

**Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra**  
**The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra—**  
**A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century**

*This is the twenty-fifth 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 February 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*The grand flow of kosen-rufu in the postwar era developed from second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's realization while in prison: "I am a Bodhisattva of the Earth." In this discussion, their third on the "Emerging from the Earth" (fifteenth) chapter, they discuss the identity of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, what it means to be "of the same mind as Nichiren," and the truly revolutionary view of the human being found in the Lotus Sutra.*

**25 "I Am a Bodhisattva of the Earth"—the Discovery of the Eternal Self**

**Haruo Suda:** This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of your taking faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism, President Ikeda. It seems to me that over the course of these fifty years, you have actualized the principle of how the human revolution of one person can generate a current that can effect a change in society, the country, and the entire world.

**Takanori Endo:** It's as though you yourself have enacted the core principles of the Lotus Sutra's essential teaching. You've accomplished the "drama of the transformation of life" on the plain of reality.

**Katsuji Saito:** As a disciple, I cannot help but feel boundless appreciation for all that you've done, and for your determination to carry on without fail.

**Daisaku Ikeda:** It has been fifty years of fierce struggle amid gale-force winds. It has been fifty years during which I have run tirelessly ahead together with President Toda.

In everything, President Toda has been my prime point. And through this unity with him, I have won. President Toda once said: "We have to bring about a great revolution. It's not a revolution that will be accomplished through force of arms or power. We have to bring about the human revolution, which is a bloodless, peaceful revolution. This is the true revolution."

We, a group of people who were scorned as a "gathering of the poor and the sick," have accomplished a revolution of the people, by the people and for the people. And we have done this without relying on power or wealth. We have embraced each person, and provided each the encouragement and the means to become prosperous and healthy. Today, more than 10 million friends around the world are advancing along this golden path of human revolution.

**Endo:** The fact that the Soka Gakkai was scorned as a "gathering of the poor and the sick" is proof that the light of the Soka Gakkai has indeed reached those suffering the most. Dr. Dong-Hoon Kim, director of Asia-Pacific Human Rights

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Information Center in Osaka, commented that for a religious body that is working to help people, to be called a “gathering of the poor and the sick” is the highest honor.

**Saito:** He commented that this proves the merit of the Soka movement.

**Suda:** This seems to perfectly match the image of bodhisattvas dynamically emerging from below the earth. Of course, “below” doesn’t mean the underside of society; rather, it indicates the wellspring of life itself, the Mystic Law.

**Saito:** I’m not sure that these two concepts can be entirely separated. So many of the members in the early days of our movement were people who had nothing on which to rely. Literally starting from zero, they were people who had no recourse other than to tap their own inherent strength and ability. Also, it seems likely that for precisely this reason they were quick to realize the greatness of faith in the Lotus Sutra, which enabled them to transform the state of their lives.

**Ikeda:** They had neither the “armor” of authority, the “shield” of learning, nor the “sword” of wealth or status. No avenue was available to them other than that of struggling to summon forth their inherent inner strength. They had no alternative but to stand on their own two feet and forge a solidarity of humanism.

### **The SGI Is a “Gathering of Bodhisattvas”**

**Endo:** I recall an address that Professor Su Dongtian of Shenzhen University in China gave at a lecture sponsored by the SGI of Hong Kong.

[Titled, “The Twenty-first Century and Buddhism—SGI President Ikeda’s Buddhist Thought and the Civilization of the Twenty-first Century,” it was held at the Hong Kong Culture Centre in September 1996.]

Characterizing the present as a time when most people are controlled by cravings and desires, Professor Su asserted that the “conscientious wisdom” of people such as yourself, Mr. Ikeda, was a bright light guiding humankind toward the future. He credited you with having created many “gatherings of bodhisattvas,” mentioning the members of the Soka Gakkai in Japan and of the SGI of Hong Kong.

Professor Su further noted that the SGI is quite a unique organization in that its members are neither motivated in their activities by concern for profit or by ideology, nor bound by a set of rules or a contract. Instead, ties of the heart and friendship, entirely free of any coercion or external pressure, form the basis of members’ association.

**Ikeda:** He really sees things very clearly.

Everything comes from the self-directed power of the people themselves. We have succeeded in helping people cultivate their own “inner power.” This is a remarkable achievement. And therein lies the SGI’s underlying strength. It simply could never happen that so many people would carry on such vigorous activities over such a long time merely on the directive of some authority figure. The SGI’s success in facilitating the empowerment of the people is truly the actualization of the Lotus Sutra’s teaching of “emerging from the earth.”

**Suda:** The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are not god-like beings who descend from the sky. Rather, they leap forth from the earth. This gives us a sense of the importance that the Lotus Sutra places on human beings.

### A Gathering of Bodhisattvas Who “Leap Forth”

I beg the most honored of two-legged beings to explain  
where they have come from,  
what causes and conditions bring them together!  
Huge in body, with great transcendental powers,  
unfathomable in wisdom,  
firm in their intent and thought,  
with the power of great perseverance,  
the kind living beings delight to see—  
where have they come from?” (LS15, 216)<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

These great bodhisattvas  
for countless kalpas  
have practiced the Buddha wisdom.  
All have been converted by me;  
I caused them to set their minds on the great way.  
These are my sons,  
they dwell in this world....” (LS15, 219–20)

**Endo:** Speaking of leaping forth from the earth, Nichiren Daishonin says, “When Bodhisattva Jogyo [Superior Practices] emerged from the earth, he leapt forth joyfully....” (MW-5, 161).

There are transcriptions of the Lotus Sutra, even of Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation, in which the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter is titled “Leaping Forth from the Earth.” This variation is found even in copies of the Lotus Sutra included in the *Taisho Shinshu Daizo Kyo* (New Compilation of the Buddhist Canon in the Taisho Era [1912–26]), a collection of virtually all the sutras that have been translated into Chinese. A copy of the Lotus Sutra that was unearthed at Dunhuang in China also reads “leap forth” instead of “emerge.”

**Ikeda:** I see. It seems that “leaping forth” is a fitting image for the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. After all, they do appear on the scene fully aware of their mission to spread the Mystic Law. They don’t come forth reluctantly because

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Shakyamuni told them to; rather, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth leap forth dancing exuberantly with the sense: “Our time has come at last!”

**Saito:** There are several places in the Goshō, too, where the Daishōnin uses the phonetically identical “leap forth” in place of “emerge.”

**Ikeda:** It is by practicing with the self-motivated faith to “leap forth” that we can attain eternal happiness.

President Toda explained the supreme benefit of faith as follows:

Attaining Buddhahood means achieving the state in which we are always reborn overflowing with abundant and powerful life force; we can take action to our heart’s content based on a profound sense of mission; we can achieve all our goals; and we possess good fortune that no one can destroy. Because we can lead tens, hundreds, thousands, tens of millions of lives in this way, our happiness truly knows no bounds. Someone who does not aspire for such a life of happiness, and who instead greedily seeks out miniscule joys, is truly pitiful.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of faith is to realize a state of eternal happiness. This existence is as fleeting as a dream. We practice faith in order to awaken from this dream and firmly establish a state of eternal happiness in the depths of our lives during this lifetime. That is what it means to “attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.” And that’s why, as I always say, we must exert ourselves to the utmost in faith.

What, then, is necessary to achieve Buddhahood? Nichiren Daishōnin says, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (MW-1, 93). Those who struggle for kosen-rufu with the same spirit as the Daishōnin are the true Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Everything in the cosmos moves along its own path in exquisite harmony. Just as the earth naturally follows its own orbit, so too is kosen-rufu like the revolution of a planet around the sun. In the same manner, our individual human revolution is like the rotation of a planet on its axis. These two motions are inseparable.

The SGI represents the “forces of the Buddha.” It is only natural, therefore, that we are attacked by “devils.” For, as the Daishōnin says, “The Buddha and Devadatta are like a form and its shadow—in lifetime after lifetime, they are never separated” (MW-2, 170 [195]).<sup>3</sup> We have to hunt out, beat down and defeat negative forces. This is the spirit of *shakubuku*.<sup>4</sup>

When we are “of the same mind as Nichiren,” what can we possibly have to fear? Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, never retreated a single step, even when they were under attack by the militarist authorities during the war. They continued advancing straight ahead with the “spirit of the lion king,” which is the spirit of Nichiren Daishōnin.

**Endo:** That was where the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood decisively parted ways. The members of the priesthood, far from being “of the

same mind as Nichiren," trampled the Daishonin's spirit underfoot out of fear of persecution.

### **Enduring Hardship on Account of Faith Equals Attaining Buddhahood**

**Ikeda:** It was in prison that President Toda attained his enlightenment, which has become the prime point of our movement. This is a key point. He was imprisoned on account of his faith in the Lotus Sutra. In light of the Gosho, "The Four Debts of Gratitude,"<sup>5</sup> this is comparable to reading the Lotus Sutra with one's life constantly throughout each day without a moment's rest.

It was during the course of his imprisonment that President Toda had the instantaneous realization: "I am a Bodhisattva of the Earth!" He carried out his human revolution while undergoing great persecution. Enduring difficulties on account of faith equals attaining enlightenment.

In truth, he proved with his life the golden words, "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth." Strictly speaking, unless we encounter difficulties we cannot be said to be genuinely "of the same mind as Nichiren."

President Toda's enlightenment in prison is our eternal prime point. At that moment, the Lotus Sutra was revived and the sun of "human revolution" dawned on the modern age. Although in the deep darkness of the time no one realized it, dawn had already broken in President Toda's life.

**Saito:** President Toda left behind statements of various kinds about the enlightenment he experienced while imprisoned. It was during the early winter of 1944. At the time, he was continually pondering the Lotus Sutra while chanting earnest daimoku in an effort to grasp the sutra's essential principles.

**Endo:** He would walk about in his solitary cell saying to himself, "I have to know! I simply must understand!" Whether asleep or awake, he continued to seriously grapple with the sutra's text. That is how President Toda describes the process leading to his enlightenment in his novel *The Human Revolution*.

He goes on to relate how one morning, as he was on the verge of reaching 1,800,000 daimoku since the start of the year, he had a mystic experience while chanting daimoku in quiet concentration that seemed to refresh him in both body and mind. As he describes it in the novel [in the third person]:

It was neither a dream nor an illusion.... In terms of time, it may have lasted for several seconds or for several minutes, or even for several hours.... He [Toda] really had no way of knowing. He discovered himself at the Ceremony in the Air among a great multitude of beings incalculable in number, reverently bowing to the Dai-Gohonzon that shone before him with a brilliant golden hue....

When he tried to cry out, "This isn't a lie! I am here right now!" he found himself seated in a chair in his solitary cell. The morning sun shone

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fresh and bright.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, he perceived himself present in the realm of the Ceremony in the Air described in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter.

**Ikeda:** President Toda’s enlightenment at that moment has become the prime point of world kosen-rufu. President Toda’s great conviction, “I am a Bodhisattva of the Earth!” is the spring at the source of the great river of kosen-rufu.

**Suda:** He also wrote:

The Lotus Sutra that I see now is the same Lotus Sutra that until recently I found impenetrable to my understanding no matter how I exerted myself. However, now I can read it and draw forth its meaning as easily and accurately as if I were looking at something in the palm of my hand. Sensing the wonder of this, I am filled with a sense of immense gratitude; it is as though I have recollected a teaching that I learned in the distant past.<sup>7</sup>

And he made this determination: “My future has been decided. I will devote the remainder of my existence to spreading this most exalted of teachings—the Lotus Sutra!”

**Ikeda:** It was a truly mystic revelation. Yet, for President Toda, it was an unmistakable experience. He read with his life the passage, “The assembly at Eagle Peak which continues in solemn state and has not yet dispersed.”<sup>8</sup>

**Saito:** Nichijun Shonin (1898–1959) praised President Toda as the “vanguard of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth,” and credited him with having called into appearance in the world the Bodhisattvas of the Earth making up the Soka Gakkai’s membership of 750,000 households. He also recognized the number 750,000 as significant because of its association with the phrase “the seven characters or five characters” of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.<sup>9</sup>

The “Emerging from the Earth” chapter could therefore truly be called the lifeline of the SGI.

### **We Can “Enter the Treasure Tower” Through Faith**

**Suda:** What is the relationship of President Toda’s awakening to the fact that he is a Bodhisattva of the Earth to his earlier revelation that “the Buddha is life”?

**Saito:** President Toda attained his revelation that the Buddha is life in early March 1944, at a time when he had been contemplating passages from the Sutra

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of Immeasurable Meanings (*Muryogi Sutra*). Specifically, he was pondering the matter of the actual nature of the Buddha that transcends the so-called thirty-four negations: “His body neither existing nor not existing, neither caused nor conditioned, neither self nor other....”<sup>10</sup>

He had his revelation as to his own identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth in November of that same year, or about eight months later. During that interval, President Toda continued chanting daimoku and pondering the sutras.

**Endo:** It seems to me his realization that the Buddha is life has something of an intellectual flavor to it. His awakening to his identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth seems to represent a deepening of this earlier revelation—such that he experienced it, not intellectually, but at the very core of his being. In that sense, I think we can see a link between his revelation that the Buddha is life and his revelation eight months later that he is a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

**Ikeda:** While the total content of President Toda’s enlightenment is beyond words, it is a fact that he was thrown into prison on account of his belief in the Lotus Sutra, and that he maintained his belief while enduring persecution. This in itself amounts to reading the Lotus Sutra with one’s life—with the totality of one’s being.

Enduring hardships on account of faith equals attaining Buddhahood. Because he struggled against extreme difficulties based on faith in the Mystic Law, a great transformation occurred in his life. This is just as the Daishonin indicates where he says, “Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood” (MW-2, 180 [205]).

Enlightenment is not simply a matter of recognition or awareness of eternal life. This is very important. The eternity of life is not something to be recognized intellectually; it is something that we have to experience with our own lives. And only if we practice a correct teaching can we do so.

The difficulty is that even if one consciously makes an effort to become aware of the eternity of life, ultimately it is life that supports the self that is trying to achieve this awareness. One cannot comprehend what is large with what is small; by analogy, a wave cannot comprehend the ocean over whose surface it passes. What, then, are we to do?

The only way to awaken to life’s eternity is to cause the greater, eternal self to “emerge” in the small self. And to do this, we need to undertake the task of self-purification wholeheartedly, with our entire being. This is the purpose of Buddhist practice.

Originally our lives are in harmony with the Mystic Law. However, because we live in a strife-ridden world, we tend to base ourselves on egoism. As a result, our hearts become clouded by illusion and karma, and we grow befuddled and confused. This prevents the brilliant light of the eternal world of Buddhahood from illuminating our lives.

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**Endo:** The “Life Span” (sixteenth) chapter states that befuddled living beings cannot see the Buddha even when he is nearby. It also describes befuddled people as drowning in a sea of suffering.

[Shakyamuni says: “I make it so that living beings in their befuddlement / do not see me even when close by” (LS16, 229); and “When I look at living beings / I see them drowned in a sea of suffering” (LS16, 230).]

**Ikeda:** That’s right. I’d like to go into this in more detail later when we discuss the “Life Span” chapter, but for now suffice it to say that the Buddha to which this refers is Shakyamuni as the original Buddha enlightened since the remote past. The Buddha is called the “Thus Come One,” indicating the state of life of one in whom the Mystic Law manifests at each moment without effort or affection.

This eternal pulsing dynamism of the Mystic Law is itself eternal life. It is the true identity of the Buddha; it is the original Buddha. Furthermore, it is the wellspring of the benefit that all Buddhas enjoy. Just as President Toda realized, the Buddha is life itself. In addition, this original Buddha is in fact the very wellspring of our lives. It is in this sense that the sutra speaks of the original Buddha as being nearby. In their befuddlement, however, people fail to perceive this Buddha.

By struggling against difficulties, we polish our own clouded hearts and fuse with eternal life. We might think of it as gaining self-mastery; it’s a matter of harmonizing one’s life, as though tuning a musical instrument, with the eternal rhythm of the Mystic Law. It is a matter of fusing one’s entire being with the eternal life of the cosmos. This is what it means to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “These great bodhisattvas benefit the living beings of the Latter Day of the Law as naturally as fish swim in water and as freely as birds fly through the sky” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1033). The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have earnestly practiced the Mystic Law since the distant past. They have tempered their lives based on the Mystic Law and based on faith. That’s why the Daishonin says, “These Bodhisattvas of the Earth are the ones who had thoroughly forged their faith”(MW-1, 227).

Because the Bodhisattvas of the Earth have such strong faith—that is, because in the depths of their lives they dwell in the world of Buddhahood—they can spread the Mystic Law in this strife-ridden *saha* world even while undergoing great persecution.

**Suda:** This is how they differ from the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching.

**Ikeda:** That’s right. The bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching and bodhisattvas from other lands are all bodhisattvas who aspire to become Buddhas. For this reason, they cannot endure the difficulties of spreading the teaching in the saha world. It is the Bodhisattvas of the Earth of the essential teaching who are thoroughly versed in and have mastered the eternal Mystic Law, who can endure the hardships incumbent upon those undertaking this great task.

President Makiguchi said:

Although it is said that particles of dust collect to form mountains, there are in fact no mountains that are made of accumulated particles of dust. At the most all they can form is a small hill. Real mountains are formed by great shifts in the earth's crust. By the same token, no matter how much minor good you accumulate, it will never amount to major good.<sup>11</sup>

The bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings are like those who are trying to attain Buddhahood by accumulating minor good. By contrast, the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching cause the great vitality of Buddhahood to issue forth from the depths of their lives—from the fundamental nature of the Law, which is to say the very wellspring of their being—with explosive force like that of a volcanic eruption.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are bodhisattvas who constantly practice the Mystic Law and who at each moment live in harmony with eternal life. While bodhisattvas in their appearance as practitioners, in terms of their state of life they are Buddhas.

President Toda's experience of having attended the Ceremony in the Air as a Bodhisattva of the Earth signifies his entry into the realm of eternal life, the world of truth of the original Buddha.

**Endo:** His realization that "the Buddha is life itself" thus closely relates to his awareness that he was a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

**Ikeda:** That's right. President Toda wrote:

Awakening  
to the life of the Buddha,  
I take pride  
in having been a Bodhisattva of the Earth  
since the remote past.<sup>12</sup>

He composed this verse in 1951, the year he became second Soka Gakkai president.

**Saito:** The Ceremony in the Air is a cosmic scene that crystallizes the eternity of life. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are bodhisattvas who manifest in themselves the eternity of life. And the Gohonzon, set within the eternal realm of the Ceremony in the Air, embodies the life of Nichiren Daishonin, which is one with the eternal Mystic Law.

In that sense, President Toda's experience could be said to signify his having "entered" the realm of the Gohonzon. When he returned to his home in 1945 after his release, President Toda immediately sat upright before the Gohonzon and carefully scrutinized the writing on the Gohonzon, thereby confirming the truth of the enlightenment that he had attained.

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**Endo:** In your novel, President Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, you describe this moment as follows:

He removed his glasses and scrutinized each character, bending so close it seemed his face would touch the scroll.

“It was just like this. No mistake. Exactly, just as I saw it...”

Murmuring silently, he satisfied himself that the solemn and mysterious ceremony in the air which he had witnessed in his cell was indeed inscribed on the Gohonzon. Profound delight surged through him and tears streamed down his face... He cried out from the depths of his being:

“Gohonzon! Daishonin! I, Toda, will accomplish kosen-rufu!”<sup>13</sup>

**Ikeda:** In a famous passage, the Daishonin says, “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 213). President Toda vividly felt the truth of these lines. And just as the Daishonin teaches when he says that through faith one can “enter the Treasure Tower of the Gohonzon” (MW-1, 214), he indeed entered the Gohonzon and took his place at the Ceremony in the Air.

The Gohonzon is itself the Treasure Tower, and the Treasure Tower is none other than one’s own life. President Toda grasped this truth with his entire being.

### **The Lotus Sutra Portrays the Drama in All People’s Lives**

**Saito:** President Toda attained that enlightenment in his heart. Had someone been there watching Mr. Toda while he had this experience in prison, the person would not have been able to see the Ceremony in the Air.

**Ikeda:** It’s something that he perceived within his own life. President Toda explained that the Lotus Sutra itself is a teaching that came out of Shakyamuni’s very own life. What was foreshadowed in the “Introduction” (first) and “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One” (twenty-first) chapters, as well as Shakyamuni’s exchanges with the voice-hearers and bodhisattvas, the astonishing appearance of the Treasure Tower, the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—we can interpret all of these as dramas taking place in Shakyamuni’s own life.

**Suda:** When I visited Eagle Peak, the place where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra, in India, there was someone in our party who went around purportedly trying to find a chasm of some kind in the earth from which the Bodhisattvas of the Earth might have emerged. But these are all dramas taking place within Shakyamuni’s life; they are not to be interpreted literally.

**Ikeda:** While not historically factual, the events described in the sutra do express

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truths about life and the nature of existence.

**Saito:** In the course of these discussions, for purposes of convenience, we have at times discussed the events of the Lotus Sutra as though they really happened. That is because they can be thought of as expressing the truth of life.

**Endo:** If we say that the Lotus Sutra is a teaching out of Shakyamuni's own life, then the issue of Shakyamuni's identity becomes problematic. That is to say, the Shakyamuni appearing in the Lotus Sutra becomes the "Shakyamuni in Shakyamuni's own life."

**Ikeda:** It represents Shakyamuni's true self. In a sense, the reason for the development from the theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra to the essential teaching (or second half) is to enable Shakyamuni to reveal his "true self." And the other personages who appear and the various events that occur all function to assist in this revelation.

**Saito:** The original Buddha of the "Life Span" chapter who has been enlightened since the remote past corresponds to Shakyamuni's true self.

**Ikeda:** That's right. The original Buddha enlightened since the remote past is the "eternal self" that is one with the eternal Mystic Law.

**Suda:** The Bodhisattvas of the Earth must also exist in Shakyamuni's life.

**Ikeda:** They are "eternal bodhisattvas" representing an aspect of Shakyamuni's "eternal self." The "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) says, "Because they are Bodhisattvas contained in Shakyamuni's own life, Shakyamuni summons forth these true disciples who were nurtured by the original Buddha" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 798).

But this is not only true for Shakyamuni. The Daishonin says, "The example of one person represents the impartial truth inherent in all living beings" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 564). Shakyamuni's "eternal self" is the "eternal self" of all living beings. In a broad sense, all beings are original Buddhas. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are therefore "eternal bodhisattvas" existing in the lives of all people. The Daishonin explains this, saying: "The enlightened life of Shakyamuni Buddha is our own flesh and blood. His practices and resulting virtues are our bones and marrow" (MW-1, 64); "Present within our lives is the Lord Shakyamuni ... the original Buddha since time without beginning" (MW-1, 65); and, "Bodhisattvas Jogyo, Muhengyo, Jyogyo and Anryugyo<sup>14</sup> represent the world of Bodhisattva within our lives" (MW-1, 65).

**Endo:** The drama of the Lotus Sutra is a drama taking place in the lives of all people. The same can be said of the Gohonzon, which is the Lotus Sutra of Nichiren Daishonin.

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**Ikeda:** Based on the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin manifested his “eternal self” in the form of the Gohonzon. The Daishonin’s “eternal self,” needless to say, is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; accordingly, down the middle of the Gohonzon are inscribed the characters “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Nichiren.”

**Saito:** In a Gosho he says, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in *sumi*<sup>15</sup> ... the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 120).

**Ikeda:** We can think of President Toda’s enlightenment in prison as the moment in which he connected with his “eternal self” as the leader of the movement to propagate the Mystic Law. That was the meaning of his experience of being present at the Ceremony in the Air. What he awakened to in that instant was the unmistakable truth of life, the fundamental transcendent reality. Therefore, President Toda talked about the Ceremony in the Air as a fact. And he said that the members of the Soka Gakkai were also all present there.

**Endo:** He once humorously remarked that those who have difficulty grasping Buddhist concepts are the ones who, during the Ceremony in the Air, were dozing off in spite of themselves at the back of the crowd.<sup>16</sup>

**Saito:** Again, President Toda once said, “The Gohonzon exists within our own lives. The quintessence of faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism is to believe that our own lives and the Gohonzon enshrined in the altar are one and the same.”<sup>17</sup> I think this was his way of expressing what he had realized while in prison.

**Suda:** President Toda stated that the vision of the Ceremony in the Air he had while in prison did not differ in the least from the appearance of the Gohonzon that the Daishonin inscribed. This seems to me evidence that President Toda truly entered the Gohonzon.

**Ikeda:** President Toda fought the devilish nature of power head on. And through his faith to wage such a struggle, he attained an immense state of life. This is the principle of “attaining enlightenment through faith.” He then became able to readily read the Lotus Sutra and comprehend its meaning. That’s because he grasped with his life that what the Lotus Sutra is trying to explain is the eternal Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. That’s why he often said, “It’s simply impossible to read the Lotus Sutra without faith in the Gohonzon.”

**“Dig Down Right Where You Are,  
For There Lies the Source!”**

**Suda:** President Toda’s struggle to chant daimoku and ponder the meaning of the sutra while in prison was a confrontation with the Lotus Sutra. But at the same time, it was a struggle to dig into the depths of his life.

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**Ikeda:** Through thoroughly pursuing the question “What is the Buddha?” he came to realize that the Buddha is none other than the self, and the great life of the universe; that these two—the self and the universe—are in fact one.

Just as the words “Start digging right where you are, for there lies the source!” imply, when we dig into the inner reaches of our own being, the common foundation of life that all people share comes into view. This foundation is none other than the eternal life of the universe. President Toda not only became enlightened to the wellspring at the core of his own being, he also awakened to the foundation of life that all people share. He realized that, as he put it, “In essence, all people are in fact Bodhisattvas of the Earth.”

With that conviction President Toda racked his brain to somehow find a way to enable all members to share that same profound level of confidence in their lives. Sometimes in urging the members to work together toward accomplishing the goal of *kosen-rufu*, he would address them as “fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth.” President Toda wholeheartedly sought to teach us the nobility and strength we can attain by basing ourselves on an awareness of the truth as the wellspring of our being. He showed actual proof of this truth through his own life. Because of his conviction, it is the members of the SGI who now share this awareness of the common “homeland of life.”

The power of one person is truly immense. Such power and strength cannot fail to become manifest in those who awaken to their mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Such confidence is the point of departure for everything. At the very wellspring of our lives, we possess a life free of all impurity that stretches out as vast as the universe. Accomplishing our human revolution means realizing and showing actual proof of the existence of this life.

### “The Universe Is Itself Compassion”

**Saito:** Regarding these Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the “Ongi Kuden” [Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings] says, “Among the thousand plants and ten thousand trees, there is none that is not a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 751). This is a little difficult to understand, because we tend to have an image of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as people.

**Endo:** The Bodhisattvas of the Earth can perhaps be thought of more in terms of a “function” that brings living beings benefit. That passage in the “Ongi Kuden” continues, “Thus we may say that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who emerge from the earth represent the essential teaching. The word ‘essential’ represents the eternal merits handed down from the infinite past of *gohyaku-jintengo*”<sup>18</sup> (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 751).

**Ikeda:** I think we might find a guideline for interpreting these passages in President Toda’s essay “On Compassion.”<sup>19</sup> In conclusion, he says, “The universe is itself an entity of compassion.” The universe gives life to all things, causing

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them to come into being, to change, and to repeatedly undergo the cycle of birth and death. The great life that is this universe is itself the entity of the Buddha. It is the entity of the Buddha inherently possessing the three enlightened properties of the Law, wisdom and action.

The compassion of the universe is the function inherently possessed by the Buddha. It is also the function of the inherent world of Bodhisattva, the power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Therefore, in a general sense, all living things in the universe are sacred Bodhisattvas of the Earth; whereas in a specific sense, Bodhisattvas of the Earth refer to those who have awakened to this law of life.

The path of the bodhisattva lies in supremely humane action. And such action, fundamentally, is at one with the function of compassion of the universe. When we pray, speak out and take action for the happiness of a friend, the eternal life of the universe manifests through our thoughts, words and deeds.

**Endo:** I feel as though I have gained a clear sense of the humanism of Buddhism, which is as vast as the universe. Moreover, [in contrast to secular humanism] this humanism is respectful of the sanctity of all things, including even mountains and rivers, plants and trees.

**Saito:** The Bodhisattvas of the Earth appearing in the Lotus Sutra are described as “filling the sky over immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and millions of lands” (LS15, 214). This is truly universal in scale; they completely occupy all space.

**Suda:** This is a depiction of a gathering of countless beings who manifest the principle that “the universe is itself compassion.” How solemn! What a grand drama! When we open our eyes to the teaching of the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter, it becomes only too obvious how truly petty and insignificant are the discrimination and egoism that are rampant in society.

**Saito:** I recall the poem, “The Sun of ‘Jiyu’ over a New Land,” that you presented to friends in Los Angeles, President Ikeda. In that poem, you describe the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as “roots” that cut through all differences. You write:

As each group seeks their separate  
roots and origins,  
society fractures along a thousand fissure lines.  
When neighbors distance themselves  
from neighbors, continue your  
uncompromising quest  
for your truer roots  
in the deepest regions of your lives.  
Seek out the primordial “roots” of humankind.  
Then you will without fail discover the stately expanse of *Jiyu*  
unfolding in the depths of your life.

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Here is the home, the dwelling place  
to which humankind traces  
its original existence—  
beyond all borders,  
beyond all differences of gender and race.  
Here is a world offering true proof  
of our humanity.

If one reaches back to these fundamental roots,  
all become friends and comrades.  
To realize this is to “emerge from the earth.”<sup>20</sup>

**Suda:** Everyone is sacred. Everyone is an irreplaceable and unique existence. Moreover, everyone is a child of the “great earth of life.” This is what the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter teaches.

**Endo:** Only one year before you composed this poem, Los Angeles had been engulfed in tragedy. A group of white police officers were on trial for brutally beating an African American male whom they had apprehended for a traffic violation, and who was not offering any resistance. When an all white jury handed down a verdict of “not guilty” racial tensions exploded, resulting in widespread rioting [in 1992].

**Ikeda:** Discrimination is absolutely an evil. Those whose minds are so “befuddled” injure the lives of others as well as themselves. To try to locate the “roots” of one’s identity in a particular racial or ethnic group is an illusion. It is like a mirage in the desert. Such a sense of identity, far from serving as a common “homeland of life” that can be shared by all, only heightens distinctions between oneself and others, and becomes an underlying cause of conflict and strife.

What is needed today is a transformation in how society views the human being. When people’s view of the human being changes, everything will change. “You must not yoke yourself to nationality or to ethnicity. You must not think of yourself as powerless, or as ‘no more than a collection of matter.’ You must not regard yourself as a slave to your genes. Fundamentally, you have limitless and immense potential. Fundamentally, the human being is one with the universe! Such is the immense power of one person!” This is the message of the Lotus Sutra.

**Endo:** That is why it is called the “sutra of hope.”

### **The Mind Is Not Merely a “Function of the Brain”**

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**Suda:** The tendency to view people as a type of machine made up of living matter, and to see the spiritual as no more than a function of the brain, is emblematic of the modern age. The assumption seems to be that advances in neurosciences will eventually fully elucidate all phenomena of the spirit.

**Saito:** There is no time to go into a detailed discussion here, but contrary to such an idea it is also pointed out that “the more we discover about the brain, the more clearly do we distinguish between the brain events and the mental phenomena, and the more wonderful do both the brain events and the mental phenomena become.”<sup>21</sup>

**Ikeda:** There is also a view of the brain as a “tool” of the mind, and as a “venue” through which spiritual phenomena are worked out. It may be true that without the functioning of the brain, the mind would have no means to express itself. Still, I believe, as current research about the brain and the mind seems to indicate, that the two are in no sense identical.

In modern terms, we may say that the brain is like a wonderful computer; yet, it is ultimately nothing but a tool. We may be able to locate the subjective entity that uses this tool, the mind. The mind cannot be a locally defined entity that is “contained” within the body or the brain, although many people today seem to suppose so. Scientific research is making this increasingly clear. The mind is more vast and expansive; it has a breadth that transcends material restrictions.

For instance, the American clinical physician Larry Dossey says:

... there is good evidence that the mind cannot be localized. It displays its nonlocal character in a million ways, showing us that it is free in space and time, that it bridges consciousness between persons, and that it does not die with the body.<sup>22</sup>

The mind that transcends time and space is an entity whose dimensions are not locally circumscribed; the mind possesses the potential to transcend the small self. Dr. Dossey also writes:

If nonlocal mind is a reality, the world becomes a place of interaction and connection, not one of isolation and disjunction. And if humanity really believed that nonlocal mind were real, an entirely new foundation for ethical and moral behavior would enter, which would hold at least the possibility of a radical departure from the insane ways human beings and nation-states have chronically behaved toward each other.<sup>23</sup>

**Endo:** The infinite expanse of the mind—this is what the doctrine of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, or *ichinen sanzen*, explains.

**Saito:** In the Goshō, “On Attaining Buddhahood,” there is the famous passage, “Life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena”

(MW-1, 3). One senses from passages like this that science is approaching the view of life of Buddhism.

## **The Lotus Sutra Teaches the True Way of Humanity**

**Ikeda:** Dr. Dossey further states:

If we continue in the ways in which we have conceptualized ourselves for hundred of years, it is no longer certain that we will have a future on this Earth. If we are to survive, a sacred regard for the Earth and all things in it must arise once more.<sup>24</sup>

It is Buddhism that greatly transforms “the ways in which we have conceptualized ourselves.” This is not merely an intellectual transformation; it manifests in the practice of compassion; that is, in altered patterns of behavior. It could be termed a transformation of people’s fundamental state of life. And the appearance on the scene of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth could be thought of as its grand prelude. Simply put, to have faith in the Lotus Sutra is to have faith in humanity. This is what President Toda said.

**Saito:** In other words, it is the human being that is truly great. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the flag-bearer of the American renaissance, makes a very interesting comment to the same effect. He says, “The Belief in Christianity that now prevails is the Unbelief of men. They will have Christ for a lord and not for a brother. Christ preached the greatness of Man but we hear only the greatness of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

**Ikeda:** Such insight is typical of Emerson. He’s right of course. Neither the state nor ideology is “sacred,” nor is any superhuman deity or Buddha.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact Buddhas. But the term Buddha is inevitably taken to mean a being who is somehow transcendental or superior to ordinary human beings. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth thoroughly devote themselves to the way of bodhisattvas as “people who carry out Buddhist practice.” They thoroughly devote themselves to the way of human beings. This is a point of tremendous significance.

The restoration of trust and belief in humanity will be the key to “religion in the twenty-first century,” which is the theme of this series of discussions.

**Suda:** The teaching of the Lotus Sutra does indeed stand on the forefront of the age.

**Ikeda:** For instance, one could argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union—one of the major changes of the latter half of this century—fundamentally arose from an inner thirst in human beings.

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**Endo:** Shimon Peres, the former prime minister of Israel [and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace], remarked:

The Communist Party was not beaten by another party opposing it. The Communist Party was beaten by its own children and not by its rivals. The Soviet Union did not come apart under the impact of American pressure, European intervention, or a Chinese threat. The pressure did not come from without, it sprang from within. This gigantic change in human organization occurred without the army's guns, without political parties' banners, and without superpower threats.<sup>26</sup>

**Suda:** In other words, it was not destruction resulting from external force, but collapse caused by an innate cry of the people from within.

**Endo:** Peres, looking back on the circumstances of the time, recalled a particularly poignant scene:

One of the most captivating images during the attempted coup against Mikhail Gorbachev was that of a battalion of Red Army soldiers in front of the Russian Parliament, Moscow's "White House." The soldiers were indifferent, with a "who cares" attitude, when suddenly an old Russian woman, a *babouchka*, went up to them and said, "Children, what are you doing here? Go home!" It was almost as if the *babouchka* were the sole commander of the Red Army.<sup>27</sup>

**Saito:** Given the tenseness of the situation, this was a really courageous grandmother. His description reminds me of the women of the Many Treasures Group (Jp. Taho-kai) who have steadfastly fought for kosen-rufu since the early days of the Soka Gakkai.

**Ikeda:** At the crucial moment, it is the ordinary people who are the strongest. It is the thoroughly polished core humanity of the ordinary people that shines most brightly. It is faith in the Mystic Law that enables us to bring out the full brilliance of this essential human core.

Nichiren Daishonin cries, "Nichiren alone began to carry out the task of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth" (MW-1, 92). Reading this line fills me with a profound emotion. The great struggle of the human revolution is the dawn of life that humankind has eagerly awaited. It marks the dawn of a new history. The human revolution is a liberation of the human being on the most fundamental level of life. It is the liberation of the human being on a dimension ranging over eternity. And it was to enable all people to accomplish this liberation that Nichiren Daishonin alone stood up.

We who have gathered together beneath the "banner of the Law" of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth share a mystic connection from the distant past as is sung

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in the song “Doshi no Uta” (Song of Comrades): “I now receive the Buddha’s decree....”

When we realize this, we can see the marvelous mission we have. It is as though the “gears” of our life mesh with a million-horsepower engine. Tremendous energy wells forth, and we can develop a self of awesome vitality and strength.

*To be continued*

1. 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.
2. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 171.
3. Editor’s note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the second edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
4. *Shakubuku*: Sharing and teaching others about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.
5. The Daishonin states in this writing, “In this latter age, there cannot be anyone else who upholds the Lotus Sutra twenty-four hours of the day and night without making a conscious effort to do so” (MW-5, p. 8).
6. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1988), vol. 8, p. 517–18.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 519.
8. Words by Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China.
9. *Nichijun Shonin Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichijun Shonin) (Fujinomiya: Nichiren Shoshu Fukyokai, 1960), p. 357. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo consists of seven Chinese characters; Myoho-rence-kyo consists of five.
10. The “thirty-four negations” describing the entity of the Buddha appear in the “Virtuous Practices” (Jp. Tokugyo, or the first) chapter of the Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings. President Toda read the sutra with his whole body and finally perceived that the Buddha is life itself.
11. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Shingenshu* (Collection of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s Sayings), ed. Takehisa Tsuji (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1979), p. 23.
12. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1981), vol. 1, p. 416.
13. Daisaku Ikeda, *Ningen Kakumei* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1965), vol. 1, p. 38.
14. The four bodhisattvas: Jogyo (Superior Practices), Muhengyo (Boundless Practices), Jyogyo (Pure Practices) and Anryugyo (Firmly Established Practices).
15. *Sumi*: Black Chinese ink.
16. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, p. 39.
17. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1985), vol. 5, p. 283.
18. *Gohyaku-jintengo*: An incredibly long period of time described in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra which indicates how much time has elapsed since Shakyamuni’s original enlightenment.

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19. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, vol. 3, pp. 44–45.
20. Commemorating the second SGI-USA General Meeting, at the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium in Santa Monica, Los Angeles, on January 27, 1993.
21. 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. 36.
22. Larry Dossey, *Recovering the Soul—A Scientific and Spiritual Search* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 2.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
25. *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 5, ed. Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 459.
26. *At Century's End*, ed. Nathan P. Gardels (La Jolla, CA: Alti Publishers, 1995), p. 301.
27. *Ibid.*

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