

**“Teachers of the Law” Are Spiritual Leaders  
Who Live Among the People  
Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 16**

*This is the sixteenth installment in a series of discussions on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the May 1996 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*This time, they discuss the identity of the “teacher” in the “Teacher of the Law” (tenth) chapter, as well as the two modes of propagation, shoju and shakubuku; the three rules of preaching, robe, seat and room; and the principle of “deliberately creating the appropriate karma.”*

**Suda:** The exhibition of photographs by Rajiv Gandhi (1944–91), the late former prime minister of India, has been very well received.

*[The exhibition, which includes two hundred photographs taken by Rajiv Gandhi, an avid photographer since childhood, was on display at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in Hachioji, Tokyo, through May 19, 1996. It was also shown in Chiba Prefecture in June, and in Saitama Prefecture in September.]*

**Endo:** The photos convey a certain warmth that is beyond words to describe. In particular, the photos of elderly people and children that he took during his travels left me with a sense of the depth of his love for the Indian people.

**Ikeda:** Rajiv Gandhi valued the modest handmade items that people gave him—a shellwork or a basket woven from bamboo—as though they were treasures.

I understand he would occasionally take these items out and hold them in his hands with a look of fond reminiscence.

Rajiv Gandhi was a leader of conviction. At the same time, he always prized sincerity.

**Saito:** Speaking before the Japanese Diet [on November 29, 1985], Prime Minister Gandhi asserted, “The Buddha’s message of compassion is the very condition of human survival in our age.”<sup>1</sup>

His meeting with you, President Ikeda, immediately followed this address.

**Ikeda:** That’s right. Although he must have been exhausted, he was smiling and had a look of peace and tranquillity about him. The moment we shook hands, I intuitively sensed that behind his gentle countenance was a person of rock-like strength who really threw himself one hundred percent into achieving his goals.

**Saito:** That was only a year after the assassination of his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (1917–84).

**Ikeda:** Asked once what was the most important thing she had inherited from her father Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), Indira Gandhi replied it was her great love for the Indian

people. Had Rajiv Gandhi been asked what the most important thing he had received from his mother was, his answer would doubtless have been the same.

Not even the terrorist bombing that took his life [in May 1991] could have destroyed the love for the people that continually burned in Rajiv Gandhi's heart. I believe people have a mission to fulfill that transcends life and death. The lives of those who embrace a mission to which they can wholeheartedly dedicate themselves and even be willing to die for are the most sublime.

**Endo:** I have vivid recollections of the time you laid a wreath at Rajiv Gandhi's tomb [in February 1992]. I accompanied you on that visit to India. I recall that in the register of the memorial, you wrote, "There are times when the lives of great leaders seem tragic, but they are actually great, magnificent dramas that serve to eternally awaken the people."

**Suda:** After Rajiv Gandhi's death, you and Mrs. Ikeda met with his wife, Sonia Gandhi, to console and encourage her. "I really hope that you can change your sad destiny into a cause for realizing an important mission in India," you told her. "Although it may be difficult not to look back, I hope you will keep advancing ever forward. That is the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, who was born in this great land of India." Over and over, I read the account of your meeting that appeared in the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

**Ikeda:** We can change even painful destiny into mission. The Lotus Sutra teaches this strong and resilient way of life. This is what the "Teacher of the Law" chapter explains when it speaks of the great bodhisattvas who, while capable of being born into pure lands if they so desired, choose instead to be born into impure worlds so that they can expound the Lotus Sutra to help those suffering. We who now spread the Mystic Law in this world are the bodhisattvas to whom the sutra refers. We are enacting a grand drama that we ourselves chose.

This time, let us discuss the "Teacher of the Law" chapter.

### The Lotus Sutra Was Expounded for the Latter Day

"... you should understand that these persons voluntarily relinquish the reward due them for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra. If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work. (*The Lotus Sutra*, ch. 10, pp. 161–62)

**Ikeda:** In a sense, all the preceding chapters up to this point have been nothing more than preparation. The most important part of the Lotus Sutra—which represents Shakyamuni's true intent—begins with the "Teacher of the Law" chapter.

**Suda:** In the progression of events that take place from this chapter on, we see a radical departure from the flow of the preceding chapters. Specifically, in this chapter, Shakyamuni begins discussing the time after his death.

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Keywords: Among Dialogue Leaders Lotus People Sutra

**Ikeda:** The period after the Buddha's death primarily means the Latter Day of the Law. Shakyamuni addresses the issue of how people should live in a time when there is confusion about which teachings are correct and which erroneous.

In the first installment in this series, we described the present as an age lacking philosophy. Who, specifically, will light the way in an "age of darkness" when people cannot see the correct path forward? The "Teacher of the Law" chapter explains in detail the identity of that "person"—in other words, "the teacher of the Law." In modern terms, the "teacher of the Law" could be termed a spiritual leader.

**Saito:** In light of the overall thrust of this chapter, "teacher of the Law" has a dual meaning. It indicates both one who "makes the Law his master" and one who "becomes a teacher and spreads the Law." These are the two sides of a bodhisattva. "Making the Law one's master" is the aspect of a bodhisattva as a "seeker of the Way." "The teacher who spreads the Law" exemplifies the aspect of a bodhisattva as someone who strives to lead others to enlightenment.

**Ikeda:** Teachers of the Law unite both of these qualities in themselves. To forget the "seeking" side is to become arrogant; to forget the "saving" side is to become self-centered. While continuing to deepen their own understanding, teachers of the Law lead others to happiness; and through helping others become happy, they further deepen their understanding. Seeking the Law is itself leading others to enlightenment; and leading others to enlightenment is itself seeking the Law. Herein lies the supreme path in life.

**Saito:** That this is a path for all people is the key point, isn't it? In this chapter, the distinction between lay people, on the one hand, and monks and nuns, on the other, is revealed as completely irrelevant. In one place, it speaks of "the lay persons or monks or nuns who read and recite the Lotus Sutra" (LS10, 162). As this suggests, the identity of the teacher of the Law transcends distinctions of clerical and lay.

Nikken<sup>2</sup> and his followers assert, among other things, that priests are inherently superior to lay believers. It is patently obvious, however, that such a discriminatory attitude goes completely against the words of the Lotus Sutra.

**Endo:** The teachers of the Law expound the Lotus Sutra to others while themselves upholding, reading and reciting the sutra. Their practice comes down to continually talking with people and enabling them to hear about the Lotus Sutra.

**Ikeda:** In a sense, it is a struggle of words, a campaign of dialogue. Our movement to conduct dialogue truly accords with the spirit of the "Teacher of the Law" chapter.

Shakyamuni spent his entire life, until the day he passed away, talking with people. Nichiren Daishonin, similarly, in addition to his efforts at dialogue, left behind a vast body of writings held to be larger than that of any Japanese person of his day. He truly wrote and spoke exhaustively. And because of his noble efforts later generations can learn the teachings he expounded.

It is a battle of words. Words illuminate not only the time when they are uttered or set down, but future ages as well. In the hope of leaving behind something of value for future generations, I give speeches on Buddhism and conduct dialogues with world leaders.

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**Endo:** In the preceding eight chapters—from the second, “Expedient Means,” through the ninth, “Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adepts”—Shakyamuni’s central concern is to enable his present disciples to attain Buddhahood. As a result of his preaching in these chapters, all of the voice-hearers enter the path of attaining Buddhahood. In other words, in his preaching up to and including the “Learners and Adepts” chapter, Shakyamuni confirms that his immediate disciples will all attain supreme enlightenment. In that sense, the preaching in these chapters is for Shakyamuni’s contemporaries.

**Ikeda:** That is certainly how these eight chapters look on the surface. But viewed in the context of the entire Lotus Sutra, it becomes apparent that these eight chapters are also in fact for the age after the Buddha’s passing.

Actually, not just these eight chapters but the entire Lotus Sutra is for the time after the Buddha’s death. Nichiren Daishonin says that the Lotus Sutra’s theoretical teaching (or first half) appears to have been expounded for the voice-hearer disciples who were Shakyamuni’s contemporaries. However, on a deeper level, he explains, it, like the Lotus Sutra’s essential teaching (or latter half), was taught for people after the Buddha’s passing, for the people of the Latter Day (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 71).

Shakyamuni’s lifetime in India was short, but the period after his passing is long. Shakyamuni’s followers in his day were few, but the people in the world after his passing are innumerable.

In his immense compassion, the Buddha naturally wanted to lead all people to enlightenment. Necessarily, therefore, the situation of people after his passing was the primary focus of his concern.

The teachers of the Law embody this immense compassion of the Buddha and take action accordingly. They are the “envoys of the Thus Come One” (LS10, 162).

**Endo:** That’s why the portion of the sutra from the “Teacher of the Law” chapter on is so important. According to Nichiren Daishonin, the five chapters from “Teacher of the Law” through the “Peaceful Practices” (fourteenth) chapter explain how ordinary people of the Latter Day should practice the teaching of the one Buddha vehicle that the preceding eight chapters reveal.

Nichiren Daishonin writes:

The eight chapters beginning with the *Hoben* [second] chapter and continuing through the *Ninki* [ninth] chapter are concerned primarily with clarifying how persons of the two vehicles [voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*] can attain Buddhahood, and secondarily with clarifying how bodhisattvas and ordinary people can attain Buddhahood.

The following five chapters, consisting of the *Hosshi*, *Hoto*, *Devadatta*, *Kanji* and *Anraku* chapters, explain how the teachings set forth in the preceding eight chapters are to be carried out by ordinary persons in a latter age. (MW–7, 3)

**Ikeda:** “Ordinary persons in a latter age” indicates Nichiren Daishonin and all of his followers.

In his writings, the Daishonin quotes extensively from the five chapters beginning with “Teacher of the Law.” And within the Lotus Sutra itself, from the “Teacher of

the Law” chapter on, there are a great many references to the time after the Buddha’s passing.

What we should note here is that Nichiren Daishonin, more than anyone else, perfectly matched in his conduct the sutra’s description of the “votary of the Lotus Sutra” who will appear in the Latter Day of the Law.

From another standpoint, in light of the fact that Nichiren Daishonin read the Lotus Sutra with his life, it could be said that the Lotus Sutra was expounded to prepare the way for the Daishonin.

The Daishonin asserts that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the “one fundamental Law” through which all Buddhas attain enlightenment, is itself the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the great teaching that can enable all people of the Latter Day to attain enlightenment.

**Saito:** In that light, we can see why in “Teacher of the Law,” Shakyamuni says that offerings should be made to the teachers of the Law such as would be made to the Buddha (cf. LS10, 161, 163). The Sanskrit text of the sutra is still more explicit, explaining that these teachers of the Law “should be viewed as Buddhas,” and are “equal to the Thus Come One.”

**Suda:** The Lotus Sutra also explains that the teachers of the Law are “envoys of the Thus Come One” who have been dispatched by the Buddha, and who carry out the Buddha’s work (cf. LS10, 161–62). “Envoys of the Thus Come One” is an important term that the Daishonin uses time and again.

Also, the offense of uttering even a single word of slander against these teachers of the Law is even greater than that of continually slandering the Buddha to his face for the duration of an entire kalpa.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the sutra explains that the benefit of praising the teachers of the Law surpasses that of praising the Buddha with countless verses for a period of one *kalpa*.

**Ikeda:** In part, this is because the Law, not the Buddha, is the fundamental cause for attaining Buddhahood, and should be cherished accordingly. The Lotus Sutra is the teaching that explains the fundamental Law through which all Buddhas—including Shakyamuni—attain enlightenment. And the teachers of the Law in the Latter Day expound the teaching that is the true cause for attaining Buddhahood.

**Endo:** The relationship between the Law and the Buddha is the relationship between “that which gives birth” and “that to which birth is given.”

**President Ikeda:** Nichiren Daishonin characterizes this Law as the “ultimate principle of compassion.”

In his writing, “Sho Hokke Daimoku Sho” (Chanting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra), the Daishonin says:

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas are our compassionate parents. You should understand that the ultimate principle of compassion that these Buddhas and bodhisattvas use to instruct living beings is contained nowhere but in the Lotus

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Sutra... This is the reason why the Lotus Sutra is superior to all other sutras.  
(*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 9)

The Lotus Sutra surpasses all other sutras because it contains the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the “ultimate principle of compassion.” It is the great teaching of compassion that can lead all people to enlightenment. As the “Teacher of the Law” chapter says, “The Lotus is the foremost!” (LS10, 164).

**Endo:** That’s what the well-known passage about the Lotus Sutra surpassing all teachings in the past, present and future indicates.

“The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions. Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.” (LS10, 164)

**Saito:** In that sense, the “envoys of the Thus Come One” are “envoys of compassion.” The teachers of the Law put into practice the Buddha’s immense spirit of compassion while embracing, reading, reciting, expounding and copying the Lotus Sutra (i.e., carrying out the five practices that the sutra itself prescribes).

In the Latter Day, however, embracing the Law is itself enlightenment; in other words, all these practices are included in the one practice of embracing faith in the Gohonzon.

**Ikeda:** Embracing faith in the Gohonzon means living with the spirit of the Buddha and dedicating one’s life to the Buddha’s vow to lead all people to enlightenment. That is the fundamental meaning of “embracing the Lotus Sutra” and of the five kinds of practices. It’s not a matter of literally holding, reading and reciting the scrolls of the Lotus Sutra, and expounding upon their meaning.

Rather, the point is to inherit the Buddha’s spirit and to thoroughly manifest the Buddha’s compassion in one’s life.

Ultimately, Shakyamuni’s purpose in bestowing prophecies of enlightenment upon the voice-hearers in the preceding chapters is to cause them to arouse the “same spirit as the Buddha.” Those who put that spirit into practice after the Buddha’s death are teachers of the Law.

### ***Shakubuku Means Speaking the Truth***

**Saito:** On the matter of propagation, I’ve recently received quite a number of questions from new Soka Gakkai members on the difference between *shoju* and *shakubuku* methods. Many people, it seems, have the impression that *shakubuku* means using strong words whereas *shoju* means assuming a gentle manner.

**Ikeda:** It is a great mistake to suppose that *shakubuku* means trying to force someone to take faith. Doing *shakubuku* essentially means speaking the truth. Since the Lotus Sutra explains the truth, it is called the “sutra of *shakubuku*.”

Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, all our efforts to tell people about and spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the essence of the Lotus Sutra—constitute *shakubuku*. In

housecleaning, for example, it doesn't matter whether one cleans vigorously or at a leisurely pace as long as the main objective of the house becoming clean is realized.

**Suda:** People probably suppose that *shakubuku* has to be harsh because of the somewhat alarming image one gets from the Chinese characters with which the term is written [a combination of two ideograms meaning "break" and "restrain"].

**Ikeda:** *Shakubuku* does not mean going out to pick a fight. *Shakubuku*, sharing the teachings of the Daishonin's Buddhism with others, has to be an act of thoroughgoing compassion. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, once said:

We should do abundant *shakubuku* out of sincere conviction in the Daishonin's teaching. And in so doing, we should not harbor feelings of antipathy toward others. We should not get into angry disputes. All we need to do is teach people earnestly and gently. The important thing is that we have this spirit to teach. If someone opposes or attacks us, then that person will suffer the consequences of his or her actions. It is important to share Buddhism with a spirit of compassion. It's almost like being in love.<sup>4</sup>

President Toda certainly had a way of putting things! When people are in love, they go all out. They waste many sheets of stationery writing and rewriting letters. They stay up all night thinking about the words they will use to invite the other person out on their next day off. If everything goes well, they might decide to get married. However, unlike marriage sometimes, *shakubuku* will never cause one to have regrets!

**Endo:** I think we can say that Shakyamuni's method of preaching was to teach people gently.

Shakyamuni first expounded the doctrine of the "true entity of all phenomena" in an attempt to help people grasp the truth that everyone can become a Buddha. When Shakyamuni revealed this teaching, Shariputra alone understood, while others did not.

And so Shakyamuni related various similes and parables. As a result, the four leaders of the voice-hearers<sup>5</sup> came to understand. However, because many still had not yet grasped his meaning, Shakyamuni next explained his profound relationship with them from the distant past. Through this revelation, all of the voice-hearers could finally accept and understand his teaching.

Thus, Shakyamuni racked his mind to find a way to clarify his teaching so that all people could comprehend it. He did not abandon people because they were slow to understand. He had the deep wish, and the tenacity of purpose, to enable all people to become Buddhas, no matter how much effort it required on his part.

**Suda:** That is the very spirit that motivates our practice of *shakubuku* today.

**Ikeda:** Yes. The key point is to pray that one's sincerity will be understood by the other person. Wisdom arises from prayer. Prayer gives birth to confidence and joy.

While *shakubuku* is difficult, when we bear in mind that, through our actions, both the other person and we ourselves will definitely realize tremendous happiness and benefit,

nothing could be more joyful. Mr. Toda often said: “We should not agonize over doing *shakubuku*. We have to do *shakubuku* with a sense of joy.”<sup>6</sup>

In practice, while some will immediately believe and understand the Daishonin’s Buddhism, there will of course be those for whom this will not be the case. But there is no need to be impatient. Whatever the immediate outcome of our efforts, there is absolutely no doubt about the benefit we receive from having offered earnest prayer and made the effort to conduct dialogue about our Buddhist faith. And precisely because *shakubuku* is not easy, it affords us opportunities to tap our innate wisdom and grow. If we plant a seed, in time it will definitely flower.

The key point, it seems to me, is to talk to people with a sense of joy and exhilaration to be serving as the Buddha’s envoy.

**Endo:** I think it’s also important to warmly praise those doing *shakubuku*.

**Ikeda:** That’s right. Those carrying out this practice are “envoys of the Thus Come One”; they should be respected as Buddhas. This is the spirit of the “Teacher of the Law” chapter. Those who have the spirit to praise others accumulate good fortune and strength, and as a result can lead many to happiness.

SGI members who dedicate their lives to *kosen-rufu* should be treasured as Buddhas. When we understand this spirit, we understand not only the “Teacher of the Law” chapter but the entire Lotus Sutra.

### The Three Rules of Preaching: Robe, Seat and Room

#### 1) The “Room of Compassion”

**Endo:** In the “Teacher of the Law” chapter, Shakyamuni explains the manner of propagation after his death in terms of the three rules of preaching, robe, seat and room:

“Medicine King, if there are good men and good women who, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, wish to expound this Lotus Sutra for the four kinds of believers, how should they expound it? These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One’s room, put on the Thus Come One’s robe, sit in the Thus Come One’s seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this sutra.

“The ‘Thus Come One’s room’ is the state of mind that shows great pity and compassion toward all living beings. The ‘Thus Come One’s robe’ is the mind that is gentle and forbearing. The ‘Thus Come One’s seat’ is the emptiness of all phenomena.” (LS10, 166)

**Ikeda:** This is highly poetic. Shakyamuni uses the images of “robe,” “seat” and “room” to clarify the Buddha’s spirit in expounding the Lotus Sutra. And he urges people to broadly expound the teaching, saying in effect, “If you base yourselves on this spirit, then, even if you encounter difficulties, you can lead people to enlightenment unerringly just as the Buddha does.”

Why, then, is the Buddha’s great compassion compared to a room?

**Saito:** Compassion in the Buddhist sense is pity and profound affection. Feeling compassion toward others means sensing a common humanity or kinship, a bond as fellow living beings.

This could also be called “love,” but it is not egoistic love of the kind that can readily devolve into hate. It is love of humanity rooted in profound insight into the nature of life and existence. It could also be thought of as a true sense of solidarity arising from a shared aspiration for mutual happiness and growth.

**Suda:** Compassion is also the spirit to share others’ sufferings, to empathize with them in their sorrows. If we see someone suffering, compassion impels us to extend the person a helping hand, to share his or her pain. It is a profound emotion of that kind.

**Ikeda:** In terms of our stance vis-à-vis others, an attitude of compassion does not mean looking down on someone from a position of superiority. It is not a vertical but a horizontal relationship. It is a feeling of sympathy toward others as fellow human beings. And it is based on respect.

That’s why it’s called the “room of compassion.” We invite a friend into a compassionate life space and warmly embrace them; we sit down in the same room and discuss life as equals. We discuss things and learn from one another as fellow human beings, and together we strive to improve our lives. Creating such a warm and welcoming space for dialogue and exchange is in itself *shakubuku*.

**Endo:** If we approach someone with the arrogant attitude that we are going to “save” the person, it will only provoke a negative response.

**Ikeda:** In the treatise, “On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism,” Nichiren Daishonin calls the “host” who engages the “guest” in dialogue a “friend in the orchid room” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 36). When someone spends time in a room filled with orchids, the fragrance of the flowers naturally permeates their clothing. Similarly, dialogue should be conducted in such a way that the other person is imbued with the “fragrance of compassion.”

Propagation does not mean trying to force something on someone, nor is it for the sake of the organization. Propagation is an act of venerating the Buddha nature in the lives of others. Therefore, our efforts in *shakubuku* should be motivated by a spirit of the greatest respect for the other person.

President Toda said, “The basis for doing *shakubuku* is a feeling of sympathy for others’ sufferings.” Compassion, in other words, is fundamental. You don’t propagate Buddhism with a confrontational spirit of trying to refute someone’s ideas and win the person over to your own side.

**Suda:** Since it’s a matter of conducting dialogue, we have to listen to what the other person has to say. Yet there are those who talk on and on, monopolizing the conversation, and then suppose that they have had a dialogue.

**Ikeda:** It can’t be called a dialogue where one person constantly interrupts while the other is trying to express an opinion, and then lays down sweeping conclusions.

Even if you think that what someone is saying is a bit odd, rather than constantly raising objections, you should have the broad-mindedness to try to understand his or

her point of view. Then the person will feel secure and can listen to what you have to say.

In that sense, the Buddha is truly a master at dialogue. Shakyamuni and the Daishonin had such heartwarming personalities that just meeting them must have given people a sense of immense delight. And that's probably why so many took such pleasure in listening to their words.

**Suda:** The term *room of compassion* conveys an image of such warmth and breadth of character.

**Ikeda:** In this connection, I would like to relate a certain recorded incident involving Shakyamuni.<sup>7</sup> A man named Upali, who believed in Jainism,<sup>8</sup> once tried to defeat Shakyamuni in debate. But he was so moved by Shakyamuni's character and wisdom that he wound up asking to be allowed to become the Buddha's disciple.

Shakyamuni, rather than exulting at his having won Upali's admiration, admonished the latter, saying, "You should not so lightly cast aside the beliefs that you have held up to now. Please think the matter over carefully."

Upali, impressed all the more by this response, answered, "In society, it is rumored that the monk Gautama [Shakyamuni] says that people should make offerings to him and not make offerings to others; and asserts that whereas making offerings to him and his disciples confers benefit, there is no benefit to be gained from making offerings to others.

But in reality, the attitude of the World-Honored One is completely the opposite. I will devote myself to the Buddha's teachings with increased ardor."

Hearing about Upali's conversion, a Jainist leader accompanied by a number of his followers went to Upali's house. Upali received them cordially. But the leader rebuked him saying, "You're like a fool who goes for wool and comes home shorn." With great politeness, Upali patiently explained, "If it should be someone like Shakyamuni by whom I should be led astray, I could desire nothing more. If the royal families and Brahmans, peasants and slaves throughout the world could be so led astray by Shakyamuni, there would be eternal peace and happiness throughout the world."

**Endo:** That's a wonderful story.

## 2) *The "Robe of Gentleness and Forbearance"*

**Suda:** Continuing, it is easy to see why the Buddha's "robe" is a metaphor for a "mind that is gentle and forbearing." Just as a robe protects one's body from cold and heat, when we don the "robe of gentleness and forbearance," we are not shaken by hardships or difficulties.

**Ikeda:** That's right. In our propagation efforts, remaining undaunted in the face of obstacles is very important. With these words, Shakyamuni is urging his followers to maintain a radiant and composed state of mind, no matter what pressures might be brought to bear against them.

In seeking to propagate Buddhism after the Buddha's passing, difficulties are inevitable. Therefore, it is necessary that we have a spirit of forbearance and patience. We need a spirit to endure. Enduring is neither retreating nor conceding defeat. We

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have to persevere and win. No matter what happens, we must not become disheartened. Kosen-rufu is a struggle of the spirit. Those who allow themselves to be inwardly defeated cannot be said to possess forbearance.

**Saito:** In “The Selection of the Time,” Nichiren Daishonin says, “Since I have been born in the ruler’s domain, I must follow him in my actions. But I need not follow him in the beliefs of my heart” (MW–3, 171). By saying that he must “follow the ruler in his actions,” the Daishonin means that he has to endure persecution. By “I need not follow him in the beliefs of my heart,” he indicates that in his heart he is not defeated.

**Ikeda:** That is the spirit of forbearance. When the Daishonin was condemned to be exiled to desolate Sado Island, physically he abided by the government’s decree. But in his heart he possessed the vast state of life to be able to say, “I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile” (MW–1, 94).

A spirit of patience generates the greatest strength. If one has true courage one can endure any hardship. In the “Encouraging Devotion” (thirteenth) chapter, the metaphor “armor of perseverance” (LS13, 194) is used to describe that strength. “One Who Can Forbear” is another name for Buddha. Both Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin had tremendous powers of patience and forbearance.

**Endo:** The “Teacher of the Law” chapter emphasizes that the teachers of the Law will encounter persecution. The passage that the Daishonin read with his life, “since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?” (LS10, 164), is also found in this chapter.

**Suda:** This explains that the teachers of the Law meet with persecution because the Lotus Sutra is difficult to believe and difficult to understand. Because it is difficult to believe and understand, there was much hatred and jealousy aroused by it even in Shakyamuni’s day. This passage indicates that persecution will be even worse in the future.

**Ikeda:** It says, “how much more will this be so after his passing?” Why should there be more persecution after the Buddha’s passing than while he is alive?

“After his passing” refers to a time when the Buddha’s spirit has been forgotten and there is great turmoil and confusion in areas of religion and philosophy. In such an age, while people might appear to revere the Buddha, they forget the Buddha’s essential spirit; and while there are Buddhist schools, the spirit of the Buddha does not abide in them. In such a time, while there may be religions, they exist for the sake of religion and not for human beings. The Lotus Sutra was taught especially for the people of such an age.

The teachers of the Law propagate the Lotus Sutra, which conveys the Buddha’s spirit, in an age that has completely forgotten the spirit of the Buddha. Consequently, there is much hatred and jealousy toward them. In an age that has lost sight of humanity, it is no easy undertaking to campaign for a restoration of humanity.

**Suda:** In that sense, those who do not experience any difficulties are not truly propagating the Law. The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, for example, has never—either now or during the war — been persecuted.

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By contrast, from the time of its first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi to the present, the Soka Gakkai has been repeatedly attacked and persecuted. Truly, we are reading the Lotus Sutra with our lives. This is proof that our organization is indeed putting the spirit of the Buddha into practice.

**Saito:** Persecutions are always occasioned by scheming. In Shakyamuni's day, there was an unending succession of scandals stemming from fabrications and misrepresentations by those of malicious intent. To obliterate the Buddhist order, some heinous individuals went so far as to commit acts of murder and then try to pin the blame on Shakyamuni's followers.

**Suda:** In Nichiren Daishonin's case, Nembutsu followers and others committed murders and acts of arson in Kamakura, the capital, and then spread rumors that these crimes were the work of the Daishonin's followers. This resulted in the Daishonin being exiled to Sado Island. The Daishonin's followers were suppressed because those hostile to their activities had made them appear a "dangerous order." In any age, there is a similar pattern of persecution against those who uphold the correct Buddhist teaching.

**Endo:** Therefore, we cannot discard the "robe of forbearance."

**Ikeda:** Allow me to share another anecdote.<sup>9</sup> Once there was a Brahman who was upset that his wife had become a follower of Shakyamuni. Since his wife praised the Buddha so highly, he went to try and defeat him in debate. But instead of refuting Shakyamuni, the Brahman was so impressed by his preaching that he converted to Buddhism himself. His fellow Brahmans thought this scandalous. They stormed into the Jetavana Monastery,<sup>10</sup> and there heaped curses and abuse on Shakyamuni. What do you suppose Shakyamuni did in response?

**Endo:** I am intrigued. Please tell us.

**Ikeda:** Shakyamuni asked one of the Brahmans, "If a relative or friend came to your house, would you welcome him as a guest?"

"That's right," the Brahman replied. "I sometimes entertain guests."

"If the person does not accept the food that is provided for him, then to whom does it belong?" Shakyamuni continued.

"It naturally belongs to me, the head of the household."

"In the same way," Shakyamuni said, "if I do not accept the abuses that you hurl at me, then will not these return to you and become your own?"

**Suda:** He certainly knew how to touch a sensitive nerve with gentleness and forbearance!

**Endo:** When we put on the "robe of gentleness and forbearance," our hearts become impervious to negative words.

**Saito:** And to the extent that such words do not enter our hearts, they return to the people who uttered them in the first place, causing them to suffer.

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### 3) *The "Seat of the Emptiness of All Phenomena"*

**Endo:** Third, what is meant by "The 'Thus Come One's seat' is the emptiness of all phenomena?"

**Ikeda:** This refers to the Buddha's unrestricted wisdom. Everything is constantly undergoing change. All existence is impermanent, nonsubstantial.

The "Thus Come One's seat" indicates the Buddha's capacity to correctly perceive the true entity of all phenomena in the world, and his state of life that nothing can sway or upset.

**Suda:** This is easy to understand theoretically, but actually achieving such a state is no easy matter.

**Ikeda:** The Daishonin says, "The 'seat' means carrying out religious practice 'without begrudging one's life.' By carrying out such practice, one awakens to the 'emptiness of all phenomena'" (GZ, 737). Sitting in the seat of the emptiness of all phenomena, in other words, means taking selfless action.

People have the tendency to become attached to or caught up in various things. For example, they may be captivated by fame and social standing; and once they acquire these, they are loath to surrender them. And in some respects, that people behave in this way may be only natural. However, to sit in the seat of the emptiness of all phenomena means daring to overcome these egoistic attachments and selflessly exert oneself in faith, to devote one's life to *kosen-rufu*. The ultimate meaning of "emptiness" or "nonsubstantiality" is found in such faith.

This, of course, doesn't mean treating your life carelessly or thoughtlessly. Rather, it means using your precious life ungrudgingly for the sake of Buddhism.

**Saito:** From such a dedicated, selfless spirit arises the wisdom to help people become happy.

**Ikeda:** Exactly. A person of selfless dedication is one who can help others. I once asked President Toda, "When we do *shakubuku*, are we in a sense doing *shakubuku* to ourselves?" He replied:

The point is that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the very wellspring of our lives. Unless we have that realization, we cannot do true *shakubuku*. There isn't any special technique or method for doing *shakubuku*. In the Latter Day, *shakubuku* is a matter of determining: "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the sum and essence of my being!"<sup>11</sup>

He also once said, "The ultimate *shakubuku* is to determine that one's life itself is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." President Toda spoke these words with a resolute tone; it was the voice of someone who deeply wanted to help young people understand the truth.

"Determining that one's life is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" beautifully expresses the principle of the emptiness of all phenomena and the spirit of not begrudging one's life.

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I hope that all of you, with these words as your guide, will earnestly pursue the essence of faith. For it is this pursuit that constitutes true Buddhist study.

### The Practice of Compassion, Forbearance and Wisdom

**Suda:** We have discussed the three rules of preaching of robe, seat and room. The fact that the teacher of the Law dwells in the room of the Thus Come One, wears the robe of the Thus Come One and sits in the seat of the Thus Come One suggests that the teacher of the Law is equal to the Thus Come One.

Also it seems that, just as an ambassador of a country enacts that country's will, we could consider the actions of the "envoy of the Thus Come One" as equivalent to those of the Buddha.

**Ikeda:** That's a good analogy.

**Saito:** Don't these three rules also express virtues of the Buddha that teachers of the Law acquire by dedicating themselves to the great wish for the Lotus Sutra's propagation?

**Ikeda:** We can indeed understand the three rules in those terms. Nichiren Daishonin says:

The robe, seat and room represent to the Buddha's three bodies of the Dharma body, the bliss body and the manifested body; the three truths of nonsubstantiality, temporary existence and the Middle Way; and the three categories of action of deed, word and thought. (GZ, 737)

The Dharma body, bliss body and manifested body are the Buddha's virtues. Simply put, they correspond to truth, wisdom and compassion. Teachers of the Law are endowed with these virtues.

The Daishonin also says, "Now Nichiren and his followers who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo are fulfilling the three rules [of preaching represented by robe, seat and room] each moment of their lives" (GZ, 737).

In other words, through the practice of chanting and propagating the daimoku of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we attain the Buddha's virtues. We acquire these virtues through our determination in faith.

Even if we have no special ability, the important point is that our hearts brim with the joy of chanting the Mystic Law and the joy of sharing the Mystic Law with others.

Such joyful faith incorporates the rules of robe, seat and room, as well as the virtues of compassion, gentleness and wisdom.

**Saito:** The "Teacher of the Law" chapter stresses the importance of "for a moment thinking of the Lotus Sutra with joy" (cf. LS10, 160). It goes so far as to say that all people can attain Buddhahood if they simply hear about the Mystic Law and feel delight.

It also states, "these persons [teachers of the Law] delight in expounding the Law. And if one listens to them for even a moment, he will immediately attain the ultimate *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*" (LS10, 162). *Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* is a Sanskrit term meaning the Buddha's enlightenment.

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**Ikeda:** A teacher of the Law is originally a person who has heard the Lotus Sutra and felt delight. Others hear that teacher of the Law expound the Lotus Sutra and they, too, delight. The eternal path of attaining Buddhahood is thus a kind of chain reaction of joy.

Nichiren Daishonin says:

When I, Nichiren, first took faith in the Lotus Sutra, I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust in all the country of Japan. But later, when two people, three people, ten people, and eventually ten thousand billion people, come to recite the Lotus Sutra and transmit it to others, then they will form a Mount Sumeru of wonderful enlightenment,<sup>12</sup> a great ocean of nirvana! Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood! (MW-3, 172-73)

The SGI is taking action in exact accord with these words.

**Saito:** At the start of this discussion, you described the teacher of the Law as a spiritual leader who illuminates society in an age lacking philosophy. I think it's wonderful that in the SGI we believe that the people themselves are teachers of the Law.

**Endo:** In many established religions, the members of the clergy carry out propagation. Religious propagation often takes place at large gatherings; I hear in the United States, there is a great deal of proselytizing on television.

By contrast, the way of the SGI is "propagation *by* the people and *for* the people." Small gatherings such as discussion meetings are the main avenue for spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism, and the method is that of one-on-one dialogue. I think that this will become the pattern of propagation for religions in the twenty-first century.

**Suda:** Dr. Bryan Wilson, former president of the International Society of Religion, remarked in his dialogue with you, President Ikeda:

Personal contact certainly appears to be the most effective technique of mission [i.e., propagation of faith],... In a world in which everyone learns to grow cynical, for example, about advertising, the fact of personal genuineness may in itself be so refreshing that the message is more adequately communicated even by a relatively ignorant missionary than by a technically adroit media advertisement with absolutely authoritative information.<sup>13</sup>

**Ikeda:** That's right. It comes down to authenticity. Eloquence is not what matters. The important thing in propagation is genuine sincerity. President Toda often said, "When you do *shakubuku* you create lasting trust."

### Those Who Spread the Mystic Law Are Noble

**Endo:** When we consider the teachers of the Law in this light, we see that they deliberately seek to be born in an evil age out of their compassion.

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**Ikeda:** The “Teacher of the Law” chapter says that these envoys of the Buddha “freely choose where they will be born” (LS10, 163).

Nichiren Daishonin explains that someone who attains Buddhahood immediately returns to the realm of the nine worlds and again freely engages in efforts to lead people to enlightenment.

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

“Reaching the supreme Land of Tranquil Light unimpeded, in the space of a moment one will return to the midst of the dream of birth and death in the nine worlds. One’s body pervades the Dharma worlds in the ten directions and one’s mind enters the lives of all sentient beings. Impelled from within and drawn from without, in the harmony of [internal] cause and [external] relation, one freely exercises the transcendental power of compassion and widely brings benefit to living beings without any impediment.” (GZ, 574)

We ourselves willed to be born in this world of suffering. The Daishonin says, “Now Nichiren and his followers who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are great teachers among teachers” (GZ, 736). SGI members who make the Daishonin’s spirit their own and dedicate themselves to achieving kosen-rufu are “great teachers of the Law among teachers.”

When our present lives come to an end, we are reborn in this world “in the space of a moment.”

We might picture it something like this: We struggle hard in this life, and then go to Eagle Peak. There, somewhat winded after the journey, we report to the Daishonin: “I’ve come having fulfilled my mission!” The Daishonin commends us: “Good work! You really did a fine job!” He then asks, “Well, where do you want to go next?” There’s no time to even think about taking it easy for a while. Of course, those who really want to relax can do so! We’re completely free.

As the Daishonin indicates where he speaks of our freely exercising the “transcendental power of compassion,” out of compassion, in an instant we return again in vigorous spirits to a new sphere of mission. Death and rebirth are like going to sleep one day and waking up the next morning.

**Suda:** Out of pity and sympathy for those suffering, the teachers of the Law yearn to be born in an impure world. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China calls this “deliberately creating the appropriate karma.” The teachers of the Law are people who, because of the benefit they have accumulated from their Buddhist practice, could by rights be born in a “good land.” But they deliberately create the negative karma to be born in a world rife with evil so that they can spread Buddhism.

**Ikeda:** President Toda often said: “Someone who is too exemplary from the outset cannot go among the people. In order to spread Buddhism, we intentionally chose to be born as people who are poor or sick.” “Life is like appearing in a play,” he would say.

He also said, “I lost my wife, and my daughter died. My business failed. Because I have known such suffering, I could become president of the Soka Gakkai.”

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People who have not experienced painful struggles or suffering cannot understand the hearts of others. Only if one has tasted life's bitterness can one lead people to happiness.

To simply view your sufferings as "karma" is backward-looking. We should have the attitude: "These are sufferings I took on for the sake of my mission. I vowed to overcome these problems through faith."

When we understand this principle of "deliberately creating the appropriate karma," our frame of mind is transformed; what we had previously viewed as destiny, we come to see as mission. There is absolutely no way we cannot overcome sufferings that are the result of a vow that we ourselves made.

**Saito:** Nichiren Daishonin comments on the passage, "such persons ... have fulfilled their great vow, and because they take pity on living beings they have been born in this human world. . . . where they may broadly expound . . . the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law" (LS10, 161). He says:

The "great vow" refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. "Living beings" refers to all beings in the country of Japan. The persons who "are born in this human world" are Nichiren and his followers. "Broadly" means to expound the sutra throughout the southern continent of Jambudvīpa [i.e., the entire world]. "This sutra" refers to the daimoku. Now it is Nichiren and his followers who chant the daimoku, Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō. (GZ, 736)

The SGI members who are spreading the Mystic Law throughout the world truly accumulate immeasurable good fortune. They are genuine followers of the original Buddha born in this world to accomplish their mission for kosen-rufu.

**Ikeda:** Therefore, we should all respect one another as noble beings each with a profound mission to fulfill.

At the outset we talked about India. Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), the father of modern India, once said:

I do not want to be reborn, but if I have to be reborn I should be reborn an untouchable so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts leveled against them in order that I may endeavor to free myself and them from their miserable condition.<sup>14</sup>

In these sentiments, I sense something akin to the spirit of "deliberately creating the appropriate karma." It's a matter of compassion, of living for and together with others. It is the desire to be born among those who are suffering the most.

The Buddha is to be found among those who are suffering the most. Buddhism exists to enable those suffering the most to become the happiest. The "Teacher of the Law" chapter explains the sublime temperament of spiritual leaders who devote themselves to, and live out their lives among, the people.

*Illustrations by Larry Ashton*

*(To be continued)*

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1. "Address to the Joint Session of the Japanese Diet (Parliament)," Tokyo, November 29, 1985.
2. Nikken: Current high priest of Nichiren Shoshu.
3. *Kalpa*: An extremely long period of time deriving from the ancient Indian tradition. The length of a kalpa is defined in various ways. According to one method of reckoning, a medium *kalpa* would equal nearly sixteen million years.
4. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, p. 466.
5. Four great voice-hearer disciples: Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Katyayana and Subhuti.
6. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, p. 120.
7. This episode and related dialogue are translated from Japanese. *Nanden Daizokyo*, ed. Junjiro Takakusu (Tokyo: Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo Kanko-kai, 1971), vol. 10, pp. 140–156. cf. *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikaya)*, vol. II, trans. I. B. Horner (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. 38–49.
8. Jainism: An Indian religion that stresses nonviolence and not killing any forms of life, and teaches the liberation of the soul by right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.
9. This episode and related dialogue are translated from Japanese. *Nanden Daizokyo*, ed. Jujiro Takakusu (Tokyo: Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo Kanako-kai, 1971), vol. 12, pp. 276–77. cf. *The Book of Kindred Sayings (Sanyutta-Nikaya)*, Part I, trans Mrs. Rhys Davids (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), pp. 201–02.
10. Jetavana Monastery: A monastery in Shravasti where Shakyamuni is said to have lived and taught during the rainy season for the last twenty-five years of his life. It was built as an offering by Sudatta on land provided by Prince Jetri. Along with the Bamboo Grove Monastery in Rajagriha, it was once one of the two main centers of the Buddha's propagation activities.
11. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, p. 466–67.
12. Wonderful enlightenment: *Myogaku*, the last of the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice, indicating the state of Buddhahood.
13. Daisaku Ikeda and Bryan Wilson, *Human Values in a Changing World* (Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1987), p. 132.
14. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1950), p. 144.