

**“Embracing the Lotus Sutra”
Means Recognizing the Infinite Worth of Each Person’s Life
Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 18**

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

In this installment, they discuss the seven treasures adorning the Treasure Tower, and the principles of the “three transformations of the land” and their relation to the three illusions, “the six difficult and nine easy acts” and the “three pronouncements” related in the “Emergence of the Treasure Tower” (eleventh) chapter.

Katsuji Saito: The more I think about the Treasure Tower, the more strongly I sense that it teaches those of us in the present age something of fundamental importance. Symbolically, it proclaims: “The human being definitely is not insignificant and powerless.”

People today, by and large, are satisfied neither with their lives nor with the state of the world. A feeling of powerlessness seems to predominate. People are asking themselves, “But what can I possibly do to change things?” A sense of futility and despair is casting a dark shadow over their inner lives and over society. This, perhaps, is the basic dilemma of the modern era, isn’t it?

Daisaku Ikeda: You’ve raised a vital issue. The problem is particularly acute in the so-called advanced countries. In the United States, for example, there are signs that, increasingly, young people are suffering and having problems in life on account of low self-esteem. In many cases, these young people so despise themselves that, in order to escape their pain, they resort to habitual drug use.

Takanori Endo: They don’t realize their inherent worth. And if people cannot treasure themselves, how can they ever treasure others?

Ikeda: It is a great tragedy to see one’s own life and the lives of others as inconsequential. In our modern society, everything has been, as it were, magnified to colossal proportions. The human spirit, laboring under the immense “mass” and “weight” of society, groans in despair. As early as the 1960s Norman Cousins, who was known as the conscience of America, wrote about this.

[Dr. Cousins’ dialogue with the SGI president has been published in Japanese under the title *Sekai Shimin no Taiwa* (Dialogue toward Global Harmonization).]¹

In one place, he wrote:

In traveling around the United States, I have been made aware of a melancholy tension. The questions people ask are not related to their personal incomes or the need to find better ways to amuse themselves. They want to know how to overcome their sense of personal futility on the big issues.²

Haruo Suda: The possibility of nuclear war and ensuing feelings of vulnerability

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must have weighed heavily on people's spirits at that time.

Ikeda: The nuclear threat was but one symbol of the insecurity people were feeling.

In the past, the "world" people were aware of was quite circumscribed. When a problem arose in their local city or village, they could readily grasp it, directly express their views on the matter and influence the outcome of events. But now people have become anonymous citizens of vast countries. They are becoming more and more aware that their destiny is inextricably linked with the destiny of the entire human race. While people worry about the direction in which their country as well as humankind as a whole are heading, they are uncertain as to how they can express their personal views on such matters or what kind of action to take in order to influence outcomes. And even where they find they can do something, they are not confident their efforts will truly help improve things in the world. This is the predicament people find themselves in today.

Dr. Cousins argues, "There can be no more important education today than education for personal effectiveness and a sense of connection with big events."³ This of course applies to the education one receives in school, but that is not all. I regard the popular movement we in the SGI are developing as social education in a broad sense. It is a movement to empower people by showing them that, through their efforts, they can definitely change the world. And it is a movement to develop a solidarity of people who aim to do this.

Saito: That's a good example of what we call "actual *ichinen sanzen*."⁴ Nichiren Daishonin said, "It is from this single entity of life that the differences among lands arise" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 563). In other words, he teaches that it is within the power of each of us to change the world we live in.

The Treasure Tower symbolizes the greatness of each person's life. The individual is a microcosm living in exquisite harmony with the macrocosm. Surely there is no greater joy than realizing that our lives exist in a state of oneness and indivisibility with the vast universe.

Ikeda: Speaking of the microcosm, we know that the human body is made up of the same chemical elements as the universe. Similarly, when you examine the constituent elements of the seven treasures that adorn the Treasure Tower you'll find that each one also exists in our bodies.

Endo: That's right. I did a little research on the seven treasures. In the Buddhist scholar Kumarajiva's Chinese translation of the sutra, the seven treasures are gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl and carnelian. Of these, gold, silver, agate and pearl are well-known gems and precious metals. Lapis lazuli is a semiprecious stone with a deep azure color. "Seashell" means the shell of a giant clam. Carnelian is a translucent quartz; Chinese carnelian, by the way, is said to be very rare.

Saito: The list varies from text to text. For example, in the Sanskrit text of the Lotus Sutra, the seven treasures include coral, amber and crystal.

Endo: Nonetheless, of the seven treasures, the basic component of lapis lazuli, agate and carnelian is silicon. Silicon is absolutely essential for the development of the human body;

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it is needed for the formation and growth of the skeletal system. And the main component of pearl and agate is calcium, which we know plays a very important role in building bones and teeth.

I also discovered that agate shows a variety of different hues depending on the kind of metal in which it is set. In iron, it has a reddish hue; in cobalt, it is blue; and in chrome, it appears green. These metals are all indispensable for the proper maintenance of our lives: iron for carrying oxygen in the blood, cobalt for building blood cells, and chromium for the metabolism of sugar and fat.

Other metals required by our bodies include copper, zinc, tin, manganese and nickel. And our bodies may also require gold, mercury and some other metals.

Ikeda: That's fascinating. You are quite right when you say our lives are literally "treasures."

Hydrogen, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen are the most common elements in the human body. The metals that you mentioned, maintained in precise equilibrium, support the microcosm of our lives.

Suda: Regarding blood, I understand that the total length of blood vessels in the human body is an astounding 96,000 kilometers (60,000 miles). That's two-and-a-half times the circumference of the Earth. It's hard to believe that such a great distance is contained within one's body.

Ikeda: In "The Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas of Past, Present and Future,"⁵ Nichiren Daishonin elaborates on the statement by the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China, "Our bodies each take the form of heaven and earth." He says, for example, "Our blood flow is like rivers and streams" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 567). Our lives, in other words, mirror the natural world.

Saito: Buddhism is truly universal in scope. The Daishonin also says, "Our eyes are like the sun and the moon, their opening and closing is like day and night" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 567).

Ikeda: "Our eyes are like the sun and the moon." While this might at first seem far-fetched, if we stop to think about it we can see the reasoning.

Goethe (1749–1832) cites an ancient saying to the effect that: "Were they not sun-akin, our eyes, / To sunlight's glory they'd be blind."⁶ He further observes, "Nothing's outside that's not within."⁷

Nichiren Daishonin, in discussing the words of Miao-lo that I just mentioned, explains that to know oneself is to know all things in the universe. When you change, your environment changes, too. When your spirit or *ichinen* changes, everything is transformed. This is the principle of *ichinen sanzen*. This principle is summed up by Goethe's maxim "Nothing's outside that's not within."

Suda: Buddhism explains that a "law" or "reason" pervades all life and the entire universe. Scientists, influenced in part by Goethe, have considered this from the standpoint of the physical manifestation of life. Goethe observed that plant parts are all helical or spiral shaped. He noted, for example, the way in which bindweed winds around the plants among which they grow, and how the white birch tree rotates

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around its central axis.

The same spiral pattern is evident in the shell of a shellfish, the horns of sheep and oxen, and elephant tusks. Blood vessels are also woven from spiral-shaped fibers. In the submicroscopic world, DNA, which carries our genetic information, has the structure of a double helix. And in the macrosphere, a similar spiral or “whirlpool” shape can be seen in tornadoes and typhoons, as well as star nebulae.

Endo: The same pattern is found in whirlpools created by tidal currents. Since ancient times, the spiral seems to have symbolized life force, growth and evolution. One researcher propounds the view that the spiral, because it is produced by the repetition of similar phenomena, is an expression of rhythm.⁸

Ikeda: There certainly is rhythm in the universe. And the rhythm of the life of an individual pulsates in perfect harmony with it. It seems to me that life, in essence, is an expression of a sympathetic resonance between the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of our lives.

In terms of “rhythm,” the universe itself produces a kind of cosmic rhythm. It is a compassionate rhythm that enables all living things to grow and advance. You might even call it a “wavelength” of compassion. Living beings are “receivers” that can intercept this wavelength. No matter where we are, when we “tune in” to the “frequency” of Buddhahood, our lives are embraced in this compassionate melody infusing us with the spirit to realize growth in our lives and help others do the same.

We could also use the image of a tuning fork to describe this phenomenon. If you have two tuning forks of the same wavelength and you ring one, then the other tuning fork, even if it is at some distance from the first, will start ringing spontaneously.

Saito: What you’ve described is the acoustical phenomenon of resonance.

Ikeda: Yes. To continue the analogy, when the tuning fork of our lives begins to ring with compassion, then, even if at first we are all alone, other tuning forks will start to ring with the same compassion. And though at first perhaps only two or three will catch the rhythm, others will definitely follow. Compassion has a certain “wavelength”; but some person has to be the first to sound it. However, a tuning fork will not ring if it is left lying on its side; to produce a sound, it must stand upright. The same is true with our lives.

In the “Treasure Tower” chapter, the gathering of the Buddhas in the ten directions is like so many tuning forks starting to ring in unison in response to the reverberations of the tuning fork of Shakyamuni’s spirit “to make certain the Law will long endure” (LS11, 177)⁹. This is a grand illustration of the principle of sympathetic resonance.

The Three Transformations of the Land

Shakyamuni Buddha, in order to provide seats for all the Buddhas that were arriving, once more transformed two hundred ten thousand million nayutas¹⁰ of lands in each of the eight directions, making them all clean and pure and without hells, hungry spirits, beasts or asuras. He also moved all the heavenly and human beings to another region. ... the whole area comprising a single Buddha land, a jeweled region level and smooth. (LS11, 174)

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Saito: That's a wonderful image. To cause his emanations who were preaching the Law in the worlds of the ten directions to return and gather together in one place, Shakyamuni transforms and purifies the strife-ridden *saha* world¹¹ three times. This is the origin of the term the *three transformations of the land*. The term expresses the transformation of the realm of the environment. The first transformation is when Shakyamuni changes and then purifies the *saha* world. As he does so, he moves all the human and heavenly beings dwelling there to another region, with the exception of those in the assembly where the Lotus Sutra is being expounded.

But the number of the Buddha's emanations in the ten directions is so great that they cannot all fit in the *saha* world. To accommodate them, Shakyamuni next transforms and purifies two hundred ten thousand million *nayutas* of other lands in each of the eight directions,¹² and moves the heavenly and human beings living there to another world. He then joins these several lands together to form a single Buddha land. This is the second transformation. The third transformation occurs when Shakyamuni transforms and purifies an additional two hundred ten thousand million *nayutas* of lands in the eight directions, removing the heavenly and human beings in those lands to another region. He also made each of those worlds part of the one great Buddha land.

When the transformations were complete, the Buddhas of the ten directions filled the four hundred ten thousand million *nayutas* of lands that Shakyamuni had purified and consolidated into one land. This is the three transformations of the land.

Ikeda: It's interesting that he moves the heavenly and human beings in these lands to other regions. I would imagine that various interpretations of this would be possible.

Suda: One interpretation is that those heavenly and human beings are among the beings of the six paths.¹³ Because beings transmigrating in the six paths are deluded, they cannot see the Buddha land that Shakyamuni created when he transformed and purified the *saha* world. This, perhaps, is what is meant when the text says they were "moved to another region." Unless you yourself change, things won't look any different.

Endo: Similarly, although the world is changing rapidly in the post-Cold War era, many people, particularly here in Japan, it would seem, are still caught up in outmoded ways of thinking reminiscent of the Cold War.

Saito: In the *Hokke Mongu*,¹⁴ the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China says that Shakyamuni effects the three purifications through *samadhi*.

Ikeda: The Sanskrit word *samadhi* means to settle and focus the mind; in other words, to meditate. From our standpoint, *samadhi* means establishing an unalterable state of life, or *ichinen*; constructing a sound and stable "inner realm" that nothing can disturb. In that sense, the principle of the three transformations not only speaks to the transformation of the land; it also addresses the transformation of one's own inner state of life.

Restoring People's Ailing Lives to Health

Saito: I recall that in the "War and Reconciliation" chapter of the fifth volume of *The Human Revolution*, you explain the principle of the three transformations through a very familiar example.

You presented the hypothetical case of two families that had been closely related for many generations; let's call them the Saitos and Endos. The two families were next-door neighbors. But their ancestors had quarreled, so for many years they didn't speak to one another. In the meantime, the Endo family formed a new relation with another family; let's call them the Sudas, who lived a thousand miles away. The Endos and Sudas became very good friends.

In time, the Saito and Endo families' memory of their ancestors' animosity faded, and gradually they felt the desire to forgive and forget. However, the Endo family, out of fear of offending their new friends the Sudas, simply could not find it in themselves to reach out to the Saitos in friendship. Naturally this upset the Saitos very much.

Now what would have happened, you asked, if at this point the neighboring Saitos and the Endos had simply let bygones be bygones and embraced one another in friendship? The environment would have changed completely. And the three families could have begun a harmonious relationship. Such a change, you explained, illustrates the principle of the transformation of the land. This is the basic outline.

Endo: You [President Ikeda] suggested that Japan and China were in the predicament of the neighboring families, and that the United States was like Japan's new friend from afar. You were making the case that Japan should develop friendly relations with China. At the time when you wrote this, Japan and China on the one hand, and China and the United States on the other were in great conflict. I recall how truly inspired I felt when I read your words.

Ikeda: Even in international relations, human beings are the key. Countries are gatherings of people, and they are created by people. It is impossible, therefore, that people could be unable to change them. Moreover, one must realize that the state exists for the sake of the people, not the other way around.

On account of various "enthrallments," people have lost sight of this simple and clear fact. Enthrilled by self-righteous ideologies, by concern over petty profit and loss, by emotionalism, by erroneous ideas and prejudice, and, fundamentally, by ignorance about human nature and life itself, people shut themselves up in their own narrow worlds.

Only when we cut the chains of these attachments can we respect other people as human beings and begin to conduct truly humanistic dialogue.

Saito: When you visited the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War, President Ikeda, many people criticized you. Undaunted, you said: "I will go there, because there are people there." And you set to work building a bridge of friendship.

At the time, it seemed as though the conflict between China and the Soviet Union would continue indefinitely. And as a matter of fact, I heard that your visit to the Soviet Union drew criticism from the Chinese, too. Still, you maintained your conviction, asserting that China and the Soviet Union would definitely mend their relations. Things turned out exactly as you said. Your tremendous faith in human nature prevailed over what were seemingly insurmountable odds.

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I think it's about changing mistrust into trust. This is easy to say, but extremely difficult to put into practice.

Ikeda: If you consistently take action in the arenas of power based on humanism, you are certain to encounter difficulties. This is an example of the principle of "the six difficult and nine easy acts" that we find in the "Treasure Tower" chapter.

Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner, president of the Club of Rome, has suggested that while we may say that the Earth is sick, the real problem is that the human beings who inhabit the Earth are sick. The three transformations indicates making the world, the Earth, healthy by restoring the ailing lives of its people to health.

The Three Categories of Illusion

Suda: In the *Hokke Mongu*, T'ien-t'ai correlates the three transformations of the land with the three categories of illusion, which are illusions of thought and desire, illusions as innumerable as particles of dust and sand, and illusion about the true nature of existence. The three transformations of the land in effect eradicate the three illusions.

Illusions of thought, by the way, are mistaken views. While illusions of desire arise from the three poisons, namely, greed, anger and stupidity.

Endo: Blaming sufferings on someone or something outside oneself is an example of an illusion of thought. When we realize that the causes for everything that happens to us are within our own lives, we have defeated this illusion of thought.

Saito: Broadly speaking, feeling prejudice toward others or judging people on the basis of social class can also be considered an illusion of thought.

Ikeda: Indeed. When we view people in this way, we are indiscriminately accepting images that other people over time have intentionally created. And when we readily rely on images without trying to open our hearts and discern the truth for ourselves, we quickly succumb to prejudice. Once we become biased, it is human nature to become attached to those biases and reluctant to surrender them. This is another type of illusion of thought.

Suda: By contrast, it could be said that illusions of desire are impurities nesting still more deeply in life. These illusions cloud our eyes to the truth.

Ikeda: These illusions could be described as distortions of life itself. They distort the mirror of the heart in which other people are reflected, giving us a skewed image of others.

Needless to say, the poisons of stupidity, greed and anger destroy human relations. And they have a similarly deleterious effect on relations between countries. Ultimately, illusions of thought and desire produce nothing but prejudice and hatred. In such a frame of mind, you cannot conduct open-hearted dialogue with anyone; nor will others approach you with open hearts.

Saito: The second transformation of the land signifies the purification of the illusions

as innumerable as particles of dust and sand. These illusions afflict bodhisattvas. They are the countless worries that arise when they struggle to help others become happy.

Ikeda: That's right. This is something SGI members all experience. Before taking faith, we struggle earnestly just to overcome our own worries and sufferings. But after taking faith, we increasingly come to worry about the well-being of others. For example, we may worry about how to encourage someone who is sick. These are noble worries.

Endo: There are even instances where, for example, in trying to intervene in a marital dispute, it may happen that, ironically, we end up suffering while the couple becomes happy.

Ikeda: For people who embrace the Mystic Law, to worry about friends and pray for their happiness comes naturally. Without hesitation, SGI members dive right into the reality of the *saha* world, with all its conflict, to come to the aid of people who are suffering. Yet we should not forget just how noble such efforts are.

The sutra says that in the second and third transformations Shakyamuni purifies two hundred ten thousand million *nayutas* of lands in the eight directions. This is the very image of the expansion of kosen-rufu.

SGI members dare to take on this most difficult work for those who are struggling the hardest. And by their actions, they are constructing "cities of tranquil light" in all parts of the world. As a result of their encouragement, friends who had been in the depths of suffering stand up and enact a "drama of revitalization" based on the Mystic Law. This itself is the splendid transformation of an "impure land" filled with suffering into a "pure land" pervaded with joy.

Saito: Each person's human revolution can fundamentally transform the destiny of an entire country.

Ikeda: Put into words, the transformation of the land may sound static; but since it comes about through individuals earnestly grappling with reality, it is actually a highly dynamic principle. As the sutra indicates where it says, "The *saha* world thereupon immediately changed into a place of cleanness and purity" (LS11, 173), the pure land is not to be found in some other world. Rather, this world itself becomes the land of tranquil light.

Put succinctly, the Buddha's land is a place where many human Treasure Towers are constructed, where everyone shines as a "tower of treasure." The appearance of forests of these Treasure Towers creates the Buddha's land.

Endo: The third transformation represents the eradication of illusion about the true nature of existence.

Ikeda: Illusion about the true nature of existence is literally illusion about the nature of one's own life. This is the fundamental source of all illusions. If we are ignorant about the nature of our own existence, then we will be ignorant about the nature of other people's lives, too.

On the other hand, when our lives are free of illusion, we can perceive the Treasure

Tower that shines resplendent in all people, in all beings. Such an “open heart” is the nature of enlightenment. The “closed heart” that prevents us from seeing the Treasure Tower is ignorance about the nature of life, or “darkness.” This is the crux of the problem.

In the future I hope we can discuss darkness and enlightenment from various angles. But for the time being, why don't we consider their relation to the six difficult and nine easy acts in light of the “Treasure Tower” chapter?

Since propagating the Lotus Sutra is ultimately a struggle to overcome the fundamental darkness in our own lives, it is the most difficult of all tasks. And since this is also a struggle against the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, in carrying out this work we are sure to meet with obstacles.

The Six Difficult and Nine Easy Acts

The other sutras
number as many as Ganges sands,
but though you expound those sutras,
that is not worth regarding as difficult.
If you were to seize Mount Sumeru
and fling it far off
to the measureless Buddha lands,
that too would not be difficult.
If you used the toe of your foot
to move the thousand-millionfold world,
booting it far away to other lands,
that too would not be difficult.
If you stood in the Summit of Being heaven
and for the sake of the assembly
preached countless other sutras,
that too would not be difficult.
But if after the Buddha has entered extinction,
in the time of evil,
you can preach this sutra,
that will be difficult indeed!
(LS11, 178–79)

Suda: To begin with, the principle of the six difficult and nine easy acts, literally referring to six difficult and nine easy tasks, is indicative of just how difficult it will be to propagate the Mystic Law after Shakyamuni's death.

Saito: In the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly cites the sutra passage describing the six difficult and nine easy acts, and indicates that it has special relevance to himself.

Ikeda: In “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin goes so far as to say, “If a person fulfills the teaching of ‘the six difficult and nine easy acts’ of the Lotus Sutra, then, even though he may not have read the entire body of sutras, all should follow him” (MW-2, 151 [175]15). He indicates that just as all the “river gods” follow the “lord of

ocean," and as all "mountain gods" follow the "lord of Mount Sumeru," all Buddhas and bodhisattvas follow the Daishonin, who read the teaching of the six difficult and nine easy acts with his entire being and thereby attained mastery of all sutras.

The Lotus Sutra is the king of all sutras. And the essence of its practice lies in the teaching of the six difficult and nine easy acts. One who internalizes this teaching therefore walks the supreme path in life.

Saito: Why don't we consider the six difficult and nine easy acts in terms of the flow of the "Treasure Tower" chapter? The three transformations have taken place and all of the Buddhas have assembled. Shakyamuni and Many Treasures (Jp. Taho) Buddha have taken their places within the Treasure Tower, and all beings in the assembly have been raised into the air. The stage has been set, and the Ceremony in the Air at last begins.

Shakyamuni first says:

Who is capable of broadly preaching the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law in this saha world? Now is the time to do so, for before long the Thus Come One will enter nirvana. The Buddha wishes to entrust this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law to someone so that it may be preserved. (LS11, 176)

Endo: Starting with this first exhortation, in the "Treasure Tower" chapter Shakyamuni calls out three times to the bodhisattvas urging them to spread the teaching after his death.

Ikeda: In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin refers to this as the "three pronouncements."

Suda: In the second pronouncement, Shakyamuni clarifies that the reason why Many Treasures Buddha has appeared and Shakyamuni's emanations in the ten directions have gathered is "to make certain the Law will long endure" (LS11, 177). And the third time, he issues his exhortation after revealing the extreme difficulty of propagating the Lotus Sutra in the future by explaining the six difficult and nine easy acts.

Ikeda: In this light, it is plain that the Ceremony in the Air is "for the time after the Buddha's passing." Shakyamuni, Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions unanimously urge that the true teaching be spread in the future. That is the purpose for the creation of such a magnificent stage.

Endo: The nine easy acts are as follows: (1) to teach innumerable sutras other than the Lotus Sutra; (2) to take up Mount Sumeru and hurl it to the measureless Buddha lands; (3) to kick the entire thousand-millionfold world (major world system) into another quarter with one's toe; (4) to stand in the highest heaven and preach innumerable sutras other than the Lotus Sutra; (5) to grasp the sky with one's hand and travel around with it; (6) to place the earth on one's toenail and ascend to the Brahma heaven; (7) to walk across a burning prairie carrying a bundle of dry grass on one's back without being burned; (8) to preach eighty-four thousand teachings and enable one's listeners to obtain the six transcendental powers; and (9) to enable

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innumerable people to reach the stage of arhat and acquire the six supernatural powers.

Suda: One tends to wonder just what is easy about these things; or if it's perhaps not some kind of mistake, and that these are actually supposed to be the "nine difficult acts."

Saito: We can classify these nine into two groups: "physical" and "doctrinal." The second, third, fifth, sixth and seventh are physical tasks, and the first, fourth, eighth, and ninth are primarily doctrinal. The point is that they are all "easy" compared to the six difficult acts.

Ikeda: The reason for their inclusion is of course to illustrate by contrast the great challenge of the six difficult acts. Even so, it cannot be said that they are subjective or exaggerated. I think this formulation contains profound meaning.

Endo: The six difficult acts are as follows: (1) to preach the Lotus Sutra, (2) to write out and embrace it and cause others to write it out, (3) to read this sutra even for a little while, (4) to embrace this sutra and expound it to even one person, (5) to listen to and accept this sutra and ask about its meaning, and (6) to honor and embrace faith in it after the Buddha's death.

In short, it is extremely difficult to carry out the practice of the Lotus Sutra for oneself and others in the Latter Day of the Law.

Ikeda: Do you know why this is?

It's partly because the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law is the Great Pure Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. There is also an important distinction when it comes to spreading the Law; only Bodhisattvas of the Earth can carry out the practice of the Mystic Law. Furthermore, those who practice the Lotus Sutra are certain to encounter great difficulties. That's probably the key point.

In the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings), Nichiren Daishonin, addressing Shakyamuni's statement in the "Treasure Tower" chapter that "This sutra is hard to uphold" (LS11, 180), says, "Those who embrace this Lotus Sutra should be prepared to meet with difficulties" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 742).

Saito: "This Lotus Sutra" means the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day. And "embrace" means to devote one's life to the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

Endo: Only those who endure persecution on behalf of the Law and persevere in its propagation truly "embrace the Mystic Law." If people merely read the sutra, while failing to spread the teaching and running away from difficulties, they are not "embracing the Lotus Sutra."

Saito: In that sense, SGI members are genuinely carrying out the extremely difficult practice of "embracing the Lotus Sutra" in the modern age, after the example of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founding president, who died upholding the teaching.

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Conquering Fundamental Darkness

Ikeda: In light of the six difficult and nine easy acts, we understand just how terrifically challenging it is to dedicate one's life to kosen-rufu.

Without relying on power, authority or wealth, SGI members have, by their own efforts, spread the great teaching that can enable all people to attain enlightenment to 128 countries and territories around the world. Nichiren Daishonin no doubt praises this most highly. Shakyamuni, Many Treasures and the Buddhas of the ten directions surely all send their applause.

Suda: Because these acts are so difficult, immediately after Shakyamuni attained enlightenment he hesitated, unsure of whether or not to expound the Law. In the Goshō, the Daishonin also describes feeling some uncertainty before establishing his teaching.

The Daishonin says he realized that if he uttered so much as a word about the fundamental cause of human misery, then without a doubt not only he himself, but his parents, siblings and even his mentor would suffer persecution at the hands of the ruler. On the other hand, he knew that if he failed to do so he would be lacking in compassion.

The Daishonin worried about whether he should speak out or hold his tongue. He realized, in light of passages in the Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra, that if he did not tell people the truth, then, while he might not suffer any negative consequences in his present life, in the future he would be certain to fall into the hell of incessant suffering. On the other hand, if he spoke out then the three obstacles and four devils would attack him. Taking these considerations into account, the Daishonin resolved to propagate his teaching.

He knew that if he lacked the fortitude to follow through when persecuted by the ruler, then he would be better off not saying anything from the start. It is said that at that time the Daishonin recollected the principle of the six difficult and nine easy acts in the "Treasure Tower" chapter.

Endo: With the six difficult and nine easy acts in mind, Nichiren Daishonin made his great determination. He says, "I vowed to summon up a powerful and unconquerable desire for the salvation of all beings, and never to falter in my efforts" (MW-2, 96 [114]). The question here is why difficulties arise when someone spreads the Lotus Sutra.

Suda: There are two reasons: the Lotus Sutra is the "sutra of shakubuku," and it is the teaching expounded in accord with the Buddha's own mind. In other words, in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha expresses his enlightenment just as it is, without modifying his explanation or accommodating it to the understanding or capacity of others. In that sense, it's only natural that this teaching should provoke a strong reaction.

Saito: It is certainly true, as the saying goes, that good medicine is bitter to the taste. History offers countless examples of instances where speaking the truth has invited strong condemnation. Many pioneering individuals, including scientists such as Galileo, encountered persecution that in some cases even cost them their lives.

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Endo: Those in power will deny and fiercely react against even the plainest truth if it threatens to destroy the status quo.

Suda: There is a famous story about how Galileo, upon being sentenced to life imprisonment by the Inquisition, mumbled under his breath, "But it [the earth] does move."¹⁶ Eager to crush Galileo's assertions were both the authority of the Church and the proponents of Scholasticism, a movement to force philosophy into reconcilability with church doctrine, providing the ideological moorings of the society.

Ikeda: When we talk about ideology, it sounds very complex. But the truth is that any society and any age have a worldview and set of values that form people's consciousness. When something contradicts this worldview or system of values, there will be an opposing reaction. We find examples of this in both present and past, East and West.

Suda: This is something Descartes (1596–1650), who challenged the metaphysical view of the universe associated with Scholasticism, also encountered. When he wrote *The World*, he feared he would be punished just as Galileo had because it contained Copernican theory. So he did not make it public.

Ikeda: That's normal. Everyone prizes his or her own life. But the Lotus Sutra says that unless this Great Law is revealed and spread, humankind will remain shrouded in darkness. Therefore, the Daishonin made a firm resolution. Only those who do "not hesitate even if it costs them their lives" are votaries of Lotus Sutra.

However, this in itself cannot account for the extreme difficulty of the six difficult acts. In fact, the Lotus Sutra is not the only sutra to discuss difficulties. In this connection, we are better served if we focus on the problem of the fundamental darkness inherent in human life, to which we referred a little earlier.

The Lotus Sutra, remember, is the "teaching for transforming life." It articulates the Great Law for conquering fundamental darkness or ignorance. Fundamental darkness is the underlying illusion inherent in life. While there are various points of view, Nichiren Daishonin says that "fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven" (MW-3, 279). In the "Letter to the Brothers" he wrote:

In each case, the Devil of the Sixth Heaven possessed these Buddhist scholars in order to deceive the believers.... The devil of fundamental darkness can even enter the life of a bodhisattva who has reached the highest stage of practice and prevent him from attaining the Lotus Sutra's ultimate blessing—Buddhahood itself. Thus he can easily obstruct those in any lower stage of practice. (MW-1, 136–37)

Saito: A bodhisattva at the highest stage of practice has attained a level of enlightenment equal to that of the Buddha. The Daishonin is saying that even bodhisattvas at this stage have not yet conquered their fundamental darkness. Put another way, whether someone has conquered fundamental darkness or not determines whether that person has truly attained Buddhahood.

Endo: Both passages explain that fundamental darkness manifests as the "Devil of

the Sixth Heaven” and functions to obstruct the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven, the “king who makes free use of the fruits of others’ efforts for his own pleasure,” is so called because it dwells in the highest of the six heavens of the world of desire. We could think of it as the embodiment of the “devilish nature of power.”

Ikeda: The Devil of the Sixth Heaven can be thought of as the fundamental tendency to seek to use everyone and everything as a means. In a sense, this is a natural inclination that all beings possess. By contrast, to actively seek to support other people and improve our environment is extremely difficult. Compassion, love of humanity, the spirit to serve others—these are wonderful qualities; but manifesting them in our actions is extremely difficult.

The universe and one’s own life are in essence one. Even though people may understand this intellectually, usually they fail to grasp it in the depths of their lives. This could be termed fundamental darkness. Because of this ignorance about the true nature of life, people try to make everything and everyone in the universe serve them, to turn them into a means. This is the function of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, of the devilish nature of power.

The Lotus Sutra explains that the self is one with the universe. The practice of the Lotus Sutra is the practice of compassion. It is to respect and revere everyone as a Treasure Tower, and to become happy conjointly with others in accord with the principle of the oneness of self and others, while overcoming the various difficulties we face.

In the course of carrying out this practice, we will definitely have to battle our own fundamental darkness. And because by our efforts we are stimulating and activating the fundamental darkness in other people’s lives, we are sure to encounter difficulties.

Those in positions of power are not the only ones influenced by the devilish nature of power. As indicated by the line, “the Devil of the Sixth Heaven possessed these Buddhist scholars in order to deceive the believers,” spiritual leaders who are revered in society may also brandish the devilish nature of power.

Saito: Such people represent the third of the three powerful enemies.¹⁷

Ikeda: Great persecutions usually result from the collusion of evil authorities and corrupt spiritual leaders. This holds true in the past and present, as it will in the future.

Endo: That’s perfectly consistent with how, in making the *saha* world a land of tranquil light through the “three transformations,” Shakyamuni ultimately has to battle ignorance and illusion about the true nature of existence.

Saito: T’ien-t’ai’s doctrine of the “three obstacles and four devils” originally referred to obstructions and negative functions that emerge from the depths of life in the process of developing “inner sight.” In order to embody the principle of *ichinen sanzen*, that is, to attain the awareness that our mind or life-moment is one with the universe, we have to overcome the seven inner obstacles and negative functions (i.e., three obstacles and four devils). In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, this inner struggle is often played out in dynamic terms as a battle to defeat devils and obstacles that

arise from without in the course of one's Buddhist practice.

Suda: "Embracing the Lotus Sutra" is the key to winning in the struggle against fundamental darkness and the devilish nature of power. Therefore, in the broadest sense, it is truly "difficult."

Ikeda: In terms of difficulty, both the "physical" and the "doctrinal" tasks of the nine "easy" acts pale by comparison.

Endo: The physical tasks sound impossible, but when you examine them carefully, you see that they are all superficial. It may even be that the advancement of scientific technology has already brought some of them quite into the realm of possibility.

Ikeda: The point is that changing the inner world is far more difficult than changing the outer world. That's what the doctrine of the six difficult and nine easy acts teaches.

Suda: Regarding the doctrinal tasks, teaching and spreading sutras other than the Lotus Sutra is "easy" because these teachings do not enable one to conquer fundamental darkness.

Ikeda: We should be careful not to overly restrict the concepts of fundamental darkness and the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. The Lotus Sutra explains that fundamental darkness and the nature of enlightenment are in essence one.

The Daishonin says that even the devil king has both "body" and "function." The "body" is the devil king inherent in life in terms of the "oneness of darkness and enlightenment." The "function" is the devil king of the sixth heaven as the function of life that derives from this essence (cf. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 843). But why don't we take this up in detail another time?

Since darkness and enlightenment are essentially one, ultimately even the devil king functions to protect Buddhism. The Lotus Sutra says, "although the devil and the devil's people will be there, they will all protect the Law of the Buddha" (LS6, 108). This time in our study of the Lotus Sutra we are focusing on the devil king function.

The Unifying Power of Compassion

Saito: And so we come to the devilish nature of power—this is a theme that we have to discuss time and again.

Ikeda: That's right. Just what is the "evil of power?" This is a fundamental issue with an important bearing on the twenty-first century. During the twentieth century the "evil of power" has assumed enormous proportions. Fascism and Stalinism are obvious examples.

Endo: While representing diametrically opposite ideological positions, in terms of one being rightist and the other leftist, fascism and Stalinism are similar in that they both produced fearfully oppressive totalitarian societies.

Ikeda: In a totalitarian system, everyone and everything is simply a "means" for the

powerful to use. Human beings are nothing more than tools, commodities, numbers. They are simply non-entities.

This is all too clear when we look at the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis and their atrocious behavior toward physically and mentally handicapped people and others, whom they defined as “inferior.” These are instances of such cruelty that it’s hard even to discuss them.

Under such systems, human beings are selected as “useful” or “useless” according to standards arbitrarily determined by those in power, and then exploited or slaughtered at will.

Suda: In Japan’s invasion of Asia, as well, there was a “commodification” of people that can only be described as insane.

Endo: While the devilish nature of power is present in any age, in the twentieth century it took on huge dimensions and became highly organized.

Ikeda: Not infrequently people have tried to justify such inhumanity on the basis of ideology.

Another factor in this century has been the advance of science and technology, which has greatly expanded the scope of tragedy. The atomic bomb and the gas chambers (used in Nazi concentration camps) are symbolic of this trend. Such technology has put in people’s hands the power to brutalize and kill human beings on a massive scale.

Science in essence exhibits the tendency to try to quantify everything; and “soulless technology” spurs on the commodification of human beings. Nuclear weapons symbolize the devilish nature of power. They are like the incarnation of the devil king. “Devil” means robber of life; the exact opposite of “Buddha,” one who restores and invigorates life.

Saito: The statement by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda in his “Declaration on the Abolition of Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs” in 1957, “Anyone who uses an atomic weapon is a devil and a Satan who threatens people’s very right to existence,” was based on such profound insight into the nature of life.

Ikeda: President Toda fought with his entire being against the negative functions pervading the universe. His struggle was intense. Probably no one can fully appreciate the anguish he went through and the strain he felt. The fierce pressures on his life would have caused another person to become violently ill or die, or commit suicide, or develop a severe psychological disorder.

I have described atomic weapons as the embodiment of darkness. But they could also be described as the incarnation of mistrust in, and hatred toward, human beings. The philosopher Max Picard (1888–1965) argued that the atomic bomb is a symbol of a “disintegrating” world. Picard wrote:

The very force which holds the atoms together as they form a world is now being used to explode that world. It is by no means accidental that the atom bomb was invented in the day and age which lives and which dies by disintegrating everything.¹⁸

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The devilish nature of power functions to disintegrate and divide. It cuts people off from the universe, alienates them from other people, divides one country from another, and sunders people's bonds with nature. On the other hand, compassion unifies. In the universe itself there is a "unifying compassion."

The universe itself is originally compassion. In that sense, the universe is the perfect stage for the struggle between the "Buddha" and the "devil," between the "devilish nature of power" and "compassion"; for the struggle between the desire to turn life into a means, and the compassion to make life the objective; for the battle between the power that attempts to turn people into grains of sands, to reduce them to nonentities, and the power that seeks to enable people to become Treasure Towers.

Saito: This reminds me of Immanuel Kant's famous definition of human worth. Kant (1724–1804) held that people have absolute worth. He said, "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."¹⁹

Endo: Kant also said: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily they are reflected on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."²⁰

The universe and the inner law —Buddhism teaches that these are not two but one. This has something in common with Goethe's comment that "Nothing's outside that's not within." Moreover, these both reflect the "law of compassion," the power that unifies everything.

Ikeda: Norman Cousins, whom I mentioned at the start of this discussion, also wrote, "I see no separation between the universal order and the moral order"; and "I may not embrace or command this universal order, but I can be at one with it, for I am of it."²¹

The moment I met Dr. Cousins, I intuitively felt, "This person is a bodhisattva." He was a great man.

Suda: Dr. Cousins is famous for having worked very hard to get medical treatment for the "Hiroshima Maidens," young girls who were victims of the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima. He also worked to get psychological and medical treatment for a group of Polish women on whom the Nazis had conducted gruesome experiments.

Ikeda: The devilish nature of power is hideously cruel. Its antithesis is to love each person as an irreplaceable entity. It is to exert oneself and suffer on others' behalf, and to regard doing so as a joy.

In a speech, the famous psychologist V. E. Frankl (author of *Man's Search for Meaning, an Introduction to Logotherapy*), a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, introduced the following passage from a letter by a mother:

While in the uterus, my child's skull formed prematurely. As a result, when she was born on June 6, 1929, she was already fatally ill. I was eighteen years old at the time. I worshipped my baby like a god and loved her boundlessly. My mother and I did everything we could to help the poor baby. But it was no good. The child could neither walk nor speak. Still, I was young, and I did not abandon hope. I worked day and night, just so that I could buy nutritious food and medicine for

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my dear daughter. I would wrap my daughter's frail arm around my neck and ask her, "Do you love Mommy, dear?" And she would hug me tight and smile, and awkwardly pat my face. At those moments I was really happy. No matter how difficult things were, I felt boundless joy.²²

This is the exact opposite of the devilish nature of power that "turns people into a means."

Saito: I feel as though I have come to understand a little of the profound meaning of the "Treasure Tower" chapter.

Ikeda: To put the devilish nature of power into more familiar terms, one example of it would be a leader who foists hard work on others, making them do things that are unpleasant or difficult, while taking it easy himself. Such a person makes others take responsibility, and then claims all the credit.

Someone has written:

There is bound to be a certain amount of
trouble running any country
if you are president the trouble happens to you
but if you are a tyrant you can arrange things so
that most of the trouble happens to other people.²³

The difference between a leader and a tyrant is that a leader works hard for everyone else, while a tyrant makes others work hard for him.

Nichiren Daishonin says that fundamental darkness manifests as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, while the fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests as Bonten, Taishaku²⁴ and the other Buddhist gods (cf. MW-3, 279). The devil king is a tyrant. Bonten and Taishaku are leaders. The outward difference between the two is decisive; it is like the difference between heaven and earth. At the same time, in terms of a person's inner state of life or *ichinen*, it is most subtle.

Saito: One has to exercise constant vigilance over one's spirit and intentions. In this light, it seems that the sense of powerlessness we talked about at the beginning is a major reason why people in modern society tend to be viewed only in terms of their "function," or as the "means" to some end.

Endo: Similarly, for children it is no doubt a source of great anxiety to be evaluated and ranked simply on the basis of their grades in school. Even in the home, which ought to be a place where children are accepted as precious and irreplaceable, there is a tendency for parents to evaluate their children on the basis of grades—a very partial and fragmentary indicator. Under such circumstances, it's probably only natural that children fail to develop true self-confidence, that they do not acquire a sense of inner strength—the feeling, "No matter what happens, I will deal with things to the best of my ability."

Ikeda: Yes. There is no hierarchy or pecking order when it comes to life. All life has infinite worth. We have to educate children and adults alike so that no one is made to

feel powerless. We have to provide nourishment for the heart. And we have to create true human solidarity. This will be the key to the present age. In that sense, the “Treasure Tower” chapter, which calls out to all, “You are a tower of treasure. Your life contains limitless strength and potential,” offers a wealth of inspiration for this age.

“Embracing the Lotus Sutra” means continually fighting against all manifestations of the devilish nature of power. When we carry out this difficult task, motivated by love of humanity, our life truly shines as a Treasure Tower; we live each day in the presence of the Ceremony in the Air, in rhythm with eternity; and each moment brilliantly glows with the sheer joy of living.

Illustrations by Larry Ashton

(To be continued)

1. Currently only available in Japanese: published by Mainichi Shimbunsha, 1991.
2. Norman Cousins, *Present Tense: An American Editor's Odyssey* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 373.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
4. *Ichinen sanzen*: Three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Actual *ichinen sanzen*, in contrast to theoretical *ichinen sanzen*, indicates the practical application of this principle to life.
5. “Sanze Shobutsu Sokanmon Kyoso Hairyu” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 558–75), written in October 1279 when the Daishonin was fifty-eight.
6. *Goethe, Poems and Epigrams*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1983), p. 90.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
8. Translated from Japanese: Shigeo Miki, *Seimei Keitai no Shizenshi* (Life Forms Natural Journal) (Tokyo: Ubusuna Shoin, 1989), pp. 5–9.
9. Editor's note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
10. *Nayuta*: An Indian numerical unit corresponding to 100,000,000,000.
11. *Saha* world: A land where people have to endure many hardships and trials.
12. Eight directions: North, south, east, west, northwest, northeast, southeast and southwest.
13. Six paths: The first six of the Ten Worlds —Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity (or Tranquillity) and Heaven (or Rapture). The six paths indicate states of delusion or suffering. One who is in these states is governed by his reactions to external stimuli and is therefore never really free but constantly at the mercy of changing circumstances.
14. *Hokke Mongu*: (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 8.
15. Editor's note: Quotes from volume 2 of the *Major Writings* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
16. *Eppur si muove*. Attr. to Galileo after his recantation in 1632. The earliest appearance of the phrase is perhaps in Baretto, *Italian Library* (1757), P. 52.
17. Three powerful enemies: Three groups of people whom the “Encouraging

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Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra predicts will persecute those who propagate the sutra in the future.

18. Max Picard, *Hitler in Our Selves*, trans. Heinrich Hauser (Hinsdale, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1947), p. 266.

19. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969), p. 54.

20. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 258.

21. *Ibid.*, *Present Tense*, p. 196.

22. Translated from Japanese: V. E. Frankl, *Soredemo Jinsei ni Iesu to Iu*, trans. Kunio Yamada and Mika Matsuda, (I Still Say "Yes" to Life) (Tokyo: Shunjusha: 1993), p. 104.

23. Don Marquis, *The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1942), "Archy Does His Part," p. 18.

24. Bonten (Skt. Brahma), Taishaku (Skt. Shakra Devanam Indra).

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