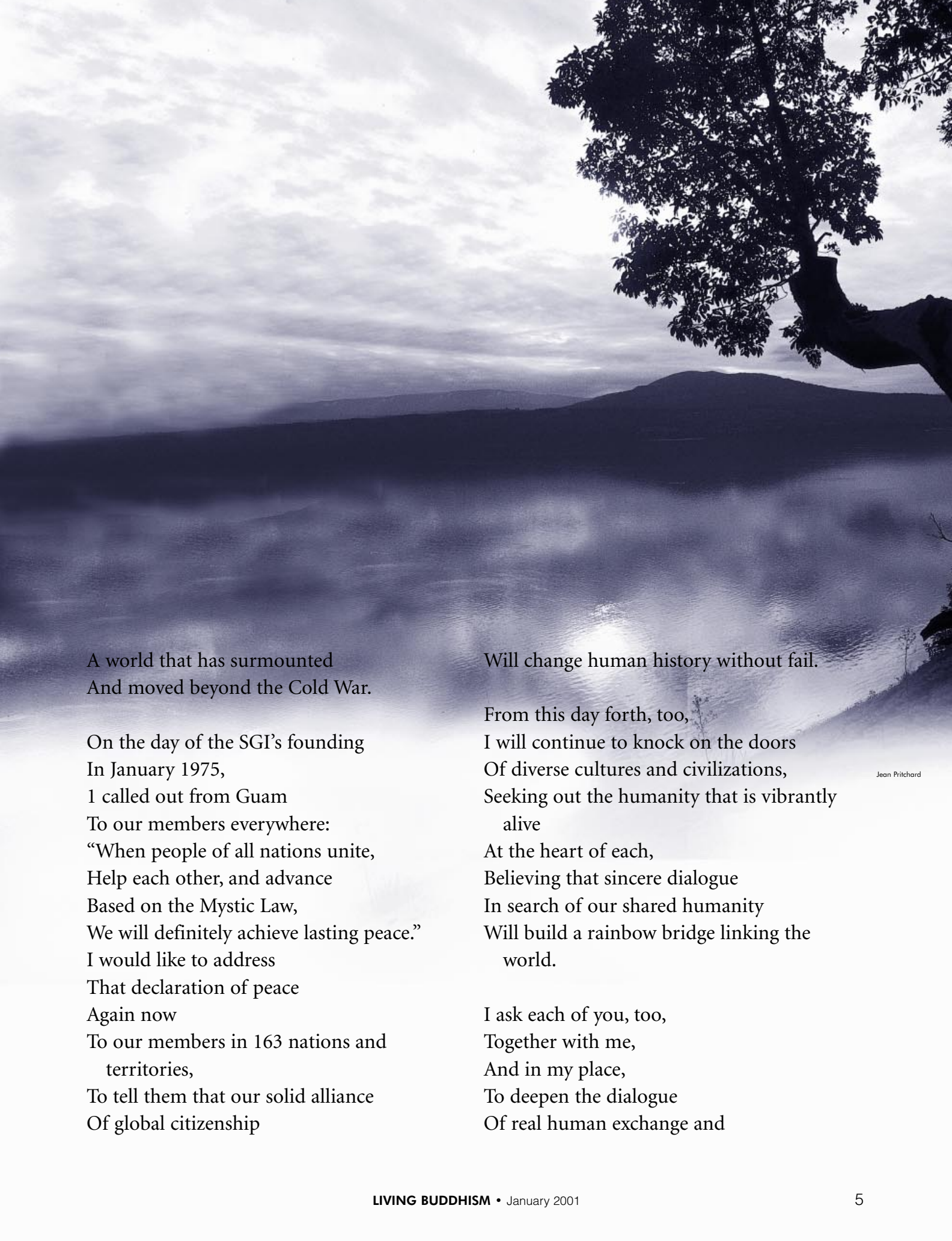
Dixon Hamby



His was a challenge to realize the ideal  
Of one human race  
That had long been an elusive dream.  
His was a philosophy of unity and harmony  
That viewed the earth  
As the common homeland  
Of all humanity;  
A philosophy of coexistence and human rights  
That saw all human beings  
As equal sovereigns  
Of this planet;  
A philosophy of peace and global citizenship  
That placed highest priority  
On the survival  
Of the human family.

Jonathan Wilson

Oct. 2, 1960 —  
With my mentor's lion's roar and visage  
In my heart,  
I took my first step for peace,  
Venturing out into a world  
In the grip of the Cold War.  
Forty years have since passed.  
The SGI's alliance of the people  
Now spans the globe  
And Buddhism has spread  
Throughout the entire world —



A world that has surmounted  
And moved beyond the Cold War.

On the day of the SGI's founding  
In January 1975,  
I called out from Guam  
To our members everywhere:  
“When people of all nations unite,  
Help each other, and advance  
Based on the Mystic Law,  
We will definitely achieve lasting peace.”  
I would like to address  
That declaration of peace  
Again now  
To our members in 163 nations and  
territories,  
To tell them that our solid alliance  
Of global citizenship

Will change human history without fail.

From this day forth, too,  
I will continue to knock on the doors  
Of diverse cultures and civilizations,  
Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly  
alive  
At the heart of each,  
Believing that sincere dialogue  
In search of our shared humanity  
Will build a rainbow bridge linking the  
world.

I ask each of you, too,  
Together with me,  
And in my place,  
To deepen the dialogue  
Of real human exchange and

Jean Pritchard



Dixon Hamby

communication,  
In all cultures, among all peoples of the world.

From one individual to another,  
Starting in our immediate environment,  
From small, modest efforts,  
Let us steadily carry on our movement.  
A commitment to treasure each person—  
In that daily, unceasing practice  
Lies the dynamism  
To transform the entire planet.  
And there, too, shines a life  
Of unparalleled value-creation.

Now, let us courageously advance together  
Into the uncharted frontier  
Of a new millennium of hope!  
As we ring in the second series of Seven Bells,  
Let us raise higher and higher still  
The banner of humanism of Buddhism!

*With my prayers for the increasing good health  
And prosperity of my beloved fellow SGI members,  
And the wish that all of you may live victorious lives  
Filled with joy, wisdom and strength.*

*New Year's Day, 2001  
Daisaku Ikeda  
President, Soka Gakkai International*