

“Upsetting Attachments and Arousing Doubts”
—A Great Jolt That Induces a Revolutionary Leap in Consciousness
Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 23

This is the twenty-third installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the December 1996 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This installment covers the first part of their discussion of the “Emerging from the Earth” (fifteenth) chapter, which marks the opening of the essential teaching, or latter half, of the Lotus Sutra. At the chapter’s outset, countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear from within the earth. The sight of these vast legions of bodhisattvas fills Maitreya and Shakyamuni’s other disciples with surprise and doubt.

The discussion here centers on the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts.”

Katsuji Saito: The theme for 1997 is the Year of Advancement toward the New Century. The dawn of the twenty-first century is now just ahead. I hope we can proceed with renewed determination in our discussion on the Lotus Sutra, as we now turn to the latter half of the sutra, or the “essential teaching.”

Daisaku Ikeda: The most crucial act in our drama begins now. Both in our efforts for kosen-rufu and in our study movement, we need now to display our underlying strength and ability to the fullest. What we accomplish from here on is what really counts. The brilliant essential phase of our movement now begins. Let us redouble our efforts.

At the same time, let’s put even more effort into this series of discussions. Together let’s discuss and clarify the essence of Buddhism! This is my ardent desire.

Takanori Endo: The transition from the theoretical teaching (first half of the Lotus Sutra) to the essential teaching (latter half) represents a dramatic revolution. That’s because as we enter the essential teaching, the way of thinking that prevails in the theoretical teaching is completely overturned. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth both symbolize and are the catalyst of this revolution in awareness.

Haruo Suda: When the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear, the other bodhisattvas and beings taking part in the Ceremony in the Air are so startled that they begin to have doubts about what Shakyamuni has been preaching up to this point—that he attained enlightenment in this lifetime. This illustrates the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts,” or causing uncertainty in people’s minds about the ideas to which they have been attached. Having doubt cast on the correctness of their current beliefs allows them to open their eyes to a higher plane of awareness.

Ikeda: Their surprise, shock and doubt represent the reaction of all those believing in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, as well as the Lotus Sutra's theoretical teaching. "Upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" indicates a sudden overturning of the beliefs and convictions that people have held up to that point. It is a decisive blow to the foundation of an existing worldview. Through this dramatic overturning of the values the people were familiar and comfortable with, Shakyamuni reveals his true identity, his true state of life.

Suda: Philosophy has been described as "the product of wonder."¹ The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) writes, "The spirit marches from surprise to surprise."² In that sense, we could perhaps say that this "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts" in the Lotus Sutra sparks an important development in Buddhist thought.

Ikeda: On a deeper level, it amounts to a spiritual revolution that completely transforms people's views of life, human existence, the world and society. Uncovering this significance concealed in the "Emerging from the Earth" and "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (sixteenth) chapters provides a potent treatment for the ills of modern civilization, which now stands at a crossroads.

Countless Bodhisattvas Emerge from the Earth

When the Buddha spoke these words, the earth of the thousand-millionfold countries of the *saha* world all trembled and split open, and out of it emerged at the same instant immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas.³ The bodies of these bodhisattvas were all golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness. Previously they had all been dwelling in the world of empty space underneath the *saha* world. But when these bodhisattvas heard the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha speaking, they came up from below.

Each one of these bodhisattvas was the leader of his own great assembly, and each brought with him a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. (LS15, 213)⁴

"The Thus Come One wishes now to summon forth and declare the wisdom of the Buddhas, the freely exercised transcendental power of the Buddhas, the power of the Buddhas that has the lion's ferocity, the fierce and greatly forceful power of the Buddhas." (LS15, 218)

Saito: Let us now consider the flow of the text.

Suda: The title "Emerging from the Earth" refers to the appearance from within the ground of those bodhisattvas who will spread the Mystic Law after Shakyamuni's death. They are called Bodhisattvas of the Earth because they emerge from the earth.

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Ikeda: The time after the Buddha's passing means the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law; that is, the eternal future. Pervading the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha's immense sense of responsibility to lead all people over the course of eternity to happiness. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth themselves embody this responsibility, compassion and wisdom. They are a gathering of great benefactors who are working to elevate the spiritual state of humankind. And we are their forerunners. This is truly amazing. Our mission is tremendous.

Endo: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth appear at the start of the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter. Up to this point, the central theme from the "Teacher of the Law" (tenth) chapter through the "Peaceful Practices" (fourteenth) chapter has been the question of whom Shakyamuni can entrust with the task of propagating the teaching after his death. The voice-hearers, even though they have received specific prophecies that in the future they will become Buddhas, aspire to spread the teaching not in the strife-ridden *saha* world but in other lands.

By contrast, in the "Encouraging Devotion" (thirteenth) chapter, the bodhisattvas vow to spread the teaching in the *saha* world, even if it means having to endure the attacks of the three powerful enemies. The theoretical teaching thus ends in such a way as to give the clear impression that the "baton" of the propagation of the Mystic Law will be passed to these bodhisattvas.

Suda: Then, at the start of the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter, the bodhisattvas who had joined the assembly from other worlds vow to spread the Mystic Law in the *saha* world after Shakyamuni's passing. This is the pledge of these bodhisattvas of high attainment who have gathered from throughout the universe. From the way things develop, one feels sure that Shakyamuni will entrust them with this great mission.

Saito: Shakyamuni's first statement in the essential teaching therefore comes as a complete surprise: "Leave off, good men!" he tells them. "There is no need for you to protect this sutra" (LS15, 212). When he said this, the entire assembly must have recoiled in shock. Everyone doubted their ears at these words; they must have felt as though their hearts had stopped beating. But Shakyamuni's next words surprise them even more.

Suda: Yes. For he then says: "Why? Because in this *saha* world of mine there are bodhisattvas ... who are as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges" (LS15, 212ñ13). And he explains that these bodhisattvas will spread the sutra. Next, the earth trembles and splits open and countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth come forth. In appearance they are magnificent. They are described as "golden in hue, with the thirty-two features and an immeasurable brightness" (LS15, 213).

Ikeda: It's a momentous scene. Their entry is most dramatic. The earth splits open and countless bodhisattvas appear in unison. Moreover, each of them emits a golden light. Nowhere in any sutra are there any bodhisattvas as brilliant as

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these Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Even the bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings and the bodhisattvas who have gathered from other lands are struck with admiration.

Comparing the two groups, Nichiren Daishonin says that the bodhisattvas already present at the assembly “seemed like a pack of apes or monkeys, with the new bodhisattvas appearing among them like so many Taishakus⁵” (MW-2, 121 [142]).⁶ The sutra explains just how noble the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are.

Suda: Yes. It describes them as follows:

**Firm in the power of will and concentration,
with constant diligence seeking wisdom,
they expound various wonderful doctrines
and their minds are without fear. (LS15, 220)**

It also says that they are “skillfully learning the bodhisattva way, / unsoiled by worldly things / like the lotus flower in the water” (LS15, 222). And:

**They are clever at difficult questions and answers,
their minds know no fear.
They have firmly cultivated a persevering mind,
upright in dignity and virtue. (LS15, 223)**

Endo: It’s like a description of the Buddha.

Saito: In a sense, they might have been even more magnificent than the Buddha himself. If Shakyamuni is compared to a youth of twenty-five years, then the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in appearance like great elders with a hundred years of rich life experience.

The Daishonin says of the appearance of these Bodhisattvas of the Earth:

Solemn, dignified, they were beings of great and lofty stature. Aside from Shakyamuni, Taho [Many Treasures] and the emanations of Shakyamuni from the ten directions, they were worthy of being good friends upon whom all beings could rely. (MW-2, 121 [143])

Ikeda: In other words, he says they towered above others like great mountains over small hills, and were true leaders on whom all people could rely.

Suda: Each of the bodhisattvas is also the leader of a great assembly, as they brought with them a “retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges,” or retinues “equal to the sands of fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, or ten thousand Ganges” or “only one thousand, one hundred, or ten” followers (LS15, 213).

The sands of one Ganges indicates the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River of India. Since sixty thousand Ganges means sixty thousand times this

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truly enormous number, the figures here are utterly beyond reckoning. This might be impossible even for a supercomputer to calculate.

Endo: Narrowly defined, “retinue” means a Buddha’s family members. But in a broad sense, it indicates all who receive a Buddha’s teaching.

Ikeda: That’s right. And the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is certainly not disorderly or confused. They are vital, energetic and free; but at the same time they are united and harmonious. In a sense, this is the image of an ideal organization.

Saito: We often say that the SGI is an organization that exists and is advancing in accord with the Buddha’s decree, but I think we need to carefully consider what this means.

Suda: The first thing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth do is bow to the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures who are seated within the Treasure Tower. Then they go around to the innumerable Buddhas who have gathered from the worlds in the ten directions and praise them in various ways. For countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to greet countless Buddhas takes time. The sutra says that although this takes the long period of “fifty small kalpas”⁷ (LS15, 214), Shakyamuni uses his supernatural powers to make it seem to those in the assembly like only half a day.

Endo: It must have been tremendously engrossing. By contrast, when you are bored even an hour can seem like an eternity.

Surprise at the Magnificent Relationship of Mentor and Disciple

Ikeda: In praising these Buddhas with the utmost respect, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are actually praising the eternal oneness of mentor and disciple. A Buddha lives each moment with the greatest sense of fulfillment, fully awakened to the truth that the present moment is itself eternity. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact also Buddhas whose lives are illuminated by the awareness that the present moment is one with eternity. This, in other words, is a meeting between Buddhas. Therefore it is joyful. Accordingly even fifty small kalpas does not seem like a long time.

Next, representing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the four great leaders Superior Practices (Jp. Jogyo), Boundless Practices (Muhengyo), Pure Practices (Jyogyo) and Firmly Established Practices (Anryugyo) begin conversing with Shakyamuni. Their discussion is about the great objective of leading all people to enlightenment.

Suda: Yes. They press their palms together and say to Shakyamuni, “World-Honored One, are your illnesses few, are your worries few, are your practices

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proceeding comfortably?" (LS15, 214)

Saito: That's a standard way of greeting the Buddha. The Buddhas of the worlds in the ten directions extend Shakyamuni the same greeting on their arrival. But the four bodhisattvas then follow by asking: "Do those whom you propose to save readily receive instruction? Does the effort not cause the World-Honored One to become weary and spent?" (LS15, 214)

Ikedo: This shows their heartfelt concern for Shakyamuni's well-being. Their attitude is completely different from that of the voice-hearers who, in their state of abject dependence, sometimes express doubts or complaints.

It's on a different level, but I was always concerned about my mentor Josei Toda's health. Whenever I saw him, I tried to get a sense for whether he was tired, how he was feeling. And President Toda was even more concerned about my health. If I was perspiring, he would say to me: "Dai, you should change shirts right away. Otherwise you'll catch cold." He was truly a wonderful mentor.

From the conversation between the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and Shakyamuni, we get a sense of profound heart-to-heart exchange. It is like a scene in a great painting.

Suda: Indeed. Shakyamuni says in reply:

... The Thus Come One is well and happy, with few ills and few worries. The living beings are readily converted and saved and I am not weary or spent. Why? Because for age after age in the past the living beings have constantly received my instruction.... So when these living beings see me for the first time and listen to my preaching, they all immediately believe and accept it, entering into the wisdom of the Thus Come One.... (LS15, 214-5)

"I'm all right," he says in effect. "You don't need to worry. I will lead all people to happiness without fail."

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth praise Shakyamuni: "Excellent, excellent, great hero, World-Honored One! ... We are accordingly overjoyed" (LS15, 215). And Shakyamuni in turn praises the Bodhisattvas of the Earth for having aroused a spirit of rejoicing in their hearts.

Endo: Shakyamuni's disciples who have been at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra all along are quite surprised by this exchange. A succession of events totally inexplicable to them has unfolded. First there was the appearance of the Treasure Tower, then the gathering of the Buddhas from the worlds in the ten directions, and the opening of the Ceremony in the Air. All of this was unprecedented; yet they have somehow managed to understand and believe. And now there is the additional surprise of the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It is easy to imagine that if one were at the scene, one would be totally dumbfounded by this point.

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Saito: Giving expression to the wonderment felt by all in the great assembly, Bodhisattva Maitreya asks Shakyamuni:

**a great host of bodhisattvas
such as was never seen in the past—
I beg the most honored of two-legged beings to explain
where they have come from,
what causes and conditions bring them together! (LS15, 216)**

Ikeda: This is the famous “question of Maitreya.” This great question is what prompts Shakyamuni to expound the “Life Span” chapter, his quintessential teaching. Questions are very important. Shakyamuni therefore praises him saying, “Excellent, excellent, Ajita, that you should question the Buddha about this great affair” (LS15, 218).

Saito: The attendants serving the Buddhas who are Shakyamuni’s emanations from other lands ask the Buddhas who are their respective teachers the same question that Maitreya has asked: “World-Honored One, this great multitude of immeasurable, boundless *asamkhyas* of bodhisattvas—where did they come from?” (LS15, 218)

The Buddhas then admonish their attendants saying:

... Good men, wait a moment. There is a bodhisattva and mahasattva named Maitreya who has received a prophecy from Shakyamuni Buddha that he will be the next hereafter to become a Buddha. He has already inquired about this matter and the Buddha is now about to answer him. You should take this opportunity to listen to what he says. (LS15, 218)

Ikeda: This is very interesting phrasing. The fact that, among the vast number of bodhisattvas and voice-hearers who have a profound connection with Shakyamuni, Maitreya is the one to ask this question has deep significance.

Saito: Maitreya, who is also called Ajita, is known as the bodhisattva who will succeed Shakyamuni Buddha after his next rebirth and become a Buddha after Shakyamuni. He enjoys high standing even among Shakyamuni’s most senior disciples. Maitreya’s question raises an important issue that had not been resolved in the theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra.

Ikeda: Yes. Even though they understand that all people have the Buddha nature and have received specific prophecies that they will attain enlightenment in the future, this alone is insufficient. That’s because without the clarification of the teaching in the “Life Span” chapter that Shakyamuni actually attained enlightenment in the remote past, the path for all beings to attain Buddhahood has no more substance than, for example, a picture of food in a painting.

I will discuss this in detail later, but for the time being suffice it to say that the

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emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is indispensable for clarifying the eternity of Shakyamuni's life. And it is in response to Maitreya's question that Shakyamuni expounds his true teaching.

Suda: The reply that Shakyamuni gives is more surprising still. For he reveals that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are people he has been instructing since the remote past in this saha world.

Endo: That's the line where he says, "Ever since the long distant past / I have been teaching and converting this multitude" (LS15, 220).

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China interprets this passage as constituting the "abbreviated opening of the near and the revelation of the distant" (where "near" means the teaching that Shakyamuni first attained Buddhahood in his present lifetime in India, and "distant" means the teaching that he actually attained enlightenment in the remote past).⁸ He calls it this because it explains in summary the "opening of the near and the revelation of the distant" that is expounded more completely in the "Life Span" chapter that follows.

Suda: This comes as a great shock. Up to that point, Maitreya and the others in the assembly had all believed that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment in his present lifetime when he sat in meditation beneath the bodhi tree. They all supposed he had attained Buddhahood for the first time in his present existence as a result of an arduous practice carried out over many previous existences. This is known as the view of Shakyamuni's "attaining enlightenment during his lifetime in India."

Saito: The teaching of his "actual attainment of enlightenment in the remote past" has not yet been spelled out in its entirety. Still, Shakyamuni's statements here decidedly contradict the view that he attained enlightenment for the first time in his present lifetime in India.

Suda: The members of the assembly are utterly baffled at seeing for the first time these countless legions of Shakyamuni's disciples, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Everything they had believed up to this point about Shakyamuni now rings hollow. It all comes crashing down. They could not have been more shocked if the ground on which they were standing had suddenly flipped over and switched places with the sky.

Saito: This illustrates the principle of "upsetting attachments and arousing doubts." Their attachments crumble and they are filled with great doubt. Maitreya, again voicing the thoughts on everyone's mind, then asks:

World-Honored One, when the Thus Come One was a crown prince, you left the palace of the Shakyas and sat in the place of practice not far from the city of Gaya, and there attained *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* [the supreme perfect

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enlightenment]. Barely forty years or more have passed since then. World-Honored One, how in that short time could you have accomplished so much work as a Buddha? ...

Suppose, for example, that a young man of twenty-five, with ruddy complexion and hair still black, should point to someone who was a hundred years old and say, 'This is my son!' ... This would be hard to believe, and so too is what the Buddha says....

"... We ourselves have faith in the Buddha, believing that he preaches in accordance with what is appropriate, that the words spoken by the Buddha are never false, and that the Buddha's knowledge is in all cases penetrating and comprehensive. Nevertheless, in the period after the Buddha has entered extinction, if bodhisattvas who have just begun to aspire to enlightenment should hear these words, they will perhaps not believe or accept them but will be led to commit the crime of rejecting the Law. Therefore, World-Honored One, we beg you to explain so we may put aside our doubts, and so that, in future ages when good men hear of this matter, they will not entertain doubts!" (LS15, 220–22)

The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter closes with this question from Maitreya.

A Great Transformation in People's Perception of the Buddha

Suda: Maitreya's question, being very candid, clearly illustrates the great turmoil that is in the hearts of the disciples.

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin says, "this present doubt was the greatest doubt of all"; and "If the Buddha had failed to dispel Miroku's [Maitreya's] doubts, the sacred teachings of his entire lifetime would have amounted to no more than froth on the water, and all living beings would have remained tangled in the snare of doubt" (MW-2, 125–26 [147–48]). It could be said that this is the fundamental question on which the enlightenment of all people hinges.

Suda: In the first place, the assembly is surprised at the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth—bodhisattvas whom they, including even the most experienced Maitreya, had never seen or heard of—who in the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter suddenly bound forth from within the earth.

Endo: While the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are frequently described as "equal in number to sixty thousand Ganges sands," this is in fact but a mere fraction of their total number. If their followers and retinues are included, their number is truly "immeasurable, boundless, beyond anything that can be known through calculation, simile or parable" (LS15, 213). Their number far surpasses human comprehension.

Saito: In appearance, moreover, unbelievable as it may seem, they are even more splendid than Shakyamuni. Nevertheless, their attitude in greeting Shakyamuni

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is most humble and respectful. They are filled with a spirit of great respect for their mentor.

Endo: On that point, the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching may still have been lacking somewhat in respect for their teacher. They might have taken him somewhat for granted.

Ikeda: Maitreya knew of Shakyamuni's practices in his previous lives. What's more he was a person of great wisdom who had grasped the principle Shakyamuni revealed in the theoretical teaching that all people can attain Buddhahood.

But with the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the very foundation of what Maitreya believed up to that time was demolished. "Just who is this person Shakyamuni that he is being reverently greeted by this multitude of great bodhisattvas?" he must have wondered. Seeing for himself these mysterious disciples from the remote past—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—causes him to wonder, "What is the truth about my mentor?" "What is my mentor's true identity?" In other words, the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth brings on a great transformation in how people view the Buddha.

Saito: They must have thought: "We were mistaken about the identity of the World-Honored One. He may be a much greater Buddha than we had imagined. Have we ever really known our mentor's true greatness?"

Ikeda: That's right. This is the condition Shakyamuni describes in the "Life Span" chapter where he says that living beings "do not see me even when close by" (LS16, 229). At the very least, Maitreya senses this. This brings him to reflect on where he stands as the disciple of so great a Buddha as Shakyamuni: "What does it mean to live my life together with this great World-Honored One?"

An important development of the essential teaching is that people are guided to seek out their own inherent brilliance. The "Emerging from the Earth" chapter directs all people to the greatness of their own lives through the grand preaching that calls forth countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Suda: These disciples—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—arise in quick succession. Their appearance is all too dazzling. "If our mentor's disciples are this splendid," the others muse, "then he must truly be amazing." I think this appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in response to Shakyamuni's call well illustrates the true nature of the relationship of mentor and disciple.

Endo: I may be presumptuous in making this comparison, but I heard the following account from someone in the Kansai area. He told me that when you, President Ikeda, took the lead in that region's activities, everyone was really moved by that alone. However, you displayed all the more thoroughness and seriousness in matters pertaining to your mentor Josei Toda. Your spirit to serve your mentor left a truly

inspiring impression on all. The complete earnestness of your actions and words toward President Toda displayed a dedication that gave people a feeling of momentousness. Observing your behavior allowed everyone to understand what an outstanding person President Toda was.

Saito: The transition to the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra thus begins with all of Shakyamuni's disciples from the infinite past assembled before him.

Looking back on the course followed in the theoretical teaching, we see that the teaching of the true entity of all phenomena in the "Expedient Means" (second) chapter clarifies that all people possess the Buddha nature. The disciples who hear this teaching dance for joy and resolve to set their sights on attaining the same state as the Buddha, and to undertake the actions of the bodhisattva. They say that they have well understood the Buddha's intent.

But when we come to the essential teaching and the vow of the disciples present to spread the teaching after Shakyamuni's passing, they are adamantly rejected. It is as though Shakyamuni himself overturns all he has taught up to this point.

Endo: "Why should he say such a thing now after we've resolved to do what he's asked of us?" they might have wondered, somewhat crestfallen.

Ikeda: When we come to the essential teaching, everything Shakyamuni has taught up to that point is fundamentally overturned. The theoretical teaching reveals a succession of important doctrines; these include the true entity of life, the enlightenment of the people of the two vehicles (the voice-hearers and *pratyekabuddhas*), the enlightenment of women, and the enlightenment of evil people. In addition, predictions of future enlightenment were bestowed on Shariputra, the disciple reputed to be foremost in wisdom, and Shakyamuni's other disciples who had comprehended these doctrines.

But in an instant, all of this becomes meaningless. That's because the very foundation of these teachings, the premise upon which they were based, has fallen apart.

Saito: In "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin says:

When we come to the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, then the belief that Shakyamuni first obtained Buddhahood during his present lifetime is demolished, and the effects of the four teachings are likewise demolished. When the effects of the four teachings are demolished, the causes of the four teachings are likewise demolished. (MW-2, 88 [103-04])

In other words, Shakyamuni himself rejects his earlier teaching about the causes leading to the effect of his Buddhahood, which was based on the premise that he had attained enlightenment for the first time in the present existence.

Ikeda: That's right. His denial of the "effect of Buddhahood" expounded in these

teachings amounts to a denial of the “cause of Buddhahood” undertaken with that aim. He thus completely refutes people’s understanding of the causes and effects of his enlightenment. It is a revolution with truly Copernican implications.

Endo: Speaking of Copernicus (1473–1543), the revolution in thought for which he is creditedófrom the view that the heavens move and the earth is stationary to the view that the earth movesóentailed a tremendous “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts.”

In a speech, Mr. Ikeda, you once described the final events in the life of the Italian Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). Bruno adopted the heliocentric theory and developed a new view of the world based on the idea that the universe is boundless. This overturned the common sense of his contemporaries, who believed that the earth was the center of the universe and could not possibly be in motion.

Suda: We cannot fathom the extent to which people’s thinking was constrained by traditional views of the world. As for reaction to the idea that the earth revolved around the sun, reportedly many people had the attitude that they did not want to believe it even if it were true.

Ikeda: That was probably the honest sentiment of many. “Even if I am called ignorant for not accepting this,” they might have thought, “I prefer ignorance to having my world destroyed.” To have one’s common sense—the basic assumptions in which one has believed and relied—overturned is extremely painful. It is very hard to accept.

The doctrine expounded in the essential teaching came as perhaps even more of a shock. The essential teaching reveals for the first time the eternity of the Buddha’s life over the three existences of past, present and future. That’s a dramatic revelation, one that fundamentally overturns Shakyamuni’s previous teaching. It is a revolution in how people view the Buddha.

A Movement That Shakes Up Existing Value Systems

Saito: Seen from that perspective, we might say the Daishonin’s practice of shakubuku was itself a great attempt to “upset attachments and arouse doubts” in the people of his day. Wasn’t it a struggle to shake up the existing Buddhist establishment?

Ikeda: The impact was not limited to the world of Buddhism. He also “upset attachments and aroused doubts” in the minds of those in power in the Kamakura government, those allied with the government, and in general throughout the populace.

He essentially refuted mistaken views of religion and faith that had prevailed up to that time. Many people’s beliefs about life, society and the people were entirely overturned. That there was a great reaction against the Daishonin is only

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natural. It is inconceivable that he could have failed to encounter difficulties.

Endo: SGI members are carrying out the practice of propagation just as the Daishonin taught. In consequence, they, too, “upset attachments and arouse doubts” in society.

Saito: In the case of Japan, certainly, the tendency of most people is to suppose that religion concerns only a select group; or, conversely, that it makes no difference what religion people believe in. In such an environment, Soka Gakkai members are seriously discussing the truth and error of religions, and asserting the correctness of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. There is no doubt that in many instances, their efforts have had an earthshaking effect.

Suda: More than just a matter of surprise, many people have become livid with anger. To begin with, Japan has a cultural climate in which even the spirit of propagation, the very life of religion, has been lost. The spirit to determine through dialogue what is true and what is erroneous in matters of religion is itself lacking. The disposition expressed in the saying “Yield to the powerful” has deep roots indeed.

Japanese people seek solace in ambiguity and tend to dislike anything that clarifies matters in black-and-white terms. Perhaps it is only natural, therefore, that the conviction of Soka Gakkai members who don’t mince words in religious matters has aroused a negative reaction. Moreover, because the existing order is shaken by this movement of the Soka Gakkai to open people’s eyes to the correctness of Buddhism, it has unavoidably invited suppression by those in power.

Ikeda: The greater the degree to which attachments are upset and doubt aroused, the greater the difficulties that will arise. Since we are “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” in order to fundamentally improve the lives of all people, it is impossible for us not to face tremendous obstacles.

Also, our efforts have the world as their focus. We are implementing the principle of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” on the global stage. While spreading peace and culture, education and friendship, we are steadily changing people’s views about Buddhism and about what it means to be human.

Saito: This reminds me of something we talked about at the start of this series. At that time, President Ikeda, you said that all human endeavor is inspired by the effort to answer the questions: “Where do we come from?” “Where are we going?” and “Why are we here?” It would seem that the view of the Buddha as eternal, which develops in the “Emerging from the Earth” and “Life Span” chapters, certainly offers a reply to those questions.

Suda: Petrarch (1304–74), the poet laureate of the Renaissance, writes, “Often have I wondered with much curiosity as to our coming into this world and what

will follow our departure.”⁹ He asked why we had been born, where we came from and where we went after death. For Petrarch, to speculate about the disposition of fish and fowl without the spirit to pursue answers to such fundamental questions testifies to humankind’s nonchalance about life.

Ikeda: That’s exactly right. Never before have people been so oblivious to their own existence, nor have they looked down on themselves as so inconsequential and insignificant as they do now. Within the immense systems of modern society, people’s hearts are shrouded in a sense of powerlessness; they feel: “My own ability is trifling. Nothing I do will change the world. All I can manage is simply to try to keep up with society.”

Saito: Therein lies the fundamental cause for the sense of helplessness in the world today. Convinced of their own insignificance, people have ceased even to question things. They live complacently, unquestioning. Such spiritual sterility makes people smaller still. However, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra breaks down the petty limitations that people set on their lives.

Ikeda: Yes. The “Emerging from the Earth” chapter breaks through the frozen earth of resignation, the sense that “this is the way it has to be.” It is a struggle to reveal before the entire world the underlying power and towering dignity of humanity and of the people.

Suda: President Ikeda, when you met with Dr. Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya of the Institute of the Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Science [in February 1996], I was impressed by Dr. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya’s comments on the “eternal Buddha” of the “Life Span” chapter. She said she felt the “Life Span” chapter explained the state in which the individual fuses with the Buddha. She suggested that in this state the energy of the universe becomes one’s own energy, and that one experiences the eternal.

Ikeda: That’s a keen insight. Don’t the Bodhisattvas of the Earth themselves embody this state of fusion with the Buddha, of oneness with the universe? Though we speak of them as bodhisattvas, they are in fact Buddhas.

Where have the Bodhisattvas of the Earth come from? The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai says that they dwell in “the ultimate depths of life, that being the absolute reality.”¹⁰ In other words, they represent the truth in the depths of life, the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the wellspring of the universe and the fundamental power of life. It is the ultimate expression of wisdom, and the foundation of all laws and principles. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth embody that fundamental energy. Moreover, they are committed to the bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva is not a stage of completion (the effect of Buddhahood), but of incompleteness (the cause of Buddhahood). Bodhisattvas, while incomplete, cause their lives to overflow with the state of completion (the effect of Buddhahood). To put it another way, while partaking in a state of life of

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boundless joy and completion (the effect of Buddhahood), a bodhisattva at the same time takes action to advance further ahead, to ascend ever higher, and to lead still more people to enlightenment. In other words, it is a state of “incomplete completeness.”

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are eternal activists who base themselves on the Mystic Law; theirs are lives of eternal advancement. Our summoning forth the bounding energy of these bodhisattvas constitutes the “emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth” within our own being. When we do this, we can break through the shell of the small self that has hitherto constrained our lives.

Saito: Certainly, if we were not practicing faith, it would be all we could manage simply to take care of ourselves. In all likelihood, we wouldn’t have the latitude to try to help people who are miserable become happy. And probably the thought of trying to change the country or of changing the destiny of humankind would have never even occurred to us.

Endo: But through the SGI, we have learned about the Gohonzon and have been able to lead incomparably greater lives than we might have otherwise. As the saying goes, “A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles” (MW-2, 25 [30]). This thought fills me with immense gratitude.

Ikeda: It comes down to people revolutionizing their state of life. From a broad perspective, our efforts to cause countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge—to help many people revolutionize their lives—amount to a struggle to change the state of life of society at large. It is a struggle to elevate the state of all humankind. Isn’t this the transformation that “breaking through the earth” symbolizes?

Saito: In that sense, the preconception held by those in the assembly of the Lotus Sutra—that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time during his present lifetime in India—is indicative of their confusion about the origin of their own lives. They don’t understand the eternal energy of life that is the foundation and wellspring of their own existence. This is comparable to the delusion of people in modern society.

Ikeda: That’s right. Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, they become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental power we have as human beings to break through all differences—whether of ethnicity, race, gender or social standing—and lead people to happiness. We are plain and unadorned ordinary people; we are thoroughly human and infinitely courageous. This is the pride of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is an earthshaking event attesting to the greatness of the underlying power of life. We have to convey this

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to people throughout the world. The transformation of the perception of the Buddha in the essential teaching amounts to a fundamental transformation in the perception of human beings.

Endo: Yes. The Nobel prize laureate Dr. John Eccles [who received the prize for medicine and physiology in 1963] comments on the superstition of the present age as follows:

It takes no deep philosophical insight to recognize the connection between what a person does and what a person thinks he is, between what others expect of us and what they think of us. So close is this connection that much of social and political history can be understood in just these terms. Whether one takes human beings to be “children of God,” “tools of production,” “matter in motion,” or “a species of primate” has consequences.¹¹

He says that modern people are benighted by what he terms the superstitions of materialism and environmental determinism, and argues that they should question those superstitions. He also says:

One need only consider such phrases as “the divine right of kings” or “the African is a slave by nature” or “Pharaoh is the living god” to recall how entire epochs have been colored and shaped by eccentric theories about ourselves and others.

But every epoch is generally far more uncritical about its own perspective than about those embraced by an earlier age.¹²

Saito: The view of humanity that people today suppose to be self-evident may well be seen by later generations to be greatly distorted.

Suda: The ideas that Dr. Eccles terms the superstitions of the present age all tend to narrowly limit the parameters of human existence. For instance, although Buddhism teaches that the mind in fact expands to encompass all time and space, people today generally suppose it to reside only within the brain.

Endo: This is a case where “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” is necessary. For a society informed by such a view of human beings will inevitably become spiritually desolate and bereft of hope.

Ikeda: This process of “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” will be initiated by the voices and actions of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, just as in the Lotus Sutra they “upset attachments and arouse doubts” through their grand appearance. In any event, we can take the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth today as an overture setting the stage for the global revolution that will continue over the course of the twenty-first, twenty-second and twenty-third centuries, and throughout eternity.

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The Daishonin calls out to his followers:

Since the worst slander already prevails throughout the country, the supreme True Law will spread without fail. What have any of you to regret? Although you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should leap for joy! Although you are not Shariputra, you should rise and dance! When Bodhisattva Jogyo emerged from the earth, he leapt forth joyfully.... (MW-5, 161)

He is saying: You must not lament! Because great evil exists, great good is sure to follow. You should advance, dancing joyfully and in high spirits, just as the bodhisattvas leapt forth, dancing, from the earth. We are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Therefore, let us vigorously dance forth from within the “great earth” of the people.

(To be continued)

1. *Bloomsbury Thematic Dictionary of Quotations* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, 1988), p. 291.
2. Henri Bergson, *La pensÉe et le mouvant* (Geneva: ...ditions Albert Skira, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946), p. 91.
3. Mahasattva: A great being, another term for a bodhisattva.
4. 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.
5. Taishaku (Skt. Shakra Devanam Indra) Together with Bonten (Brahma), one of the two principal tutelary gods of Buddhism.
6. Editor’s note: Quotes from vol. 2 of *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
7. Kalpa: An extremely long period of time deriving from ancient Indian tradition. There are various explanations of a kalpa, but all of them, except one, are metaphoric and defy exact computation. According to the one exception, a kalpa is 15,998,000 or approximately 16 million years long. A hundred kalpas, then, is about 1.6 billion years.
8. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 9.
9. *Petrarch’s Secret*, trans. William H. Draper (London: Chatto & Windus, 1911), author’s preface.
10. *Hokke Mongu*, vol. 9.
11. Sir John Eccles and Daniel N. Robinson, *The Wonder of Being Human: Our Brain and Our Mind* (New York: The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., 1984), p. 1.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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