

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA (49) KOSEN-RUFU IS THE ULTIMATE PATH IN LIFE

This is the forty-ninth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the February 1999 issue of the Soka Gakkai study journal, Daibyakurenge.

Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds symbolizes the compassion of Buddhism, the spirit to lead all living beings to enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra is a vibrant teaching about creating value in one's life and in society. In this second discussion on the "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds" (twenty-fifth) chapter, the participants discuss how religion can and should contribute to the betterment of the individual's life. They point out that religions lacking the power to help people improve their lives tend to become subservient to authority. They also address the importance of basing one's prayer on accomplishing kosen-rufu—the establishment of a peaceful world through spreading Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

At that time the bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent immediately rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, pressed his palms together and, facing the Buddha, spoke these words: "World-Honored One, this Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds—why is he called Perceiver of the World's Sounds?"

The Buddha said to Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent: "Good man, suppose there are immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of living beings who are undergoing various trials and suffering. If they hear of this bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and single-mindedly call his name, then at once he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will all gain deliverance from their trials." (LS25, 298–99)¹

DAISAKU IKEDA: Incidentally, do you suppose Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds is a woman or a man?

HARUO SUDA: Outwardly, there is every indication that this bodhisattva is a woman. There are even statues of the bodhisattva holding a baby.

TAKANORI ENDO: But there aren't many references to female Buddhas or bodhisattvas in the sutras. They are usually male. That's because ancient India was a male-dominated society.

Also, if you closely examine an image of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, you will find that it depicts facial hair, a masculine characteristic. Furthermore, the bodhisattva's name in Sanskrit, Avalokitesvara, is a male name.

SUDA: Some argue that in exhibiting both female and male qualities the bodhisattva transcends sexuality.

KATSUJI SAITO: According to the Buddhologist Dr. Yutaka Iwamoto, who taught at Soka University in Tokyo, while Perceiver of the World's Sounds was originally a goddess, the bodhisattva took on a male form when inducted into Buddhism.

IKEDA: That seems to be the case. I guess that settles it!

The original Indian goddess was probably connected with the idea of a Great Mother or Earth Goddess.

SAITO: So it appears.

IKEDA: Just as Mother Earth sustains, nourishes and fosters all living beings, Perceiver of the World's Sounds represents the compassion to lead all people to happiness.

SAITO: That's right. Scholars tracing the bodhisattva's origins suggest connections with the Persian goddess Anahita, and with fertility and water deities.

SUDA: The origins of life can certainly be traced to water as well as to the earth.

ENDO: Come to think of it, there are statues of Perceiver of the World's Sounds that depict the bodhisattva holding a water jar.

IKEDA: This bodhisattva is said to freely manifest "thirty-three bodies (forms)" or states of existence. This is analogous to the way that water naturally assumes any shape. Like water, life is not static; it is essentially "non-substantial."²

BELIEF IN PERCEIVER OF THE WORLD'S SOUNDS AND THE CULT OF MARY

IKEDA: So Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds can take the form of either a man or a woman. Moreover, the secret of the bodhisattva's popularity lies in the fact that it has retained the original characteristics of a goddess.

In the conclusion of Faust, Goethe says: "Woman, eternally, / shows us the way."³

This is a principle of humanity common to both East and West.

SUDA: It seems to me that worship of the Virgin Mary in Christianity has much in common with faith in Perceiver of the World's Sounds.

IKEDA: People tend to pray to Mary about their immediate hopes and aspirations.

SUDA: Yes, they pray to Mary for many things in life, such as recovery from illness, easy childbirth and a peaceful death.

ENDO: While belief in Jesus is the main pillar of Christianity, it might be that many Christians find Mary more approachable.

SUDA: Some say that Mary is like a bridge between the absolute world of divinity and the world of human beings. It is believed that no matter how great a sin one has committed, if

one offers sincere prayer to Mary, then Mary will intercede with God on one's behalf without passing judgment.

SAITO: She is like a gentle mother who stands by her delinquent child as the child apologizes to its father for misbehaving.

IKEDA: Mothers are great. Children feel absolutely secure when embraced by their mother. Fathers, on the other hand, are no match for mothers, as their embrace sometimes leads to more tears.

Scholars of religion suggest that faith in Mary reflects belief in the Earth Goddess. However, according to Jungian research in the area of depth psychology, in addition to the positive aspects of giving birth, nourishing and embracing, the Great Mother also tends to hold her children too tightly, and sometimes devours them. This latter aspect might be comparable to the function of the demon goddess Kishimojin (Mother of Demon Children) in Buddhism who killed the babies of others to feed her own children.

Though Goethe alludes to an eternal benevolent femininity, it can be represented in ways that are exact opposites, such as in the form of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds, or in the Mother of Demon Children, who both appear in the Lotus Sutra.

SUDA: Dependency on a “comfortable” way of faith is nothing more than infantile regression.

One researcher on the cult of Mary has pointed out that past images of Mary as a fragile girl have in more recent times been replaced by images of an adult woman exuding self-confidence and dignity. At the same time, the scholar notes, believers have regressed to a childlike state. She writes: “They gather together within the mantle of the holy mother like baby chicks, and simply intone prayers with their rosaries and await a miracle, creating a relationship based solely on sentimentality.”⁴

IKEDA: When Christians in Japan went underground [as a result of persecution during much of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries], it is said that they would conceal their faith in Mary by praying to Perceiver of the World's Sounds as a kind of surrogate. The compound proper name “Mary Perceiver of the World's Sounds” (Maria Kannon) that came into use in Japan as a result of this dramatically shows the similarity of belief in Perceiver of the World's Sounds to the cult of Mary.

In any event, history seems to show that both faith in Perceiver of the World's Sounds and faith in Mary developed and spread not because the clergy promoted them, but as a result of the people's own desire.

SAITO: Concerning the inclusion of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds in the Lotus Sutra, there seems to have been a very popular Indian goddess from whom Perceiver of the Worlds Sounds is thought to have been derived.

IKEDA: It's interesting that a goddess that people at the time believed in and treasured was actively inducted into and brought to life in the Lotus Sutra. That in itself is an expression of the compassion to perceive the world's sounds — to know the hearts and minds of the people. Buddhism does not exist apart from the realities of the age and the people.

SAITO: I think that the clear promise of benefit in the present life in the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter conveys this same spirit.

IKEDA: Reality is reality, and theory is theory. Life is reality. The focus of Buddhism is on reality; we practice faith to win in reality.

The *saha* world is itself the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. To escape from reality is not the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra teaches how to make our reality ideal. Buddhism is about winning in life.

Some might think it shallow to speak of attaining benefit in the present life, but I believe a religion that does not enable people to transform their lives is powerless. The Mystic Law exists so that we may enjoy “peace and security in the present existence” and “good circumstances in future existences.” (cf. LS5, 99) Creating value in daily life is the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

A WORLD RELIGION MUST ENABLE PEOPLE TO GAIN BENEFIT IN THE PRESENT

ENDO: Professor Jan Van Bragt of Nanzan University in Japan, argues that a true world religion must serve society’s needs, have the ability to influence society, contribute to world peace, be thoroughly humanistic, and respond to people’s expectations for attaining benefit in this lifetime.

IKEDA: Reality is what matters. Mahatma Gandhi proclaimed: “Religion which takes no count of practical affairs and does not help to solve them, is no religion.”⁵ A religion that cannot respond to the problems and worries that people are facing right now, he declared, is a religion only in name.

The fact is that many Japanese religions craftily take advantage of people’s religious ignorance and have managed to endure promising benefit in the present life. Their approach might be compared to luring children with candy. From the early days, the Soka Gakkai has been criticized as preaching benefit in the present in much the same way as these other schools. But the Lotus Sutra, humankind’s supreme spiritual legacy, authoritatively teaches the gains to be had in this lifetime from Buddhist practice. It does so because the most important function of religion is to enable people to be truly happy.

The Soka Gakkai has fought against all manner of human suffering, giving hope to those struggling with illness, financial problems, domestic discord and so on. This itself is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. We have been the greatest ally of the suffering and the poor. I take great pride in this.

Religion has no meaning if it avoids the serious question of how to encourage those who are suffering and how to help them out of it. I discussed this point from various angles with Dr. Bryan Wilson of the University of Oxford.

[Dr. Wilson was the first president of the International Religious Society Association. His discussions with President Ikeda are collected in the volume Human Values in a Changing World.]

PRAYER IS SUBLIME PROOF OF ONE’S HUMANITY

SAITO: Suppose a child becomes deathly ill. In addition to seeking the help of a physician,

the parents would surely pray wholeheartedly for their child to recover. I'm certain that even if they didn't practice a particular religion, they would offer some kind of prayer. Prayer is not to be taken lightly. It is a natural human response.

SUDA: I think it would be cold and inhumane to dismiss the desire to pray.

IKEDA: Prayer is unique to human beings. Animals do not have the ability to pray. It is sublime proof of our humanity.

In ancient times, people stood in awe of the immensity and boundlessness of nature. It may be that they deeply revered what they saw as a great presence that was beyond their human intelligence to fathom, and that from this the desire to pray naturally emerged.

When people face a crisis, such as, for instance, any of the seven disasters⁶ described in the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter, they desperately wish to be protected. Prayer is the crystallization of those earnest feelings. This is what gave birth to religion.

ENDO: Religion did not come before prayer; prayer in fact came first.

IKEDA: How do we have our prayers answered? Buddhism clarifies this in terms of the law of life. It expounds the Mystic Law, the key that causes the gears of the microcosm — the self — to mesh perfectly with the macrocosm — the universe.

WORRIES INSPIRED BY CHILDREN

SAITO: Along those lines, the "Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter says:

If a woman wishes to give birth to a male child, she should offer obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then she will bear a son blessed with merit, virtue, and wisdom. And if she wishes to bear a daughter, she will bear one with all the marks of comeliness, one who in the past planted the roots of virtue and is loved and respected by many persons. (LS25, 300)

IKEDA: This is saying that the prayers of parents definitely affect their child's birth. Through the faith of parents, children will develop outstanding attributes.

Many parents worry over their children. Nichiren Daishonin in fact teaches that children may either be a blessing or a bane, saying: "There is a sutra passage in one of the sutras that says that children are one's enemies" (WND, 1043); and "There is also a sutra passage that says that children are a treasure" (WND, 1044).

While people without children may long to have them, I hope they will remember that they will suffer unless their children are good. I would also like to stress the importance of treating our fellow members with the same concern we would our own children, for more noble than the connection of blood is the connection between people brought together by lofty ideals and the fostering of spiritual heirs.

People who suffer because of their children can use that obstacle to strengthen their faith. It could even be argued that this is the reason that children cause their parents to worry. Children will become happy without fail when their parents attain Buddhahood.

SUDA: I see.

IKEDA: While the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter speaks of the benefit of “offering obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds,” this of course means praying and making offerings to the Gohonzon. As evidence of this, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds presents the offerings made to him to the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures.

ENDO: Bodhisattva Inexhaustible Intent makes an offering of a necklace adorned with numerous precious gems to Perceiver of the World’s Sounds. But Perceiver of the World’s Sounds declines to accept it.

After Shakyamuni entreats Perceiver of the World’s Sounds to accept the gift, the bodhisattva complies. He then divides the necklace into two parts, which he presents to Shakyamuni and the tower of the Buddha Many Treasures. (cf. LS25, 303)

SUDA: In terms of the implicit meaning of the sutra, “Shakyamuni and the tower of the Buddha Many Treasures” represent the Mystic Law, the Gohonzon. In other words, this teaches that we should make the Mystic Law, not Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, our foundation.

ENDO: I would really like for the many people who place their faith in Perceiver of the World’s Sounds to pay attention to this passage.

SAITO: In “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” the Daishonin says:

If one chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, then the power of the words Namu Amida Butsu, the power of the mantras invoking Mahavairochana, the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, and the power of all the Buddhas, all the sutras, and all the bodhisattvas will without exception vanish before the power of Myoho-renge-kyo.

Unless these other sutras manage to borrow the power of Myoho-renge-kyo, they will all become worthless things. (WND, 732-33)

THE BENEFICIAL POWER OF PERCEIVER OF THE WORLD’S SOUNDS IS ACTUALLY THE POWER OF NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO.

IKEDA: To embrace the Gohonzon is to embrace the entire universe. It is to tap the source of the power of the universe. One who does so is worthy of utmost respect. Such a person is hundreds, thousands, tens or hundreds of thousands of times more noble than the founders of the various religious schools who are revered as gods and Buddhas. People don’t realize this.

It is vital that we treat our fellow members who are exerting themselves for kosen-rufu with the highest respect and honor. This is the fundamental spirit of the SGI. As long as we uphold this spirit, we will never become deadlocked.

DISTRACTED WHILE CHANTING?

ENDO: With regard to prayer, people frequently bring up the problem of extraneous

thoughts occurring to them while they are chanting.

IKEDA: There is nothing wrong with having an active mind while chanting. This is a natural human tendency. The important thing is to face the Gohonzon just as we are, without affectation.

Having extraneous thoughts is an inherent part of our lives in that we are entities of the principle of three thousand realms in a single life moment. Therefore, through daimoku we can turn even those thoughts into benefit.

There are no rules governing how we should pray. There's no need to be something we aren't. Even if we were to try to control our thoughts by making our prayer rigid and forced, our minds would still tend to wander. As we deepen our faith, we also strengthen our ability to concentrate.

Actually, since the thoughts or ideas that come to mind as we chant represent issues that concern us at that moment, we should not consider them extraneous. Instead, we should pray earnestly about each one, whatever it may be. Rather than chant only about large issues, we should pray specifically about every issue we face, winning over each one and strengthening our foundation as we go.

There is of course no need to be tense or nervous when praying. What matters is that we are completely ourselves.

ENDO: People also wonder whether it is okay to chant for many things at the same time, or if they should concentrate on one issue at a time.

IKEDA: There's no limit to how many things we can pray about. It just means that the more desires we have, the more sincere and abundant our prayer will be. It's just like if you want to do a lot of shopping, you need a lot of money. Buddhism is reason.

SAITO: It occurs to me that questions such as this one might arise from the misconception that the Gohonzon "hears" our prayers and then solves them supernaturally.

IKEDA: Who answers our prayers? We do—through faith and effort. No one does it for us.

Returning to the shopping analogy, it is the same as using our own money when we go shopping. Having our own money is a prerequisite. The "currency" of prayer is none other than our practice of faith.

UNANSWERED PRAYERS

SUDA: Some people have expressed concern because some of their prayers have not been answered.

IKEDA: We are practicing a faith in which "no prayer goes unanswered." We must first and foremost be convinced of this. There will be times, however, when our prayers seem to be answered and times when they do not. As long as we continue to pray, in the end everything will go in the best possible direction. This will be clear to us when we look back later.

More than anything, it is the struggle we go through to have our prayers answered that

makes us stronger. If we were to immediately get everything we prayed for, we would become spoiled and decadent. We would lead indolent lives, devoid of any hard work or struggle. As a result, we would become shallow human beings. What, then, would be the point of faith?

Life is a series of events and problems. We face all manner of troubles. This is the way life goes. But it is this variety that enables us to lead a fulfilled and joyful existence, to grow, and to develop an expansive and strong state of life.

ENDO: Certainly, if all SGI members were to pray to win the lottery, it would be impossible for everyone to have their prayer answered!

IKEDA: If everything that we prayed for came true instantly, it would be no different than magic. This goes against reason. You can't make steamed rice by simply turning on the rice cooker if you haven't put in any rice.

Buddhism is common sense. It teaches the correct path in which our faith is expressed in how we live. There is no such thing as faith that ignores reality. Our desires will not be realized without making any real effort.

A RELIGION THAT CANNOT REPLY TO PEOPLE'S PRAYERS IS USELESS

ENDO: Religions that promise immediate benefit are often criticized as inferior. Along those lines, I certainly feel that religions that make people dependent ought to be refuted.

SUDA: Faith that seeks selfish gain by invoking some sort of mysterious force could well be described as magic.

SAITO: On one side, there are religions that preach only inner fulfillment; on the other, there are those that promise mysterious benefit in the present life without any real effort. Both of these depart from the reality of human life, the reality of the oneness of body and mind. On that level, they are similar.

ENDO: One is abstract, the other, preposterous.

SUDA: I think we could also say that one lacks compassion, and the other lacks wisdom.

IKEDA: True religion is found in neither way of thought. True religion does not depart from reality; it reveals the fundamental law based on which people can improve their lives in reality. First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi termed this "value creation." In refuting a view on religion articulated by an eminent scientist⁷ of the day, Mr. Makiguchi declared that a religion that does not produce value in response to prayer is useless.⁸

This scholar had argued that while people "sense the divine in wondrous laws of nature," things that cannot be understood through the natural sciences ought to be left unknown. And he asserted that it therefore "defies good reason to pray to the gods for personal gain."

SUDA: That's a typical criticism.

IKEDA: By contrast, President Makiguchi asserted that a religion that is not concerned with creating value in human life is useless. To ignore the reality of life is to ignore the human being.

Wondrous phenomena are not limited to the realm of nature. Mr. Makiguchi believed that human life itself and day-to-day occurrences are also wondrous, and that one ought to seek the wondrous power of life force that enables people to create value and realize victory. He stated that the natural sciences alone cannot lead people to happiness, and that what is needed is a “science of value.” His insight penetrates the basic flaw of modern civilization.

SAITO: President Makiguchi also opposed the idea that “the sacred” is exclusive to religion. He argued that religion that exists merely for the sake of religion has no meaning.

Concerning such values as “the sacred” and “inner peace”: these accord with the value of “gain,” or benefit, where the individual is concerned and the value of “good”⁹—moral and ethical value—with respect to society. Mr. Makiguchi posed the question: “What is the significance of a religion if not to help people become happy and improve the world? Isn’t the act of helping people become happy the value of gain? Isn’t improving the world the value of good?”¹⁰

IKEDA: In short, it is hypocrisy to avoid the actual struggle of helping people become happy and improving the world, while preaching the “sacred” as though it existed on another lofty dimension.

Helping people become happy and improving the world—this is kosen-rufu. This great struggle to grapple with reality is itself value creation and true religion. The sacred exists only in the midst of such struggle. Isn’t peace also a form of benefit in this life?

There is profound meaning in the term “world” of “Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.” We cannot separate ourselves from reality. The “world” is society. We are engaged in a struggle to create a happy society. “Sounds,” on the other hand, means the cries of individual living beings, their personal desire for happiness. It is Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, in other words, the Lotus Sutra, that unifies these two goals of social prosperity and individual happiness.

ENDO: Certainly, those who care only about their own happiness become egotistic. By contrast, an exclusive preoccupation with the demands of society at the expense of the individual readily lends itself to totalitarianism and nationalism. The balancing of these two is most difficult.

BALANCING THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY, FREEDOM AND EQUALITY

SUDA: When Vice-Chancellor Vrajendra Mehta of the University of Delhi visited Japan [in January 1999] to present you with an honorary doctorate in literature, President Ikeda, I recall that in his remarks the Indian educator emphasized the Middle Way.

IKEDA: That’s right. He is a great philosopher and a distinguished political scientist. He remarked:

The traditional way of thinking in the modern West has swung to the extremes of individualism and collectivism. This has unfortunately resulted in loss of the self.

In contrast to these two “isms,” Gandhi and other Indian thinkers have tried to respond by returning to traditions that have existed from ancient times. This is the thought of the Dharma, which views all things as mutually related, and the thought of nirvana, which is the ultimate transcendent ideal.

Similarly, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda emphasized that individuals create value through their relationship with society.

From the standpoint of the philosophy of value creation, individual happiness and social prosperity are definitely not opposed. The two actually are closely related, like the rotation and revolution of the earth. It is through exerting oneself for the well-being of society that one becomes happy. And society must strive to bring happiness to each person.

SUDA: It’s a case of “one for all, and all for one.”

IKEDA: Dr. Mehta also said:

The universe is held together by organic relations. By this I mean the relations between man and nature, man and man, and man and the cosmos. This is not the relation between “part” and “whole.” Man and nature and the universe—each of these is itself a “totality.” It is something irreplaceable that has a purpose.

What a profound view of life! To live based on the Law or Dharma, the correct path in life, means to advance along the Middle Way.

ENDO: This surely does not mean taking the path of least resistance.

IKEDA: It means to find and stay on the right path—to hit the mark or target. Never to stray from the correct path as human being, to live in a manner that is always on course and accords with the law of life—that’s what is meant by the Middle Way. It is humanism.

Dr. Mehta characterized the nineteenth century as a “century in pursuit of freedom,” and the twentieth century as a “century in pursuit of equality.” And he said that the twenty-first century must be a “century which pursues justice.”

Freedom and equality, individualism and collectivism—it is justice that balances these opposing forces. It is the Dharma. It is the Middle Way. This is how we must usher in the “third civilization.”

ENDO: This is a clear manifesto for the twenty-first century.

IKEDA: Returning to the earlier topic of prayer, following the Middle Way is to steadfastly advance along the correct path in which “daily life equals faith” and “faith manifests itself in one’s efforts.” It is neither abstract “placebo faith” nor effortless “magical faith.”

SAITO: We need to continue chanting and taking action until our prayers are realized. Then, in the end, we will attain a state of ultimate fulfillment. Life is about such struggle.

IKEDA: Whether our prayers are answered depends on our faith. The depth of our karma also affects the result of our prayer. Sometimes it just takes time. Whether and when our prayers are answered can have a variety of meanings. But there is no doubt about the fact that our life begins to change in a favorable direction from the very moment we begin to pray.

SUDA: Is this true even of self-centered prayer?

IKEDA: It is human nature to think of oneself. The important thing is that we go to the Gohonzon just as we are. If we go out of our way to put on an air of nobility, as if all our concerns are lofty ones, then we are presenting a “false self.” The Gohonzon does not respond to lies.

When we chant daimoku about our greatest worries and our deepest wishes, our state of life improves, and we gradually develop the mind to pray not just for ourselves, but for the happiness of our friends and for kosen-rufu. Also, I think it is vital to challenge ourselves to pray for such lofty goals. It is all up to us—we are free to pray about anything we wish.

ENEMIES ON EVERY SIDE

IKEDA: Each day, I pray only for the attainment of kosen-rufu and for the health, longevity, prosperity and happiness of all SGI members. I believe that this is my fundamental responsibility and mission.

To be the one bearing all the responsibility is no easy task. I will never forget the words of Madame Deng Yingchao (wife of the late Chinese premier Zhou Enlai): “We had enemies on every side. That was the situation every single day. It was like that for years, for decades. We really fought hard.”

It is the same with the Soka Gakkai. We have been surrounded by enemies. Politicians, priests, the media, traitorous former members—all have united their forces with the aim of stamping out the people’s advance and attacking me personally. They have resorted to all kinds of base ploys.

Alone, I have fought and surmounted these attacks, and protected all the members. I have not let down my guard for a single moment. I could not afford to. As a result, the Soka Gakkai has developed into a dignified international organization. I have prayed single-mindedly to the Gohonzon to open a boundless, hope-filled path toward the spread of this Buddhism and a peaceful world. It is my wish that all leaders will have this same spirit, without which our organization will succumb to bureaucratism.

Leaders must work wholeheartedly with the prayer and determination to help each and every member in their areas to become happy without fail. To wage a genuine struggle, we must abandon our egos. To win or lose, to live or die—everything is a decisive battle. Terrible things can happen when people take their responsibilities lightly.

One month before his death, Professor Yudo Takada, the founder of my alma mater, Fuji College (formerly Taisei Gakuin), said: “Education means imparting life to students.” What noble words! He firmly believed that education meant devoting oneself completely to one’s

students. What distinguishes a truly humane educator is the ability to treasure, love and work hard on behalf of one's students, as though they were one's own children.

The same applies to leaders of kosen-rufu. In this world, only the SGI is working to achieve a peaceful world through the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism. The SGI is the sole body of people dedicated to the sublime goal of fulfilling the Buddha's will.

In a sense, the course or "orbit" along which the SGI is advancing kosen-rufu is itself the Dharma. As we live in accord with this Dharma, or Law, we can accomplish our own human revolution and attain enlightenment. The relation between our individual enlightenment and the propagation of Buddhism is like that of a planet's rotation on its axis, and revolution in its orbit around the sun. Those with a self-centered practice may be compared to a planet that only rotates on its axis and does not revolve around the sun. While such people might appear to enjoy good circumstances, they actually wind up falling out of rhythm and becoming lonely and isolated. Instead of being "self"-centered, we should center on the Dharma, or the Law. This is what is meant by the phrase 'Rely on the Law and not upon persons' (WND, 105).

TAKING ACTION FOR KOSEN-RUFU ALLOWS OUR LIVES TO BLOSSOM

IKEDA: Our life is like a flower. It is an entity of Myoho-renge-kyo. Only by taking action for kosen-rufu can we cause this lotus flower to blossom. To just pray without taking action for kosen-rufu is like trying to raise a flower on water without sunlight. Under such circumstances, there is no true blossoming of the self.

When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu, we are protected without fail. We must not separate ourselves from our friends and comrades in the SGI. The SGI itself is a "castle of peace and tranquillity," a "treasure land." The degree to which the SGI has served to protect us is truly remarkable.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda used to say, "The Soka Gakkai organization is more precious to me than my own life." Those who treat the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu lightly only invite the same treatment by King Brahma (Jpn Bonten), Lord Shakra (Jpn Taishaku) and all the Buddhist gods. They have no time for such people.

At any rate, the ordinary members of the SGI who are painstakingly carrying out activities for kosen-rufu are treasures more precious than any celebrity.

ENDO: President Ikeda, I recall the episode involving King Ashoka (r.c. 268–232 b.c.e.) that you brought up in your discussion with visiting scholars from the University of Delhi.

Ashoka at one time placed offerings before *stupas* erected in tribute to the Buddha's disciples. He made offerings and prayed at the *stupas* honoring Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Mahakashyapa, Ananda and others. But before the *stupa* to Bakkula he made only a small offering. Thinking this peculiar, an attendant inquired: "This person is equally a disciple of the Buddha. Why do you make such a distinction?"

The king replied: "It is because while it seems that he wholeheartedly exerted himself in his practice, he did not expound the Law to others and did not contribute to society." The king took as a standard for Buddhist practitioners those who exert themselves for the widespread propagation of Buddhism and for the good of society.

SUDA: When Professor Seba Singh Rana, a leading authority on King Ashoka, heard you relate this story, he remarked: "If people simply keep knowledge to themselves, not sharing

it or putting it to use for the benefit of others, it turns into ‘poison.’” His words impressed me deeply.

ENDO: There have recently been numerous news reports of poisoning incidents in Japan. I think this is indicative of a society that lacks compassion.

IKEDA: Poison symbolizes a cold and hellish heart. People whose lives are dominated by the worlds of Hell and Hunger resent and envy the happiness of others, and are consumed by the desire to cause others to fall into the state of Hell.

By contrast, those who dwell in the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood are overwhelmed by the desire to help others become happy. The SGI is a compassionate group whose members are dedicated to becoming happy themselves and helping others do the same. Kosen-rufu is a movement to expand this “life current” of compassion — the very thing that society needs most — and with it to nourish the world.

Even if it seems that our individual impact is very small, by moving we can create waves. The continuous flow of one wave after another is itself kosen-rufu.

ENDO: I think that this is the means for “detoxifying” a society that is poisoned with mercilessness and brutality.

SEEING THROUGH THE “POISON” OF NATIONALISM

SAITO: This conversation calls to mind the words of a scholar who had investigated the history of persecution of the Jewish people.

How was it possible that a person such as Adolf Hitler could become the supreme leader of a country of such rich cultural heritage as Germany? How could people have been so totally taken in by the ridiculous idea that the Jewish people were the fundamental source of all evil and misery, and that it was only natural that they be slaughtered?

The scholar writes:

Many answers have been given and perhaps many are needed, for no single theory can satisfactorily explain Hitler’s phenomenal success with the German people. They were mesmerized by his voice, and they responded to his message. Was it because their moral sense, at least with regard to the Jews, had become atrophied under the effect of generations of virulent anti-Semitism? Had the German people already become mithridatized by anti-Semitic poison, so that they had become immune even to Hitler’s deadly brand?¹¹

Her remarks drive home just how dangerous and frightening it is if people are “mithridatized”—desensitized to such poison.

IKEDA: It’s the same in Japan. People are losing their sense of human rights. There is a nationalism growing that has no qualms about making the people victims of the state. It is a dangerous situation. We therefore have no alternative but to stand up.

ENDO: Although Japan's constitution is founded upon the ideal of creating peace through soft power, this ideal is now being trampled upon.

SUDA: Justifications for Japan's past war of aggression in Asia are being advanced with tremendous vigor. Most alarming is the prominence of such propaganda in media that appeals to members of the younger generation.

SAITO: At the same time, the spirit of resistance has all but disappeared, resulting in an atmosphere where people think it is best simply to leave everything up to those in power. This certainly goes for the media. And the abject tendency of the public to follow the prevailing current without question is truly pathetic.

JAPANESE RELIGION IS A SLAVE TO POWER

From "The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings"

Five important points on the "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds" chapter:

Point Five, concerning the thirty-three bodies that Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds manifests in order to benefit living beings.

"The Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings" says: "The number thirty stands for the doctrine of three thousand realms. The three bodies stand for the doctrine of the three truths.

Again, regarding the thirty-three bodies, if one is endowed with the three bodies in each of the Ten Worlds, this constitutes thirty bodies, and if the original three bodies are then added in, we have a total of thirty-three bodies.

Essentially, the number "three" stands for the three categories of action, namely, the actions of body, mouth and mind, while the number "ten" stands for the Ten Worlds. The number "three" also stands for the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance. The word "bodies" refers to the bodies of all living beings.

Now when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are receiving the benefits of the thirty-three bodies. (GZ, 777)

IKEDA: The fundamental reason the spirit of the Japanese to oppose authority is so weak is that religion in the country has long been spineless. This is what the leading thinker and educator Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) argued in his work, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*.

Mr. Endo, didn't you attend Keio University [which Fukuzawa founded]?

ENDO: Yes. I recall that in this work he harshly denounced priests as "slaves of the government."

IKEDA: He writes:

Religion works within the hearts of men. It is something absolutely free and independent, not controlled in any way by others or dependent upon their powers.

But while this is the way religion ought to be, such has not been the case here in Japan.

...

... Buddhism, too, has belonged to the ruling class, and has depended upon the patronage of the ruling class, ever since its introduction. . . . The worst of them [Buddhist monks] even felt proud when the government made them peers. . . .

Buddhism has flourished, true. But its teaching has been entirely absorbed by political authority. What shines throughout the world is not the radiance of Buddha's teachings but the glory of Buddhism's political authority. . . .

Thus we can say that the Buddhist monks were slaves of the government. More recently, the government has passed a law which permits Buddhist priests throughout the country to eat meat and get married. The fact that prior to this law these priests were unable to eat meat or get married was not because they were keeping some kind of religious precept. Rather, they refrained from these things because they did not have the government's permission. From this, then, we can conclude that the monks have been slaves of the government; indeed, we can even conclude that at present there is no real religion in Japan.¹³

SAITO: Religion, which ought to become a mainstay of people's spiritual independence, has long been in such a deplorable state that it is quite natural the Japanese people's spirit to fight authority remains weak.

IKEDA: For precisely this reason, the Soka Gakkai movement in Japan is a cultural, human and spiritual revolution on the most fundamental level.

Nichiren Daishonin, while enduring a barrage of attacks from priests who had become "slaves to power," calmly described the sovereign of Japan as a "ruler of this little island country" (WND, 765). In society, everything has its limits. Buddhism is unlimited. The Daishonin knew that even the most powerful person is no match for the Mystic Law, and that the powerful therefore ought to humbly seek the true teaching.

A little earlier we talked about President Makiguchi's theory of value. Mr. Makiguchi's decree that "religion is worthy of the name only if it can lead people to happiness and improve society" is linked directly with Nichiren Daishonin. Our movement is continually tapping the wellspring of religion to send a fresh spiritual current into society. It is ever engaged with society. This is also the spirit of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds, who has the ability to manifest any form he chooses.

[The sutra describes him as assuming thirty-three bodies to preach the Law and lead people to happiness. These bodies include the forms of a Buddha, a pratyekabuddha, a voice-hearer, King Brahma, Lord Shakra, the heavenly being Freedom, the heavenly being Great Freedom, a great general of heaven, Vaishravana, a petty king, a rich man, a householder, a chief minister, a Brahman, a monk, a nun, a layman believer, a laywoman believer, the wife of a rich man, of a householder, of a chief minister or of a Brahman, a young boy or a young girl, a heavenly being, a dragon, a yaksha, a gandharva, an asura, a garuda, a kinnara, a mahoraga, a human or a nonhuman being and a vajra-bearing god (cf. LS25, 301–302).]

SAITO: He can manifest all forms, including even those that are not mentioned in the sutra.

IKEDA: This indicates the importance of respecting all individuals, whatever their station. That person may be the embodiment of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. There are occasions when that person may fulfill the function of a Buddha or bodhisattva. We must never judge a person based on status, line of work or appearance.

“POLITICS WITHOUT RELIGION IS DEAD”

SUDA: The Lotus Sutra is a teaching that is directed toward society.

IKEDA: It is indeed. From the fundamental level of religion, the Lotus Sutra constantly purifies, refreshes and revitalizes society.

With regard to the relationship of religion and politics, Dr. N. Radhakrishnan¹⁴ related to me [in 1994] that Gandhi once said: “Politics that is bereft of religion is dead and lifeless!” Gandhi also said: “It is a noose that will hang the nation.”¹⁵

SAITO: I completely agree.

IKEDA: While Yukichi Fukuzawa said that Japanese religion is a “slave of the government,” Gandhi, by contrast, called for transforming politics by infusing it, through religious spirituality, with moral compassion.

In Japan, the Seventeen-Article Constitution of Prince Shotoku (572–622) includes the exhortation to “devoutly revere the three treasures.”¹⁶ There was thus the idea that the political authorities, too, should behave in accord with universal truth.

Some religions collaborate with power and become its slaves. There are also those that isolate themselves from society, turning a blind eye to politics. But this only passively supports the growth of pernicious power, ultimately allowing it to thrive. There is also a third path in which religion neither unites with power and assists it, nor abets power through a hands-off approach. This is the path of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land, which Nichiren Daishonin espoused.

It aims, from the standpoint of the eternal truth of the correct teaching, to engage in and revolutionize reality. This is the sole noble path by which religion can avoid becoming a slave to power. Yet for precisely this reason, it is a path occasioned by persecution and difficulties, which means it is the genuine article.

ESTABLISHING ETHICS IN ECONOMICS

SAITO: We have already discussed the principle in the “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds” chapter of attaining benefit in the present. An abstract religious view that rejects the creation of value in daily life will not become a vibrant force in society.

Conversely, an easygoing teaching of immediate gain will neither help people open up their inner lives nor give them the ability to transform society even at great personal sacrifice. These are opposite extremes, and I think that both would be very convenient for those in power.

IKEDA: In Japan, not only have priests become “slaves to power,” but so have most intellectuals, leading members of the business world and ordinary citizens. By rights, the powerful and society’s leaders should serve as the “hands and feet” of the people. They are

a means for the people's happiness; they are public servants. However, this concept has been turned on its head.

ENDO: While such people may call themselves public servants, “public” here does not mean the people, but the state or the present system. The idea that public servants are supposed to serve not the people but the system is frightening.

SUDA: I guess that nothing will change in Japan unless the basic tenet of democracy that “the state is a means which has the people's happiness as its end” is really driven home to the Japanese people.

IKEDA: People who are without the invisible authority of the spiritual realm (i.e., religion) readily adhere to visible authority (i.e., the political and social hierarchy).

The Buddhism of value-creation that seeks to breathe life into society is not limited to politics. Just as Perceiver of the World's Sounds can manifest all manner of forms, the stage on which we carry out our Buddhist activities encompasses all spheres of society, including, for example, economics.

Gandhi espoused an “economics of justice,” saying:

An economics that inculcates mammon worship and enables the strong to amass wealth at the expense of the weak, is a false and dismal science. It spells death. True economics, on the other hand, stands for social justice, it promotes the good of all equally, including the weakest.¹⁷

The worship of wealth makes the strong arrogant and the weak servile, corrupting the spirit of both. The essence of economics lies in fostering the wisdom to bring happiness to all people, particularly the destitute. This is what is meant by an “economics of justice.” It accords with the true meaning of “economics,” which (in Japanese) is a contraction of a phrase literally meaning to “govern society and save the people.”

SAITO: Professor Amartya Sen of Cambridge University's Trinity College in England, who received an honorary doctorate from the University of Delhi at the same time as you, President Ikeda, is also an advocate of ethics in economics.

IKEDA: Professor Sen was the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for Economics. He was born in the village where the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) ran an academy, and he was in fact given his name by Tagore.

SAITO: When he was nine, Professor Sen experienced the Great Bengal Famine [of 1943], in which approximately three million people died of starvation. He explains that this experience inspired him to study economics so he could help the poor. He has consistently advocated ethical standards in economics.

IKEDA: How noble!

In his theory of value, President Makiguchi included gain among the three major values

of beauty, gain and good. He clearly stated that gain that does not serve to benefit the public interest is evil and anti-value.

Without a system of values to guide economic activity, economics becomes devoted to nothing more than money-making for the sake of making money and economic growth for the sake of economic growth. There is the danger that such a situation will spin out of control.

ENDO: Japan's bubble economy [in the late 1980s] would be a classic example of this.

IKEDA: President Makiguchi's theory of value could therefore be said to aspire toward an economics of justice.

SUDA: These days in Japan all one hears people talking about is "restoring prosperity." It's as though people think that returning to economic expansion will solve all the country's problems.

While economic growth is of course very important, nothing would be more wasteful than for Japanese society to simply pursue past dreams of economic prosperity without changing its underlying values.

SAITO: It would mean that the country had not learned anything from the bursting of the economic bubble, which resulted in such turmoil that it has been dubbed "the second defeat in war."

THE DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM IS BASED ON MAKING A VOW

From the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings"

Part One: The Essential Passage in Each of the Twenty-eight Chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

Chapter Twenty-five: "The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds."

"He views living beings with compassionate eyes. / The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable" (LS25, 306).

This passage indicates that, because both the objective and subjective aspects of the Dharma-realm are the Mystic Law, the Buddha looks with compassion on all living beings equally, as though each were his only child. The blessings and wisdom of both the objective world and subjective beings are immeasurable. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has these two aspects of blessings and wisdom. (GZ, 792)

IKEDA: The kosen-rufu movement in Japan is an effort to transform this land that is devoid of philosophy and culture into one that is rich with humanism. If the struggle for kosen-rufu is forgotten, then even the Daishonin's Buddhism will become no better than the selfish religions that have heretofore prevailed.

SUDA: The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is a case in point.

IKEDA: It is when we take action for kosen-rufu with a selfless spirit that the microcosm of our lives fuses with the macrocosm of the universe and our prayers are answered. The Daishonin says, “It could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered” (WND, 345). So the issue becomes whether one is a “practitioner” of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching is about making a vow. In our present situation we need to pledge to the Gohonzon: “I will advance kosen-rufu to the best of my ability! I will realize victory without fail!” Our prayer starts from this vow.

In explaining the origins of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, the sutra says, “His vast oath is deep as the ocean” (LS25, 303), meaning that his pledge to spread Buddhism is profound. It further states that, as a result of this oath, “The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable” (LS25, 306).

Nichiren Daishonin says regarding this passage, “The blessings and wisdom of both the objective and subjective worlds are immeasurable. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has these two aspects of blessings and wisdom” (GZ, 792). In other words, both we and our immediate environment gain tremendous good fortune and wisdom.

Some people tend to be wise while others possess good fortune. Everyone is of course unique, but if we have wisdom yet lack good fortune then our efforts will come to nothing; we will be unable to create happiness for ourselves. If, on the other hand, we have good fortune but no wisdom, then we will find it difficult to earn the trust of others and will not be able to help those around us become happy. A supreme life is one that encompasses both good fortune and wisdom.

To walk the essential path of humanism throughout life, the path of kosen-rufu, is to lead an unsurpassed existence. Therefore, we need to forge ahead on this path without retreating a single step. There is no need to hold back.

All leaders should take their places in the vanguard of our movement, working with the persistence of beavers and engaging in dialogue with the fortitude of lion kings, while putting their whole lives into creating a history of the victory of kosen-rufu. To the extent that we do so, our own eternal journey over the three existences will shine with brilliance.

To be continued

1. Editor’s note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.

2. Non-substantiality: Along with the truth of temporary existence and the truth of the Middle Way, one of the three truths formulated by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China to clarify the essential nature of phenomena. The truth of non-substantiality is that phenomena have no absolute or fixed existence of their own.

3. *Goethe’s Collected Works*, vol. 2, Faust I & II, ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins (Cambridge, MA: Suhrkamp/Insel Publishers Boston, Inc., 1983), p. 305.

4. Setsuko Takeshita, *Seibo Maria* (Holy Mother Mary) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998), p. 113.

5. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 26 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967), p. 557.

6. The seven disasters: fire, flood, rakshasa demons, attack by swords and staves, attack

by yaksha and other demons, imprisonment and attack by bandits.

7. Dr. Jun Ishihara (1881–1947): A professor of physics who taught at Tohoku University, Japan.

8. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1988), vol. 9, p. 88.

9. Mr. Makiguchi posited the existence of three basic values: beauty, gain, and good.

10. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu*, vol. 5, p. 356.

11. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 22.

12. In writing Chinese and Japanese numbers, the character meaning “ten” represents multiples of ten. Therefore, the number “33” is written with the characters for “3,” “10,” and “3,” in that order.

13. Yukichi Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, trans. David A. Dilworth & G. Cameron Hurst (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973), pp. 146–48.

14. Dr. N. Radhakrishnan: Director of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti.

15. *Haribhau Upadhaya, Bapu Monogatari* (The Story of Bapu), translated from Hindi by Hakobu Ikeda (Tokyo: Kodansha Shuppan Sabisu Senta, 1998), p. 22.

16. The three treasures: The Buddha, the Dharma (i.e., his Law and teaching) and the sangha (the Buddhist order or community).

17. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 66 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1976), p. 168.