

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA 38 JOYFULLY SPREADING THE MYSTIC LAW

THE WISDOM OF THE LOTUS SUTRA—
A DISCUSSION ON RELIGION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This is the thirty-eighth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the March 1998 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This time participants discuss the great benefit of joyfully and courageously spreading the Mystic Law based on the principle of “continual propagation to the fiftieth person” expounded in the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” (eighteenth) chapter.

38 Joyfully Spreading the Mystic Law

KATSUJI SAITO: The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter will be the theme of our discussion today.

DAISAKU IKEDA: When we respond with joy, we receive benefit—that, in essence, is the meaning of the title. In other words, we receive great benefit to the extent that we joyfully exert ourselves in faith. Here, again, we see that the heart is the all-important factor. If you’re going to practice Buddhism anyway, you might as well enjoy it rather than complain about it!

When you’re faced with a challenge, do you sigh deeply and say, “Oh no, not again”? Or do you confront it head-on, determined to use the situation to accumulate still more good fortune? This slight distinction in attitude makes a world of difference in the end.

The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter clarifies the great benefit that accrues from courageously encouraging others to practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

TAKANORI ENDO: We entered the transmission section¹ of the Lotus Sutra with “Distinctions in Benefits,” the seventeenth chapter, which we discussed last month. It’s interesting that, parallel to our discussion of this part of the sutra, members throughout the country have intensified their propagation activities.

HARUO SUDA: Transmission, meaning to cause or allow to spread, plainly refers to propagation.

The Desire To Accomplish Kosen-rufu

[After the Buddha has entered extinction, suppose there are people who, hearing this sutra, respond with joy and] put forth effort in preaching and expounding for the sake of their parents and relatives, their good friends and acquaintances. These persons, after hearing, respond with joy and they too set about spreading the teachings. One person, having heard, responds with joy and spreads the teachings, and the teachings in this way continue to be handed along from one to another until they reach a fiftieth person.

Ajita,² the benefits received by this fiftieth good man or good

woman who responds with joy I will now describe to you—you must listen carefully.

Or suppose there is a person who is sitting in the place where the Law is expounded, and when another person appears, the first person urges him to sit down and listen, or offers to share his seat and so persuades him to sit down. The benefits gained by this person will be such that when he is reborn he will be in a place where the lord Shakra is seated, where the heavenly king Brahma is seated, or where a wheel-turning sage king is seated. (LS18, 246–48)³

IKEDA: Transmission is kosen-rufu, the spread of the Law. The transmission section that we have begun studying is full of guidelines pertaining to the propagation of the Mystic Law. It is remarkable that in the three thousand years of Buddhist history, we of the SGI, virtually alone, can understand this chapter based on actual experience. It seems, therefore, that the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter was expounded for us.

In 1952, one year after his inauguration, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda proclaimed: “At this auspicious time of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, I declare that kosen-rufu will increasingly flourish from this point forward.”⁴

The SGI is an association dedicated to propagating the Mystic Law and accomplishing kosen-rufu. It is a body with a profound mission to realize the Daishonin’s will and decree. To develop this profound awareness is of utmost importance.

SAITO: I would like to read an excerpt from a speech titled “Toward the 704th Anniversary of the Founding,” delivered by Nichijun (1898–1959, the sixty-fifth high priest) in 1956:

I believe future historians will define the period leading up to the seven-hundredth anniversary of this school’s founding as the age of protection [of the Law] by the priesthood, and the period thereafter as the age of widespread transmission. Looking over the history of the priesthood until now, while there have been times of some prosperity, in the final analysis it never went beyond safeguarding the teachings...

The fact that, with the seven-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Daishonin’s Buddhism as the turning point, we have entered a period of widespread propagation indicates that there is something preordained above the spread of the Law. I therefore believe that the emergence of the Soka Gakkai indicates its extraordinary relationship with the Buddha.⁵

ENDO: His remarks bear great significance.

SUDA: The “age of widespread transmission” that will unfold over the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law has indeed begun.

In his speech at the eighteenth Soka Gakkai General Meeting on May 3, 1958, Nichijun also commented on the appearance of so many Soka Gakkai members in the dawning of this age:

In the assembly on Eagle Peak described in the Lotus Sutra, the four great bodhisattvas, with Bodhisattva Jogyo in the vanguard, arrived one after another. They, in turn, were

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followed by great bodhisattvas as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, who also gathered at Eagle Peak. There, they made a resolute vow to propagate Myoho-rence-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law. Those people are now here in accord with the promise they made at Eagle Peak. I believe that the Soka Gakkai, with President Toda in the vanguard, summoned them forth; in other words, that the 750,000-strong membership built by President Toda represents the seven or five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo.⁶

He describes the Soka Gakkai as a great assemblage of Buddhas.

SAITO: These are the words of a former high priest. The Nikken sect, in betraying these crystal-clear statements, is guilty of serious slander in turning against its own predecessors. It has attempted to obstruct kosen-rufu, and consequently has become the archenemy of Nichiren Daishonin.

IKEDA: We chose to be born at this time in anticipation of the dawn of an “age of widespread transmission.” From that standpoint, it is impossible to overstate the profundity and nobility of our mission in this life. We are in the forefront of a movement that will continue over the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. This thought fills me with profound emotion. My heart dances with joy. We must cultivate this awareness through strong prayer to the Gohonzon.

The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter includes the well-known explanation of the “benefit enjoyed by the fiftieth person.” It is the SGI that is in actuality putting this teaching into practice. Propagation is not simply a matter of explaining theory; the key is to convey the confidence and sense of fulfillment we gain from putting Nichiren Daishonin’s philosophy into practice. That is how we can touch other people’s lives.

The Boundless Benefit of the Fiftieth Person

SUDA: The explanation of the benefit of the fiftieth person goes as follows: Bodhisattva Maitreya (Miroku) asks how much benefit will accrue to those who respond with joy upon hearing of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha replies that after his passing—that is to say, in the Latter Day of the Law—there will be some who will delight upon hearing the Lotus Sutra. He adds that no matter what their particular circumstances, whether old or young, they will go into the city and to the country, to quiet places and bustling places, and, according to their ability, explain the teaching that they have heard to parents, relatives, friends and acquaintances. (The sutra says, “in accordance with what they have heard they put forth effort in preaching and expounding” [LS18, 246].) Those who hear the teaching from such people will in turn share the teaching with others. In this way, the teaching spreads continuously until it reaches the fiftieth person.

ENDO: One might wonder if the joy experienced would not be somewhat diminished by the time it reached the fiftieth person!

SUDA: Even if that were so, the benefit would still be immense. That’s the point of the principle of continuous propagation to the fiftieth person.

IKEDA: Addressing the question of just how vast that benefit is, the Daishonin says, “The benefit enjoyed by the fiftieth person who rejoices on hearing the Law is greater than that acquired by giving alms for eighty years” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 29).

ENDO: The idea of “giving alms for eighty years” supposes that there is a person capa-

ble of giving all living beings in “four hundred ten thousand million asamkhya worlds” (LS18, 246) anything and everything that they desire. According to the sutra, these alms include all kinds of precious items, such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, agate, coral, fine vehicles, and palaces adorned with the seven kinds of treasure. This goes on for a period of eighty years. Not only do the donors offer material objects, but when they see that someone is growing old and approaching death, they share with that person the teachings of the Buddha.

SAITO: To give material things is to “make offerings of treasure.” To expound the teachings is to “make offerings of the Law.” No matter how wealthy one may be, material possessions themselves cannot enable one to grasp life’s fundamental issues, like old age and death. That’s why it is necessary to teach people about the Law.

IKEDA: Of course, the Law referred to in the sutra is a teaching prior to the Lotus Sutra.

ENDO: Yes. And the beings who hear it are said to attain higher states of life, such as that of *arhat*. This is the sort of enlightenment sought by voice-hearers. Still, it represents a superior state of life to which people aspired.

SUDA: The Buddha asks Maitreya whether he thinks that the benefit gained by a person who has thoroughly carried out such extensive offerings of treasure and of the Law would be sizable. Maitreya replies that the benefit of such a person would indeed be infinite and boundless. The Buddha then explains that the benefit of the fiftieth person who hears a verse of the Lotus Sutra and rejoices is even greater than that by hundreds, thousands, tens of millions of times.

IKEDA: And that is to say nothing of the benefit of those who hear the teaching before it reaches the fiftieth person. Such is the immense power of the Mystic Law.

Interpreted literally, the fiftieth person hears the teaching and rejoices, but does not share it with anyone else. However, even though he doesn’t carry out the practice for others, his benefit is still immense. The sutra explains that the benefit gained by those who not only rejoice themselves, but also endeavor to share the teaching with others, is incomparably greater (cf. LS18, 247).

From the standpoint of the Daishonin’s teaching, the “one verse of the Lotus Sutra” (LS18, 247) that these people hear is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In other words, they hear about the Gohonzon. This means that just hearing about the Gohonzon and thinking, “How wonderful!” “I am so fortunate to learn of this teaching!” produces enormous benefit. Those who respond this way and then embrace faith and share it with others according to their ability will have all their prayers answered, gain tremendous good fortune, and attain the state in which all desires are fulfilled without fail. The passage about the fiftieth person is documentary proof of this principle.

The Daishonin says that a person who chants daimoku only once a day or only once in the course of a lifetime or who hears someone else chant it only once in a lifetime and rejoices and so on to the fiftieth person will gain blessings “a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand times greater” than those gained by persons of excellent innate ability and superior wisdom such as Shariputra, Monjushiri and Maitreya (MW-6, 3–4).

SAITO: He also includes in this those who “rejoice in hearing the voice of someone else rejoice in the hearing” (MW-6, 3).

A Movement To Bring Happiness to All

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SAITO: In fact, there have been many instances where people living adjacent to homes where discussion meetings are held joined the SGI, their interest sparked by the sound of members' joyful voices.

ENDO: I heard such an account from Toku Shirai, a women's division leader of Niigata Prefecture. For many years, the Shirais' home was used for discussion meetings. A neighbor had for a long time thought it odd to see many people in high spirits coming and going. She could hear the vigorous recitation of the sutra at the beginning of the meetings, followed by singing and the sounds of laughter. She wondered why they always ended at 8:30 sharp and why everyone leaving looked elated and refreshed.

Whereas in the past the Shirais' neighbors overheard nothing but continual fights between husband and wife, they now heard only cheerful voices. And they were impressed by how polite the children had grown. This became the talk of the neighborhood.

After observing the Shirais for many years, the woman living next door came to the conclusion that the change must be due to the Soka Gakkai, and decided to try practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism. So she asked Mrs. Shirai if she could join.

SUDA: You hear about many cases in which people decide to join our movement simply because they see the joy exuded by SGI members and want to acquire this themselves.

ENDO: I also heard from Mrs. Shirai about a men's division member who had a speech impediment. When he reported on some activity at a discussion meeting, often he could only get out the words, "It was great!" He would try with all his might to speak, but he simply could say no more. So, in the end, he would just repeat, "It was great!" Although those listening didn't have any clear idea of what exactly was great, they could clearly sense his enthusiasm. Often guests attending the meeting would be so moved from what few words he said that they would decide to join.

Mrs. Shirai's conclusion, after having introduced more than a hundred families to the practice, is that dialogue means speaking with conviction and joy. This is just as you said a little earlier, President Ikeda.

IKEDA: She is truly noble. In this egoistic world, to offer prayers and work hard for the happiness of others, as well as one's own, is magnificent. It is sublime. The fact that SGI members exert themselves for kosen-rufu day in and day out, even in the face of criticism and abuse, is proof that they are Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Of this I have not the slightest doubt.

On the subject of joy, the Daishonin says, "'Joy' means delight shared among oneself and others"; and "'Joy' is to share wisdom and compassion with others" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 761). The key point is that joy is something that we share with others. To be concerned only with one's own happiness is egoism. To care only about the happiness of others is hypocrisy. Genuine happiness is becoming happy together with others.

President Toda said: "Just becoming happy oneself—there's nothing difficult at all to that. It's easy. Helping others become happy is the foundation of our faith."⁷ The earlier passage by the Daishonin plainly states that such happiness is gained by sharing wisdom and compassion, sharing the life of the Buddha. To have wisdom but lack compassion is to lead a closed and constricted life. That is not true wisdom. To possess compassion but lack wisdom and be foolish is to be of no help to anyone, including oneself. One who cannot help another does not know compassion at all.

SAITO: Both wisdom and compassion are vital.

IKEDA: And faith encompasses both. The Daishonin says: "Generally speaking, when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are expressing joy in the

fact that they are certain to become Buddhas eternally endowed with the three enlightened properties” (GZ, 761). Attaining this state is itself “the greatest of all joys” (GZ, 788).

SAITO: Sharing happiness with others—this is the benefit of talking to others about Buddhism. I think that the discussion of continuous propagation to the fiftieth person indicates a dynamic movement to propagate happiness. And the SGI has spread the Mystic Law quite literally to the ends of the earth.

The Daishonin says that the “fifty persons” represents all living beings:

In its description of the continuous propagation to the fiftieth person, the numeral 5 in the number 50 [which in Chinese is written with two characters standing for “5” and “10”] represents the five characters of the Mystic Law, while the numeral 10 represents the living beings of the Ten Worlds. The term “continuous propagation” stands for the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

In terms of the surface meaning of the sutra, this chapter explores the vast benefit received by the fiftieth person who responds with joy to the teaching. The fifty persons here stand for all living beings. (GZ, 799)

This seems to suggest that when the living beings of the Ten Worlds embrace the five characters of the Mystic Law that is, when *kosen-rufu* is in progress then the principle of actual *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single moment of life) is being realized.

Achieving True Democracy

IKEDA: *Kosen-rufu* also includes the struggle to transform the “realm of the environment.” This is the meaning of actual (as opposed to theoretical) *ichinen sanzen*.

At any rate, propagation from one person to the next and so on to the fiftieth person is the democratic path of dialogue. Democracy is definitely not simply a matter of setting in place certain forms and institutions. Without content, democracy is an empty vessel that is easily crushed.

What is this content? It is individual self-reliance and self-improvement. It is individual happiness. Democracy must enable each person in society to live to the full. Without valuing the sanctity of the individual, democracy is a mere shell.

ENDO: That would certainly describe the state of affairs in Japan today.

IKEDA: When people’s hearts are vacant and hollow, democracy is imperiled, and the devilish nature of power starts to take advantage. That is when the dark shadow of nationalism begins to spread.

President Toda said that individual happiness and social prosperity must go hand in hand. It is a grave mistake for society to neglect the well-being of the individual while striving only for economic growth. Individual happiness is not self-centered; rather, it is the process of solidifying one’s humanity, of developing wisdom and compassion in both one-self and others.

This is an issue of global importance, affecting socialist and democratic countries alike. The Lotus Sutra, however, has the power to enable all people to realize both individual happiness and social prosperity. This is the meaning of actual *ichinen sanzen*.

In short, it is our efforts to pray for and help another person to become happy that represent the foremost popular movement and directly contribute to the creation of a truly democratic society. We are engaged in the transmission of joy from one person to

another. No matter how long or broad the chain of transmission, the amount of fulfillment each person feels does not wane nor is anyone made to suffer. The propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy continues as each person becomes indestructibly happy. This is the path we have followed, raising our voices in a chorus of Gakkai songs along the way.

Over the years, in times of hardship and struggle and through bitter tears, we repeatedly revived our spirits by singing Gakkai songs. The remarkable task of spreading the Mystic Law that our pioneering members accomplished through their tenacious efforts could well be called the miracle of the twentieth century.

The Path of Indomitable Dignity

SAITO: For most Soka Gakkai members, the song "Ifu Dodo no Uta" (Song of Indomitable Dignity) is laden with many memories. That shows just how widely it has been sung throughout the country.

ENDO: Some say it's the greatest hit of the postwar era!

SUDA: President Ikeda, you once introduced the background of the person who wrote the lyrics, Yukie Ohashi, saying that the song was born from the Kyoto members' unwavering spirit to continue amid severe circumstances. You also described it as a wonderful part of the history of our kosen-rufu movement.

Since Mr. Ohashi has died, I asked a number of people in Kyoto about him. He reportedly wrote the song in 1955 or 1956, shortly after taking faith. He operated a wholesale umbrella outlet, but the bankruptcy of a business associate resulted in his being saddled with enormous debt, making his daily life excruciatingly difficult. That was when he heard about this Buddhism.

The person who introduced him told him that this faith is truly remarkable and challenged him to give it a three-month trial. The friend guaranteed Mr. Ohashi that he would see results, promising that if he didn't, he would give him his head.

"I don't want your head," Mr. Ohashi replied. "I need money."

"How much do you need?"

"Thirty thousand yen," he said. That was the amount that the associate had failed to pay him.

The person responded: "I see. You can absolutely pay off your debts. The only condition is that you must do gongyo without missing a single day and attend discussion meetings for three months. And you have to tell others about the practice with me."

ENDO: What confidence! Great confidence is the soul of propagation.

SUDA: So for three months Mr. Ohashi joined his friend in sharing the Daishonin's teaching with others. Before three months had elapsed, the business associate who had absconded came back and returned the 30,000 yen. Having gained confidence in faith through this experience, Mr. Ohashi told more and more people about Buddhism.

Around that time, there was a movement among districts in the organization to come up with their own songs. The Kyoto area had no song, and that made the members feel left out. When Mr. Ohashi pointed this out to one of his leaders, the leader handed him a pencil and paper and suggested that he go ahead and write one.

Mr. Ohashi had not an ounce of songwriting experience, but what he did possess was passion. Standing before a small desk in his shop, he thought it over. As soon as he had decided on indomitable dignity as the theme, it was as though his pencil began moving on

its own and the words of the song just flowed out. “Though I may currently be beaten down, when I enter the ranks of kosen-rufu, I stand up with indomitable courage.” He also worked out the melody by trial and error. The song changed slightly every time he sang it, and it took him a month to complete it. One verse goes:

Into this defiled and evil world go
we of the Gakkai
Whoever may stand in our way.

With indomitable dignity
we summon our faith and advance.
Herein lies our conviction.

There were no tape recorders in those days. People who heard the song took to it, and soon it was being passed by word of mouth from one person to the next. When Kyoto Chapter was inaugurated, it was made the chapter song, and the members, singing it proudly and vigorously, went on to make their new chapter the first in propagation in the nation. This sparked the enthusiasm of members across Japan.

IKEDA: I, too, heard this song in Kyoto. The song itself is wonderful. Seeing the Kyoto members hoist high the “banner of the Law” in the city that was Japan’s ancient capital for a thousand years with this song on their lips was more wonderful still. Immediately, I thought that I would like to make this a song for members throughout Japan.

SUDA: This episode is still a source of pride for the members of Kyoto. You proposed that the song be introduced to all members. Originally the third verse began, “Behold the peaceful land of Kyoto where we live.” You suggested that it be changed to “Behold the paradise of Japan where we live.” Everyone was inspired by your proposal, and after that the song spread around the country in no time at all.

Mr. Ohashi in the meantime saw his circumstances take a dramatic turn for the better. He started a silk-dyeing business, and it prospered. And he never again had to endure privations. He eventually took up residence in an estate people called the Ohashi Palace, and traveled overseas frequently.

When you introduced Mr. Ohashi’s experience at a meeting in Kyoto (in 1989), he was hospitalized with advanced cancer. Immediately afterwards, a senior leader visited him to tell him about the meeting. He reportedly listened with great satisfaction to what you had said at the meeting. Shortly after that, having completed his mission of sixty-nine years, he passed away in peace.

People widely recognized Mr. Ohashi as a master of dialogue and an expert at giving individual guidance. It is said that even those in whom no one else could stir any response would listen carefully to what Mr. Ohashi had to say.

Not long before he died, Mr. Ohashi remarked to someone who had come to visit him at the hospital, “There’s more that I would like to do.”

“Are there more places in the world you would like to see?” the person asked.

“No, I would like to do more home visits,” he said. “I would like to do activities again together with everyone.”

It seems to me that Mr. Ohashi was a genuine champion of the people, true to the words of “Song of Indomitable Dignity.”

SAITO: “I would like to do more activities”—those must have been his real senti-

ments as he approached death. SGI activities are veritably the supreme “memory of our present life in this human world” (MW-5, 38).⁸

SUDA: That’s because they’re so enjoyable.

Rise Above Your Troubles

ENDO: Though at the time they may not seem all that enjoyable, the feeling of satisfaction you get from putting forth your best effort in activities is unsurpassed. It’s like how you feel after a nice hot bath!

IKEDA: We talk about experiencing joy, but that feeling itself does not last long. Emotions like excitement and joy tend to fade with time.

A Japanese author wrote: “The life of a flower is short. Of sufferings only are there many.”⁹ It’s simply a fact of life that joy is short-lived while suffering endures. For precisely this reason, we are most fortunate to embrace the Mystic Law, which embodies the principle for transforming earthly desires into enlightenment.

When faced with difficulties, we chant daimoku to solve our problems. When sad, we take our sadness to the Gohonzon. When happy, we chant with a profound sense of appreciation. As we do so, we continue moving forward, gazing down on our troubles from the vantage of a lofty state of life. When we pray to the Gohonzon, it is as though we are surveying the entire universe, allowing us to observe impassively our own sufferings.

“Responding with joy” doesn’t mean that we are without worries or suffering. Precisely because we have worries, we can chant daimoku, bringing forth strong life force. Because there is suffering, there is joy. It is impossible to experience only happiness in life.

Buddhism is a struggle. Life is also a struggle. That is why we must develop the inner fortitude to strive continuously forward. A life that has been tempered and made strong will savor eternal joy.

Through faith we can establish a state of life where, no matter what happens, we experience joy, hope and confidence in the depths of our being. That gives us the power to go among those who are suffering and together with them find true happiness.

While it is difficult for us to fathom Nichiren Daishonin’s state of life, we can certainly discern such profound joy in his writings. President Toda once described the Daishonin’s exile to Sado Island, saying, “In modern terms, exile to Sado is comparable to being banished to the Sahara Desert.” And yet, in the midst of such great persecution, the Daishonin said, “I feel immeasurable delight” (MW-1, 94).

SUDA: It is hard to imagine how incredible his state of life must have been.

The Daishonin’s Immense State of Life

IKEDA: Throughout his writings, we can hear the Daishonin declaring in a great voice: “How joyful!” “What happiness I feel!”

Why don’t we look at some of these passages?

SAITO: OK. Well, to begin with, the passage you cited earlier reads in full, “I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile” (MW-1, 94). Elsewhere he says: “The greater the hardships befalling [the votary of the Lotus Sutra] the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith” (MW-1, 9); “Among all the persons since the beginning of our present kalpa who have incurred the displeasure of their parents or their rulers and have been exiled to distant islands, there can be none who overflow with joy as we do”

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(MW-7, 26–27); “I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 188) and “With this body of mine, I have fulfilled the prophecies of the sutra. The more the government authorities rage against me, the greater is my joy” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 102).

ENDO: There are countless examples. In other places the Daishonin says: “[Hearing that the government was discussing whether to behead me or banish me from Kamakura] I rejoiced, saying that I had long expected it to come to this” (MW-1, 175); “You should be delighted at this great fortune [that I am to be executed for the sake of the Lotus Sutra]” (MW-1, 181); “When it is certain that Nichiren will be executed, you should feel particular joy. You should regard it like meeting a ruthless thief, but [instead of being robbed] exchanging great poison for a cluster of jewels” (GZ, 962); “How joyful! What delight I feel to have been able to live my life with the passage, ‘again and again he will be banished’” (GZ, 963); and “What joy is ours to expiate in one lifetime our slanders from the eternal past! How fortunate to serve the Buddha who has never been known until now!” (MW-1, 117).

IKEDA: These passages seem to reverberate with the rhythm of the Daishonin’s heart. This is the rhythm of great joy of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

To Be “Obedient” to the Gohonzon

SUDA: Incidentally, the original meaning of the term *rejoice* or *delight* [as used in many of the above examples and in the title of the Lotus Sutra’s eighteenth chapter] is “obediently believe and rejoice.” I think it could be said that “obedience” means faith. If so, then what is the object of one’s obedience referred to in the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter?

The fact that the benefit of the fiftieth person is so immense suggests that the teaching that the person “obeys” is incomparably broader than that of the person of great resources who makes offerings for eighty years that we talked about earlier. But while the sutra makes reference to the idea that one should obey this Lotus Sutra, the substance of this teaching is never made clear in the text.

SAITO: In other words, what does Shakyamuni indicate that we should believe and take as our object of fundamental devotion? This is not clear. And it has been a point of serious debate in Buddhist communities from ancient times.

IKEDA: That’s why it is necessary to elucidate the implicit teaching. At the start of this chapter, there is mention of those who will hear this sutra after the Buddha’s passing. The question is: What are people to do after Shakyamuni has passed away? Does the Lotus Sutra say that they should make Shakyamuni their object of fundamental devotion? No, it does not say that anywhere. Rather, it indicates that we should take as our object of fundamental devotion the Law that enabled Shakyamuni himself to become a Buddha. This is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

“Obedience,” therefore, means faith in the Gohonzon that embodies the oneness of Person and Law. And the benefit of this “obedience” is the “benefit of rejoicing.”

The Daishonin says: “The Person is the Venerable Shakyamuni, the dignified Buddha of *gohyaku-jintengo*. The Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of the ‘Life Span’ chapter. ‘Responding with joy’ [as in the chapter’s title] means to follow and take joy in this teaching” (GZ, 761). The Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan says of those who fail to grasp this

point, “Even though they praise the Lotus Sutra, they destroy its heart.”¹⁰

SUDA: Nichijun Shonin made an interesting comment on this passage: “What do the priests of the Tendai school say? If they understood this [the heart of the Lotus Sutra], they would say that the present is the age of Nichiren Daishonin. Those who don’t, continue to trample on the heart of the Lotus Sutra.... That is why there are many priests from that school who have converted to the Daishonin’s faith; because in the depths of their teaching lies the heart of the Lotus Sutra.”¹¹

ENDO: In that sense, the latter half of the “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter should be read as describing the great benefit deriving from faith in the Gohonzon. Following the discussion of the fiftieth person, there is an explanation of three types of benefit received.

First, it says that a person who hears about the Mystic Law is sure to gain material happiness:

As a result of the benefits so obtained, when he is reborn in his next existence he will enjoy the finest, most superior and wonderful elephants, horses and carriages, and palanquins decked with rare treasures, and will mount up to the heavenly palaces. (LS18, 247)

Second, it says that the person will acquire the merit to become a leader:

The benefits gained by this person will be such that when he is reborn he will be in a place where the lord Shakra [Taishaku] is seated, where the heavenly king Brahma [Bonten] is seated, or where a wheel-turning sage king is seated (LS18, 247–48).

It says the person will become Taishaku, Bonten or a wheel-turning sage king. In modern terms, this means that if the person works in a company, he or she will become a manager or the company president or a leader in the community and a leader of propagation of the Mystic Law. This chapter is basically saying that one who takes faith will become a leader in any realm of society.

IKEDA: That’s right. The Lotus Sutra is the “science of leadership.” The training that we receive in our efforts for kosen-rufu in the present is the cause that enables us to become great leaders in lifetime after lifetime and world after world. Absolutely no effort that we make in our Buddhist practice is wasted.

ENDO: Third, it says that the person will acquire abundant wisdom and the benefit to enjoy excellent health in both body and mind.

The sutra goes on to describe fifty kinds of benefit from encouraging others to learn about the Mystic Law. In addition to keen faculties and wisdom, it says that they will be wholesome in appearance and healthy in mouth and tongue, teeth and nose, and in every respect. It concludes, “In each existence he is born into, he will see the Buddha, hear his Law, and have faith in his teachings” (LS18, 248).

SAITO: The person will possess an utterly free state of life, enjoying unsurpassed economic, spiritual and physical good fortune, wisdom and merit.

IKEDA: Last, it says that the person enjoys a state in which all desires are fulfilled. In life, there are both mountains and valleys. But by maintaining faith throughout we attain a golden state where we can look back over our existence and say, “This was the best pos-

sible life I could have lived.” Just as the fire produced by a single match can set a vast field of dry grass ablaze, our strenuous work for kosen-rufu produces benefit as expansive as the universe.

The Joy of Living Based on the Daishonin’s Teachings

SAITO: I heard the experience of Fumiko Matsuda, who was a victim of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Mrs. Matsuda joined the Soka Gakkai in 1956. When she heard President Toda deliver his declaration calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons (in Yokohama in 1957), she was so moved that she decided to dedicate herself to spreading the Daishonin’s teaching.

Although she suffered from seven ailments, including anemia, rheumatism and gastrointestinal obstructions, all aftereffects of radiation exposure, she overcame these one by one in the course of doing activities. She has in fact become so healthy that to this day she continues vigorously carrying out activities as a senior leader of Hiroshima Prefecture.

About fifteen years ago, when she was sixty, she suddenly realized that she had not read all of the Daishonin’s writings. Saying she felt ashamed that she had never even looked at certain of the Daishonin’s writings, she challenged herself to read the entire *Gosho Zenshu* (The Complete Writings of Nichiren Daishonin). The first time through, it took her five years. But she gradually improved her speed and is now reportedly on her fifth reading.

As to the benefit she has received as a result of this effort, Mrs. Matsuda explains that she has stopped complaining. She never complains of being weary or tired. “Nowhere in his writings does the Daishonin express such sentiments,” she notes, adding that her former complaints have now been replaced by a hardy optimism. I understand she is increasingly ardent in her passion to change the social environment, aware of the tendency of people to readily succumb to pessimism.

IKEDA: I have heard a great deal about Mrs. Matsuda. The fact that our membership includes countless such grass-roots champions is the pride of the SGI. This is wonderful.

“I will live exactly as the Daishonin teaches!” This is the faith of “rejoicing.” The SGI has fought with the fundamental spirit to live according to the Daishonin’s writings. It is by striving to do this that we can experience true joy and benefit.

In short, no benefit can compare to the joy of dedicating one’s life to kosen-rufu. No joy is greater than the joy of propagating the Mystic Law. Nothing is greater than the joy of seeing other people become happy as a result of our efforts in dialogue. And when we rejoice at others’ happiness, our own lives become increasingly pure.

Propagation has nothing to do with arrogance. On the contrary, it is motivated by a sincere desire to share Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with others, delighted at our good fortune to have been born as human beings and to be able to expound the Law. Whether or not the other person decides to take our advice is a separate matter.

Sharing Buddhism Is Itself Great Benefit

IKEDA: The “Benefits of Responding with Joy” chapter explains that just by inviting someone to listen to a discussion of the Lotus Sutra, we accumulate immense benefit. It says that the act itself of making room for a visitor in a meeting place produces benefit. Accordingly, the benefit we receive by telling someone about Buddhism is truly enormous.

Whether or not the person begins practicing after hearing an explanation of the Mystic

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Law, our benefit is the same. President Toda once commented humorously about people who had difficulty taking faith no matter how many people talked to them, saying, “These people have given that many more members the opportunity to receive tremendous benefit.”

ENDO: So, if there is someone who decides to take faith after seven people have spoken to him about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, all seven receive benefit.

IKEDA: That’s right. We receive benefit as a result of our efforts to enable others to hear about the Mystic Law, regardless of whether they practice or how many others talk to them. When we realize this, we know even greater joy.

Those who are carrying out the practice of propagation deserve hearty praise from all. They are supremely noble emissaries of the Buddha. When we have this spirit to applaud those who are carrying out propagation, then everyone experiences profound happiness, and kosen-rufu expands still further.

When we possess the kind of strong faith where we love the Gohonzon, love chanting daimoku, and love SGI activities, our life overflows with the “benefits of responding with joy.”

To be continued

1. One of the three divisions of a sutra, along with preparation and revelation.
2. Ajita: Other name for Bodhisattva Maitreya.
3. 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.
4. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 201.
5. From the January 1, 1956, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.
6. From the May 9, 1958, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.
7. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, p. 378.
8. This passage reads in full: “Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world.”
9. Fumiko Hayashi (1903–51), *Horoki* (Journal of a Vagabond).
10. *Hokke Shuku* (The Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra).
11. From the November 8, 1957, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

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