

## DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA 40 A STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FORCES OF ARROGANCE

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

*This is the fortieth 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 May 1998 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*This time participants discuss the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter, which Nichiren Daishonin describes as explaining the “heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra.” They investigate the teaching that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging expounded, and the modern significance of his practice of revering others, which they contrast with nationalism.*

### **40 A Struggle Against the Forces of Arrogance**

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** The cherry blossoms this year are spectacular. The seventeenth-century Japanese haiku poet Matsuo Basho says, “Myriads of things past / Are brought to my mind— / These cherry blossoms!”<sup>1</sup> As in these lines of verse by Basho, each time the cherry trees blossom, I am reminded of how the blossoms looked on that day, that spring forty years ago, when Mr. Toda passed away. On the day of the funeral, the air was filled with falling cherry petals. As they floated to the ground, each petal shone as if it were alive. It seemed as though the cherry trees, too, were saddened at the departure of this great champion of the Mystic Law.

Nichijun, the 65<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, who had rushed to the scene when he learned of Mr. Toda’s death, said: “President Toda was a truly remarkable person. . . . He was a Buddha.” Throughout his life, Mr. Toda expended every ounce of energy for the sake of the people, and continually struggled against the forces of nationalism.

It occurs to me that during World War II even cherry blossoms were enlisted to serve Japanese nationalism. Propagandists glorified death for the nationalist cause with slogans like “To fall vigorously and suddenly like a cherry petal is what it means to be Japanese.” This was appalling.

In fact, in Japan cherry trees have traditionally symbolized living one’s life to the fullest. In ancient times, people observed the cherry blossoms to ascertain the duration and extent to which the flowers would be in bloom. It was held that if the cherry blossoms were numerous and stayed in bloom for a long time, there would be a rich harvest that year.

**KATSUJI SAITO:** So if they bloomed in full force and then fell all at once, people would have had cause for concern.

**TAKANORI ENDO:** This traditional view has been turned on its head.

**IKEDA:** From around the middle of the nineteenth century, a type of cherry tree called *Someiyoshino* (*Prunus yedoensis matsum*) was planted throughout the country. It was the rapidly scattering blossoms of this tree, in particular, that were used to create the nationalistic image of “suddenly falling” in battle, which I mentioned earlier.

**HARUO SUDA:** Cherry trees in places such as Tokyo characteristically blossom

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (40)

Subject: Living Buddhism 08/99 v.99 n.8 p.16 LB9908p16

Author:

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before the leaves appear, with the flowers blooming all at once and quickly scattering.

**ENDO:** Power will twist anything it can to its advantage.

**SAITO:** Moreover, after a while, people gradually forget the original meaning behind certain images and just accept the new meaning as a given.

**SUDA:** Learning that cherry blossoms originally were not a symbol of death but of a resolute and fulfilling life, comes as a shock to me. It never occurred to me that these blossoms had once been entrusted with people's hope for an abundant harvest.

**IKEDA:** President Toda was committed throughout his life to realizing the hopes of the people. As a result of the two years he spent in prison, he was physically in very bad shape. But summoning every ounce of his strength, he dedicated himself fully as the disciple of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, who had been killed by the injustice perpetrated by the state. Mr. Toda's life force was truly miraculous. His life epitomized the teaching of the "Life Span" chapter.

On January 1 of the year President Toda died, he delivered what would be his last New Year's lecture. Although very weak from a long battle with illness, his voice was full of energy. Interestingly, on that occasion he discussed the integration of the three mystic principles<sup>2</sup> in the "Life Span" chapter.

**SAITO:** He continued to lecture on the Lotus Sutra until the very end. Why did he choose to talk about the integration of the three mystic principles at that time?

**IKEDA:** He emphasized the point that Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha of True Cause, and that the true Buddha does not exist anywhere apart from this real *saha* world, the world of suffering.

**ENDO:** That pertains to the mystic principle of the True Land, which is based on the passage, "Ever since then I have been constantly in this *saha* world, preaching the Law, teaching and converting" (LS16, 225).<sup>3</sup>

**IKEDA:** Although mythical Buddhas were mentioned [by Shakyamuni] as expedient means, a Buddha is not an imaginary being. A genuine Buddha dwells in this real, impure world, going among those who are suffering the most, sharing their misery and sadness, and leading them to happiness. Only one who lives this way can be called a Buddha.

Moreover, because the Buddha is dedicated to helping people become happy, the Buddha meets persecution from such arrogant forces of authority as secular leaders and priests, and is hated even by the very people he is trying to help. He is subject to "curses and abuse" and is struck with "sticks of wood or tiles and stones" (LS20, 267). The Buddha dwells in the midst of such great hardship.

A Buddha is not an other-worldly being basking in enlightenment. A Buddha is the first to dive in among the fierce waves of society. And one who does so will absolutely encounter persecution and even be subjected to physical harm. One who lives in a calculating manner, on the other hand, disregarding the people and looking only to protect oneself, is something other than a Buddha. Such a person is actually a devil.

The members of the Soka Gakkai, including President Toda himself, have ceaselessly striven to achieve peace and happiness for all humanity. The light of genuine Buddhism shines nowhere apart from such endeavors. That's what President Toda taught in what could be called his last lecture on the Lotus Sutra.

**SAITO:** To carry on a struggle in the midst of society and undergo persecution—this in itself is the teaching of the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter.

**IKEDA:** Nichiren Daishonin says, "The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is

the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is expounded in the *Fukyo* [Bodhisattva Never Disparaging] chapter” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240). Basically, the ultimate teaching of Buddhism is the Lotus Sutra. And the concrete practice of the Lotus Sutra is explained in the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

**SUDA:** The passage you just cited is followed by the famous line: “What does Bodhisattva Fukyo’s profound respect for people signify? The real meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance in this world lay in his behavior as a human being” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240).

**ENDO:** In other words, Shakyamuni made his advent in the world and expounded the Law in order to instruct people how to conduct themselves as human beings, how they should live. And the conclusion that he arrives at is the way of life of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

**IKEDA:** With these extraordinary words, the Daishonin is explaining the essence of Buddhism. On that premise, let us commence our study of the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

### Helping Those Who Are Suffering the Most

**SUDA:** To begin with, the three chapters that follow the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter—“Distinctions in Benefits,” “Benefits of Responding with Joy” and “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law”—explain the benefit of propagation. The subsequent “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (twentieth) chapter explains the good fortune and benefit that those who spread the Lotus Sutra receive, as well as the unfortunate circumstances met by those who slander the sutra’s votaries.

**SAITO:** It explains this recounting the experience of one practitioner, a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging.

**IKEDA:** There are various interesting explanations regarding this bodhisattva’s name. In contrast to the way it is rendered in Kumarajiva’s Chinese-language translation as meaning someone who never disparages or looks down on others, I understand that in the original Sanskrit text it can be interpreted as meaning someone who is “always disparaged.”

**ENDO:** That’s right. Another Chinese translation of the sutra by Dharmaraksha renders the chapter title as “The One Who Is Always Scorned and Treated with Contempt.”

**IKEDA:** This could certainly be said of the Soka Gakkai. We have been constantly ridiculed by Japanese society, where there is a pronounced tendency to revere the powerful and scorn the masses. Many once sneered at our organization as a gathering of the poor and the sick. But President Toda indomitably declared that helping the poor and the sick is the main focus of a genuine religion.

So-called religious organizations that only aim to make money wouldn’t concern themselves in the least with people of scant resources, much less with sick people, unless, of course, they intend to open a hospital!

A true religion exists for the sake of those who are suffering. Its purpose is to enable those faced with severe hardship to achieve real happiness.

We have been “constantly disparaged” by people who fail to understand this sublime spirit. Nevertheless, we have courageously reached out to people who are suffering and offered them genuine support. While showing them we care, we have helped them realize that they can definitely become happy by cultivating the world of Buddhahood within their own lives. We have steadfastly encouraged them and made them aware of the Mystic

Law. We have expended great energy in educating and caring for people on a person-to-person basis. This is the conduct of bodhisattvas who never disparage others.

**SAITO:** It is certainly impossible to teach others Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and encourage their practice without genuinely respecting them. The fact is that once we give up on someone, thinking that no matter what we say to them they'll never listen, we close the door on any chance for meaningful exchange.

**IKEDA:** When we observe only the outer aspect of the circumstances of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, we can see without a doubt that he was constantly disparaged. But if we go a step further and consider the essence and spirit behind his actions, it becomes all the more apparent that the translation "never disparaging" is correct.

**ENDO:** I think this rendition, which takes into account the fundamental spirit of the sutra itself, shows the genius of Kumarajiva's translation.

**SAITO:** President Ikeda, I recall that you once answered a question from a journalist on the reason for the SGI's development by saying, "It's because I directly meet and talk with each individual member."

**IKEDA:** My intention at that time was not to speak about myself. It goes without saying that the foundation for the SGI's development has been the hard work of all the members.

My point was that you cannot build such solid unity among many people simply by the power of organization or by giving orders. The SGI is strong because we have sincerely treasured each person. I wanted to emphasize that spirit.

Leaders in society tend to rely on giving orders. While carefully avoiding the hard, painstaking tasks, they steal the fruits of others' labors. There are all too many such leaders. The SGI is striving to revolutionize this style of leadership.

**ENDO:** Treasuring each person—that's certainly an arduous undertaking.

**IKEDA:** A leader who does not work to the point of exhaustion is a fraud. Misery in the world largely stems from the fact that we have so many leaders who are merely looking out for themselves. When it comes down to it, such people are concerned only with protecting their positions and leading a comfortable existence.

The SGI exists to empower those who are fatigued from their earnest labors and ardently striving to live their lives to the fullest, and to help them become happy. Leaders of such an organization must be willing and ready to take on even the most difficult tasks to the best of their ability.

Of course, this is not to say that we should push ourselves unreasonably. As we get older, we naturally need to exercise wisdom and common sense to safeguard our health. But if we lose the spirit to exert ourselves with selfless dedication, we are finished. This goes for leaders in our organization as well as in society.

## **The Twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra**

For what reason was he named Never Disparaging? This monk, whatever persons he happened to meet, whether monks, nuns, laymen or laywomen, would bow in obeisance to all of them and speak words of praise, saying, "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood." (LS20, 266–67)

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**SUDA:** In summary, the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter introduces a Buddha named Awesome Sound King Thus Come One living at a remote time described as “an immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable number of asamkhyā kalpas in the past” (LS20, 265). It relates how after the Former Day of the Law and toward the end of the Middle Day of the Law when this Buddha lived, his true teaching is lost and “monks of overbearing arrogance” (LS20, 266) become all powerful. That is the state of affairs when Never Disparaging appears.

**IKEDA:** It is a time when the Law has perished. The Chinese character used to denote *Middle Day of the Law* means “likeness” or “image,” referring to similarity of appearance. It is a time when the spirit of the Former Day has been lost and only the outward framework of the teaching remains, an age when Buddhism is reduced to a mere skeleton of its former self.

**ENDO:** The designation “end of the Middle Day” corresponds to the start of the Latter Day of the Law, which is when Nichiren Daishonin lived. I think there is also significance in the fact that the Soka Gakkai began to flourish at a time when Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism was clearly in crisis, when the Law was in danger of becoming extinct on account of the priesthood’s negligence.

**SUDA:** There are certainly a lot of “monks of overbearing arrogance” around. It is in such a time that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appears.

**SAITO:** He salutes all people, be they men or women, clergy or laity, with these words: “I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood” (LS20, 266–67).

**ENDO:** Since this passage is written with twenty-four characters in Chinese, the Lotus Sutra that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging propagated is called the “twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra.” In terms of the concept of the comprehensive, abbreviated and essential expositions of the sutra, the twenty-four-character passage represents the abbreviated Lotus Sutra.

*The “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings) says: “These twenty-four Chinese characters that make up this passage are interchangeable with the five characters of Myōhō-enge-kyō; [though the wording is different] the meaning is the same. These twenty-four characters represent the abbreviated Lotus Sutra (Gosho Zenshu, p. 764).*

**IKEDA:** Just what does the Lotus Sutra teach? The sutra is condensed into this twenty-four-character passage: “I deeply respect you. I would never slight you or behave arrogantly toward you. For if you carry out the bodhisattva practice you can become a Buddha without fail.” All living beings have the Buddha nature, the world of Buddhahood. It is this world of Buddhahood that Never Disparaging reveres.

The twenty-eight-chapter Lotus Sutra does not explicitly state that all people have the Buddha nature, but this is without doubt what it is affirming. This is the highest philosophy of the sanctity of life.

While there are any number of religions that preach equality, often what they mean by this is that human beings are all equally sinful. But the Lotus Sutra teaches that all people are noble children of the Buddha; that they are equal as entities of the world of

Buddhahood. This is a very important difference.

**SUDA:** Even if someone is an adherent of a different teaching and doesn't perceive the world of Buddhahood in his or her life, this does not in any way alter the fact that life is an entity of the world of Buddhahood. This is just as Never Disparaging states in his declaration. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra absolutely never condones violence.

**SAITO:** Religious strife accompanied by violence would be totally antithetical to the sutra's spirit.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the Lotus Sutra directly oppose all forms of violence. The Lotus Sutra is a teaching of struggle on a spiritual plane, not of violence.

**SAITO:** Yes. And though totally nonviolent himself, Never Disparaging is showered with both physical and verbal abuse.

**ENDO:** He is struck with sticks, tiles and stones, and is slandered and mistreated. Seeing the four kinds of people<sup>4</sup> from afar, Never Disparaging approaches them, intoning the twenty-four-character passage and bowing in reverence.

**SUDA:** To this day, it is a common practice in India for people to greet one another by joining their palms together and saying *namaste* in a sign of respect. I imagine Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as making a similar gesture.

**ENDO:** But arrogant people, far from feeling any appreciation, only became angry and rebuked him: "This ignorant monk—where does he come from, presuming to declare that he does not disparage us and bestowing on us a prediction that we will attain Buddhahood? We have no use for such vain and irresponsible predictions!" (LS20, 267).

They would constantly berate him, saying in effect: "You're no Buddha. How presumptuous of you to talk about us becoming Buddhas. You are an ignoramus who doesn't know his place."

**IKEDA:** As the sutra indicates when it says, "monks of overbearing arrogance exercised great authority and power" (LS20, 266), these people commanded considerable power and influence. That probably made them all the more highhanded.

As long as people rely on some kind of force—be it authority, power, wealth, physical strength, position, organization, fame, talent or knowledge—they have a hard time being humble. All too often, it is only after a person has lost everything that he or she can really listen for the first time. This is a tragic human failing.

Most people are destroyed by their own arrogance. Before that happens, we must ask ourselves what kind of human beings we would be if we were stripped of all such externals and ornamentation.

**SAITO:** Even when arrogant people derided him, Never Disparaging was not the least taken aback. No matter how he might be mocked, without becoming angry he would simply repeat, "You will surely become a Buddha."

**IKEDA:** This is the practice of forbearance. The Buddha is called "One Who Can Forbear." Everything depends on whether we can endure the hardships that are an inevitable part of life and Buddhist practice.

**ENDO:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging underwent this treatment for many years. It did not stop with being vilified and mocked; he was also struck with sticks, tiles and rocks. When this happened, he would retreat to a safe distance and repeat in a loud voice the twenty-four-character passage.

**SAITO:** That shows agility and strength of character.

**SUDA:** After all, there's no need to pointlessly subject oneself to violence. You can't just stand there and do nothing. While tactfully dodging the onslaught, he continues to

spread the teaching without being the least intimidated. He is a dauntless practitioner.

**SAITO:** And he steadfastly carries out a nonviolent struggle.

**IKEDA:** President Toda once said: “We ourselves are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Therefore, even if we should be struck or vilified, since we have determined to chant daimoku, as long as we are alive we should continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo through everything and exert ourselves for kosen-rufu, even if it means having to survive on water and grass. This is faith.”

With regard to propagation, he said:

There is no art or technique for carrying out shakubuku. There is no way to spread the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin without the solid conviction that you yourself are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Knowing this is the essence of propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. This is the only way.

There are no rules for spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or for sharing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with others. We ourselves are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo! Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is all there is! We must be staunchly determined that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is all we have and that, if that is not enough, then even if we should be killed or die, there is nothing else to do. Firmly convinced of this, we must continue to tell others about the Gohonzon.<sup>5</sup>

This is also the attitude of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Even when vilified or injured, he never ceases to plant the seed of the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra. He continues struggling through all, having determined that this is how he will live regardless of other people’s reaction. What becomes of him as a result?

**SAITO:** The sutra says:

When this monk was on the point of death, he heard up in the sky fully twenty thousand, ten thousand, a million verses of the Lotus Sutra that had previously been preached by the Buddha Awesome Sound King, and he was able to accept and uphold them all. Immediately he gained the kind of purity of vision and purity of the faculties of the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind that have been described above. Having gained this purity of the six faculties, his life span was increased by two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of years, and he went about widely preaching the Lotus Sutra for people. (LS20, 267)

**IKEDA:** That’s right. His life span is extended. He lives long, he survives. While “life span” here carries the literal meaning of longevity, it can also be interpreted as life force. Even if a person’s life is short, if he or she lives with abundant life force and dies having created much value, then the person has had a long life. Also, there is no greater longevity than to have contributed to kosen-rufu and enabled many people to accrue strong life force.

In any event, Never Disparaging receives the benefit of the purification of the six sense organs. This indicates actual proof of human revolution. As a result, those around him come to view him in a new light.

**SUDA:** The text continues:

At that time, when the four kinds of believers who were overbearingly arrogant,

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the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who had looked with contempt on this monk and given him the name Never Disparaging—when they saw that he had gained great transcendental powers, the power to preach pleasingly and eloquently, the power of great goodness and tranquillity, and when they heard his preaching, they all took faith in him and willingly became his followers. (LS20, 267–68)

**IKEDA:** Those people are very calculating!

Up to that time, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was not an eloquent speaker. All he did was repeat the twenty-four-character passage and bow to people. That is probably even the reason people ridiculed him so.

But the tables turn completely. The wretched person whom everyone had laughed at becomes splendid and dignified. At that point those who had ridiculed him may have all thought, “Oh, no! What have I done?”

President Toda once remarked, “When those who are presently so arrogant toward us ask themselves, ‘Oh, no! What have I done?’—that will be kosen-rufu.”

**ENDO:** These people who have a change of heart and come to believe in and follow Never Disparaging are in better shape than those who do not. Even so, they fall into the state of hell because of their offense.

The Daishonin says:

The people who cursed and struck Bodhisattva Fukyo [Never Disparaging] at first behaved with such animosity, though later they took faith and became followers of the Lotus Sutra, looking up to Fukyo and treating him with great respect, honoring him as the heavenly deities would Taishaku, and standing in awe of him as we do the sun and moon. However, they were unable to wipe out the great offense of their initial slander, so that for a thousand kalpas they were condemned to the Avichi Hell, and for twenty billion kalpas they were abandoned by the three treasures. (MW-6, 54–55)

As for those who had slandered Bodhisattva Never Disparaging but do not have a change of heart, their offense is so great as to defy comprehension.

## The Buddha Lives in the Present

**SAITO:** In the meantime, lifetime after lifetime, Never Disparaging continues to serve the Buddhas and dauntlessly strives to widely propagate the Lotus Sutra. And finally he becomes a Buddha.

**IKEDA:** When Shakyamuni reaches this point in his discourse, he suddenly declares, “In fact he [Never Disparaging] was none other than I myself!” (LS20, 268). This is a truly dramatic moment.

**SUDA:** What had seemed like a discussion of events long past turns in a flash into a discussion of the reality before their eyes. Everyone is stunned.

**IKEDA:** Exactly. Nichiren Daishonin reads even deeper into the passage “In fact he was none other than I myself!”, looking at it in terms of his own life. Having summoned forth the greatest persecution and facing imminent execution at Tatsunokuchi, he discards his transient status and reveals his true identity, and so extends his life.

While at Teradomari en route to exile in Sado Island, he writes:

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The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences. The past events described in the *Fukyo* chapter I am now experiencing as predicted in the *Kanji* ["Encouraging Devotion," thirteenth] chapter; thus the present foretold in the *Kanji* chapter corresponds to the past of the *Fukyo* chapter. The *Kanji* chapter of the present will be the *Fukyo* chapter of the future.... (MW-4, 105–06)

**ENDO:** He is saying in effect: "I have called forth the three powerful enemies<sup>6</sup> described in the 'Encouraging Devotion' chapter." He explains that he himself is now waging the battle that Never Disparaging carried out in the past. And, from the vantage of the future, people will recognize that his struggles are the same as those of Never Disparaging.

**SAITO:** This is what he means by "The Lotus Sutra invariably concludes the Dharma preaching of all Buddhas of the three existences."

**IKEDA:** The Daishonin says, "Shakyamuni lives today; this is the age of the Buddha" (MW-1, 185). One must not vaguely think of the Lotus Sutra as simply a twenty-eight-chapter text. Buddhism exists only in the here and now, in the reality of people's lives. The Lotus Sutra teaches that in the depths of the present, we find the remote past. Fully grasping this profound truth is called attaining Buddhahood.

It's the present that counts. Myoho-enge-kyo lives only in the spirit and determination to work for kosen-rufu in the present, keeping in mind the words: "In fact he was none other than I myself!"

The Daishonin teaches that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is Shakyamuni. And he reveals that he himself, who was encountering incredible persecution at the time, is in fact also Shakyamuni, the Buddha. Unless we grasp this, he says, we have not delved into the Lotus Sutra.

**SUDA:** By "Lotus Sutra" he does not mean a written text.

**IKEDA:** Someone once asked this question of President Toda: "It is said that Buddhism no longer exists in China and India, but isn't it true that many sutras remain in these countries?" President Toda replied: "The sutras are all that exist. Where there is no correct faith, there is no Buddhism. The sutras, just by themselves, are simply texts; they are not Buddhism."

**SAITO:** The same can be said of the Daishonin's writings. Unless we read them and take action with the spirit that the Daishonin lives today and this is the age of the Daishonin, we will not profit from their study. We will only be reading old texts.

For that matter, if we should become haughty because of the knowledge we gain from Buddhist study, then, far from doing us any good, it will result in our manifesting the nature of the four groups of arrogant people.

**IKEDA:** Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was not an eloquent speaker. He did not put on an air of greatness. He merely traveled around planting the seed of the Lotus Sutra in people's hearts with such direct simplicity that it bordered on naiveté. Across past, present and future, the spirit of the Lotus Sutra lives in such conduct.

In a word, this is the behavior of SGI members. Those struggling in the forefront of our movement are themselves Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. On the other hand, those who are widely revered in society and who are filled with self-importance belong to the four groups of arrogant people.

Whatever our standing in the organization, whether or not we have a leadership posi-

tion, we can vigorously take action and realize success in all endeavors because of the strength of the SGI, a wondrous body that is carrying out the Buddha's decree. Those who fall under the illusion that they can do everything on their own, grow decadent and begin a downward spiral.

At any rate, we need to carry out the practice of never disparaging others, aware that "In fact he was none other than I myself!"—that we ourselves are Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and entities of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

**ENDO:** Speaking of the practice of never disparaging, you once composed a poem, President Ikeda, celebrating our departure toward the Soka Gakkai's seventieth anniversary:

The benefit of friends of kosen-rufu  
who embrace the brilliant spirit of never disparaging endures for millions of *kalpas*.

Since the Mystic Law is the teaching  
without beginning or end,  
by dedicating our lives to it  
our offenses have all been expiated.<sup>7</sup>

**SUDA:** This is saying that the benefit received by SGI members, who in the spirit of never disparaging have opened a path of kosen-rufu where none existed before, is eternal. Also, the line "our offenses have all been expiated" points to a very important doctrine expounded in the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter.

**ENDO:** Yes. The sutra explains that the reason Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is persecuted by the four groups of people is that he had slandered the Lotus Sutra in the past, and that by spreading the Lotus Sutra while enduring such persecution, he expiates his past serious offenses.

**IKEDA:** This means that no matter how people might oppose or vilify us in our efforts to spread the Law, we should gladly accept this in the knowledge that we are thereby expiating our negative karma. We should not deplore such treatment.

I recall how President Toda described being struck four times while he was in prison. The jailer, brandishing his authority, punched President Toda once and then again for no reason. Though he burned with deep anger, since he was a prisoner he had no choice but to grit his teeth and endure it. Eventually, through studying the Lotus Sutra and intensively chanting daimoku in his cell, he came to the realization that the purpose of this event was to enable him to erase his negative karma.

The third time was on a day in early spring when he was bathing. The jailers herded the prisoners, forty to fifty in all, into the tiny bathroom. Though he was chilled to the bone from having waited for thirty minutes, President Toda bathed carefully so as to waste as little hot water as possible out of consideration for the prisoners who would bathe later.

When a guard saw this, he started shouting at him: "Hey you! What are you doing taking such a leisurely bath! You must be a troublemaker!" And as he said this, he viciously struck President Toda in the face several times.

This time, while shedding bitter tears, he thought to himself with utmost conviction: "Yes! I have been hit again! When I am struck a fourth time, I will be free to leave!"

On another occasion, a furious guard gave President Toda twenty-some lashes on his back with a hemp rope. This was of course a horribly painful ordeal. But in his heart

President Toda shouted with delight: “At last! The fourth time! Now my offenses are completely expiated!” Shortly thereafter, President Toda attained enlightenment in prison.

**SAITO:** Just listening to this account gives me the shivers—both at the profundity of Buddhism and at the cruelty of power.

## The Religion of Nationalism

**IKEDA:** What is nationalism? It is a way of thinking about the world that finds the worship of power at its root. This is the exact opposite of the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

**SUDA:** Worship of power as the basis of nationalism—that’s a difficult concept to grasp.

**ENDO:** I think some people have a hard time clearly understanding what nationalism is.

**IKEDA:** Nationalism could be described as a cult of power. It is based on the perverse notion that the state comes before the people. Nationalism is a “religion” that has existed since ancient times.

**SUDA:** A “religion”?

**IKEDA:** I discussed this at length with the British historian Arnold Toynbee. As I think I have noted before, Dr. Toynbee remarked that the vacuum created in the West by the recession of Christianity was filled by three distinct religions: “belief in the inevitability of progress through the systematic application of science to technology, nationalism, and communism.”<sup>8</sup>

What kind of religion, then, is nationalism? It takes collective human power as its object of worship. And worship of collective power is worship of the state.

Incidentally, Toynbee declared that nationalism, fascism and communism all share a common reverence for collective power.

In the religion of nationalism, people are nothing more than components of the state. They are turned into tools, means to an end. It is a religion in which the ego of the state tramples on the dignity of human beings.

**ENDO:** I think we can find many signs of such nationalism in Japan today.

**IKEDA:** Toynbee also writes that the collective ego is dangerous “because it is . . . less patently unworthy of devotion.” He says:

Bad behaviour that would be condemned unhesitatingly by the conscience in an individual culprit is apt to be condoned . . . under the illusion that the first person is absolved from self-centredness by being transposed from the singular number into the plural.<sup>9</sup>

**SUDA:** He is saying that when operating in numbers as a “we,” people are more likely to carry out immoral acts that they could not possibly commit while acting as individuals.

**ENDO:** This is the same mentality as thinking that it’s safe to cross the street on a red light if you are in a group. It’s frightening when you think about it.

**SAITO:** The guards who tormented President Toda exemplify what becomes of people once they have been poisoned by nationalism. They identify with the great power of the state and carry on as though they themselves possess such power.

**ENDO:** They borrow and hide behind the authority of a presumed higher power.

**IKEDA:** We see the same thing in war. Ordinarily, people regard killing another person as the most heinous of acts. But when it is “for the country,” someone who kills many people becomes a hero.

**SUDA:** The perverse religion of nationalism causes people to lose their senses.

**IKEDA:** President Toda wrote:

There are a number of things that have puzzled me since I was a boy. Among these, the thing that baffled me the most is how some relations between countries can be so far removed from culture.

What I mean is that people living in “civilized” countries receive a great deal of “cultural training,” such as education in manners, language and attitudes. Despite the fact that such people live cultured lives based on a shared sense of value and awareness, when diplomacy between countries is the issue, although things may seem cultured on the surface, in actuality they are an exercise in brute force. Once diplomacy breaks down, isn’t it often the case that countries discard courtesy and custom and become arenas of anger?<sup>10</sup>

President Toda declared that genuine religion is the driving force that can enable people to end this vicious cycle, including the wars that result from it, and construct an eternal paradise for humankind. The human being is most important. Society and the state exist for the sake of people; not the other way around.

The idea that the state takes precedence over people is “worship of power.” In a word, such thinking produces a society of survival of the fittest. This is the exact opposite of the love of humankind exhibited by Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Under such conditions, it is ultimately the people who suffer. People need to recognize this. They need to open their eyes.

### **Rejection of State Worship**

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi keenly perceived that the iniquity of the state was something to be feared. When he refused to accept the Shinto talisman forced upon him by the authorities, some Nichiren Shoshu priests implored him to take it, saying that it was just a formality. But Mr. Makiguchi would not relent in the slightest.

Before Mr. Makiguchi was imprisoned, officers of the special police maintained a presence at Gakkai discussion meetings. If the talk turned to the talisman, they would immediately shout, “Stop!” When President Makiguchi, after discussing other subjects, came to the issue of household Shinto shrines, they would again shout for him to stop speaking.

The leaders around him wondered why Mr. Makiguchi returned time and again to these issues even though he was aware that he was in serious jeopardy. They failed to understand his spirit.

In rejecting the talisman, President Makiguchi was essentially rejecting worship of the state. “Aren’t people more important than the state! We can’t just sit back and watch everyone become miserable! Never!” This was his irrepressible cry.

**SAITO:** Early Christianity also rejected worship of the state, firmly rebuffing the Roman Empire, which was the supreme collective power of the day.

Title: Dialogue On The Lotus Sutra (40)

Subject: Living Buddhism 08/99 v.99 n.8 p.16 LB9908p16

Author:

Keywords: Bodhisattva Buddhahood Chapter Dialogue Disparaging Lotus Never Study Sutra

**IKEDA:** Toynebee also discusses this history.

*In his work Civilization on Trial, he says: “The early Christians challenged the apparently irresistible might of the Roman Imperial Government rather than compromise with a Leviathan-worship that was persuasively commended to them as being nothing more sinister than an amiable formality.”<sup>11</sup> Hobbes (1588–1679) uses Leviathan, an enormous mythical creature appearing in the Bible, to symbolize the power of the state.*

**SUDA:** Japan’s religious denominations compromised with and gave in to the nationalists’ efforts to control religion. In the name of protecting their organizations, they abandoned the essential spirit of faith and became utterly spineless.

**ENDO:** This is true of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood as well. It lost its soul.

**IKEDA:** President Makiguchi and Mr. Toda safeguarded the Daishonin’s spirit by waging a magnificent struggle against the power of the state.

**SAITO:** I think we could say that theirs was a fight against the erroneous religion of Japanese nationalism.

**ENDO:** The state wielded enormous power.

**IKEDA:** Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda fought to save people from becoming slaves to the state. Everyone has the right to become happy, and the right to live freely. People are definitely not merely cogs in the machinery of the state. Because they cherished such conviction, they were persecuted by the authorities. Theirs were truly actions of “never disparaging.”

**ENDO:** It seems to me that your actions, President Ikeda, also exemplify this idea that the person comes before the state. When asked why you were going to visit the Soviet Union, given that Soviet ideology rejected religion, you replied, “Because there are people there.” Again, when you went to China, to a young girl who asked you why you had come to China, you replied, “I came here to meet you.” More recently, you also went to Cuba and opened a path with that country at a time when the international situation was very tense.

Your efforts to unite the world based on faith in human beings are truly the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging of the present day.

**IKEDA:** I am opening a path. But unless young people follow in my footsteps, it will not develop into a great road.

In any event, the four groups of arrogant people described in the account of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, broadly speaking, can be identified with the evil of the state. No one is more arrogant than people of power.

A passage in the “Ongi Kuden” says that the actions of the four groups are the conduct of the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven.

**SAITO:** Yes. It reads:

The four groups of people in their overbearing arrogance curse Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, calling him an “ignorant monk.” To call “ignorant” a bodhisattva who reveres all people is the work of the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven. (GZ, 765)

**IKEDA:** The four groups of people, priding themselves on their “great authority and power,” ridiculed and persecuted Never Disparaging, who had no such power. And Never

Disparaging waged a spiritual struggle against their power and arrogance. He fought violence with nonviolence. He stood up alone to the tyranny being perpetuated against the people. In the modern age, this is reminiscent of the struggles of Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States. It is a struggle for human rights motivated by love of humankind and championed by ordinary people.

## **The Oneness of Good and Evil**

There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back. (GZ, 769)

**IKEDA:** Let's examine the spirit of never disparaging in more depth and from other angles. For instance, the Daishonin says regarding the relationship between the four groups of arrogant people and Bodhisattva Never Disparaging:

To set up distinctions between good and evil by regarding Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as a "good" person and the arrogant ones as "bad" persons is a sign of ignorance. But when one recognizes this and performs a bow of obeisance, then one is bowing in obeisance to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the principle of the oneness of good and evil, and of true and false. (GZ, 768)

In terms of life tendency, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is the opposite of the evil people who accost him. But both are human and both are entities of the Mystic Law. Evil people also possess the good of the world of Buddhahood, and good people likewise possess evil. Therefore, no matter how he might be persecuted, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging continues striving to achieve the widespread propagation of the Lotus Sutra. Confident that the world of Buddhahood lies dormant inside these evil people, he enables them to form a connection with Buddhism through a poison-drum relationship.<sup>12</sup>

**SUDA:** In the Buddhism of sowing, enabling people to form a relation with Buddhism is very important. The Daishonin says:

Therefore one should by all means persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra and causing them [the people of today] to hear it. Those who put their faith in it will surely attain Buddhahood, while those who slander it will establish a "poison-drum relationship" with it and will likewise attain Buddhahood. (MW-6, 197)

He says that we should "by all means persist" in this effort.

**SAITO:** When people hear the Mystic Law being expounded, the Buddha nature in the depths of their lives is sure to be aroused. Whether they reject this or are inspired to take faith depends on the individual. But without a doubt, such discourse stimulates their dormant Buddha nature.

**IKEDA:** That's right. The Daishonin says, "When one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back" (GZ, 769).

**ENDO:** The entire passage goes:

There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore, when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back.

**IKEDA:** Put another way, respect invites respect, and contempt breeds contempt. When we ourselves change, the other person changes, too.

The task of raising capable people also hinges on treating people with respect, and believing wholeheartedly in their inherent ability. Treating people as though they are subordinate will not bring out their potential.

Those who genuinely respect their fellow members are great. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging reveres even people who do not embrace faith because he knows that the world of Buddhahood resides within them. Those who treat people poorly, especially their comrades in faith, will certainly suffer the consequences.

**SAITO:** Leaders must be very careful about how they conduct themselves. To be inconsiderate of others or behave arrogantly goes against the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

**IKEDA:** No matter what the other person's attitude, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging steadfastly maintained his convictions. And he won. It might seem on the surface that the powerful people who constantly abused him had won, but in terms of state of life, the difference between him and them could not have been greater.

Come to think of it, Nichiren Daishonin, while living in exile on Sado Island, said, "I pray that before anything else I can guide to the truth the sovereign and those others who persecuted me" (MW-1, 117). What sublime words! Like a peal of thunder and a grand symphony, this statement resounds high into the heavens and across tens of thousands of years of human history.

**SAITO:** Those who irrationally attacked the Daishonin, unaware of his profound and sincere spirit, were truly pitiful. And such people exist in the world today. The Daishonin says of them, "They will fall into the hell of incessant suffering for a long time, and later they will meet Nichiren again and will be saved" (GZ, 766, 1123).

**IKEDA:** The concept of the oneness of good and evil doesn't mean to simply recognize evil as evil. It means resolutely struggling against and defeating the negative functions in life, and turning them into allies.

To practice Buddhism is to wage a decisive battle. To be defeated by such forces is not establishing the oneness of good and evil in one's life; rather, it is to allow good to be overpowered by evil. By resolutely winning in our endeavors to vanquish evil, we are able to turn even the ill-intentioned into positive influences.

**ENDO:** The Daishonin says, "It is the Regent Hojo Tokimune above all who has been of the greatest aid to me. Hei no Saemon is to me what Devadatta was to Shakyamuni" (MW-1, 185). He says that Hojo Tokimune, the ruler of Japan who sent him into exile, is an ally, and that Hei no Saemon, his chief persecutor, is his Devadatta—an evil person whom Shakyamuni turned into a good friend of Buddhism.

**IKEDA:** A passage in the Lotus Sutra says, "Although the devil and the devil's people will be there, they will all protect the Law of the Buddha" (LS6, 108). Kosen-rufu becomes a reality when we turn even enemies into allies. And the only way to do this is for those who have this awareness to stand up with fierce resolve and forge an iron unity of the peo-

ple.

At the outset of this discussion, I mentioned cherry blossoms. Millions and tens of millions of noble irreplaceable lives have been destroyed by the perverse ideology of nationalism. It was President Makiguchi and President Toda who cried out for an end to the massacre. Theirs were actions of the ultimate patriotism.

And they willingly devoted their lives to the Lotus Sutra, which can be called the religion of humankind. They gave their lives not for the state, but for the sake of people. Thoroughly aware of this history, we need to stand up and oppose the new nationalism and cult of power that is now emerging. This is what it means to truly read the “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” chapter.

*To be continued*

1. Makoto Ueda, *Matsuo Basho* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), p. 28.
2. Integration of the three mystic principles: This refers to the fact that the three mystic principles of True Cause, True Effect and True Land are all taught in the “Life Span” chapter.
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 are given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number and then the page number.
4. Four kinds of people: Monks, nuns and lay men and lay women. Broadly speaking, this refers to all people.
5. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 466–67.
6. Three powerful enemies: Three groups of people who persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra after Shakyamuni’s passing.
7. Our offenses have all been expiated: This corresponds to the line from the sutra, “his offenses had been wiped out” (LS20, 270).
8. *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue: Man Himself Must Choose* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1976), p. 292.
9. Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 34.
10. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1981), vol. 1, p. 20.
11. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial / The World and the West* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1964) p. 224.
12. Poison-drum relationship: Another term for reverse relationship, i.e., a bond formed with the Lotus Sutra by opposing or slandering it. The expression “poison drum” comes from the Nirvana Sutra, vol. 9, which states, “Once a poison drum is beaten, all the people who hear it will die, regardless of whether or not they have a mind to listen to it.” Similarly, when one preaches the Lotus Sutra, both those who embrace it and those who oppose it will equally receive the seed of Buddhahood.

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