

DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA (53) THE LOTUS SUTRA IS A TEACHING OF THE ONENESS OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

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

All people are Buddhas—this is the truth to which the Buddha is enlightened and the conclusion of the Lotus Sutra. To enable all people to realize their Buddha nature is the goal of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and is itself what it means to work for *kosen-rufu*. To strive harder and harder no matter what happens and to continue giving hope to more and more people—it is in this spirit to move ever forward from the present moment that the heart of the Lotus Sutra is found. In this installment, which brings to a close a series of discussions carried out over four and a half years, the participants elucidate how the essence of the Lotus Sutra is alive nowhere but in the practice of the oneness of mentor and disciple upheld by the SGI, which alone is promoting the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

KATSUJI SAITO: A pioneer member shared the following account with me. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda once visited Shimonoseki City in Yamaguchi Prefecture for the completion ceremony of a renovated temple there. After the ceremony, he attended a banquet, where people took turns singing songs.

When someone began to sing “Nippon Danji no Uta” (Song of the Sons of Japan), a traditional song of the young men’s division, President Toda suggested that instead they sing “Byakko-tai” (White Tiger Brigade).¹ As participants energetically sang, President Toda stood listening. Behind his thick glasses, tears welled in his eyes.

Afterwards he remarked: “While you are all enjoying yourselves like this, my dear Daisaku is waging a desperate struggle in Osaka. Now that I’ve heard the song ‘White Tiger Brigade,’ I’m going to bed.” His voice was choked with emotion as he spoke. Then he took his leave. This completely changed the mood of the evening.

TAKANORI ENDO: And that took place when?

DAISAKU IKEDA: I seem to remember it was April [20] 1957. It is my great fortune to have had such a mentor.

ENDO: That was when you took leadership of activities in Osaka during the time of the House of Councilors by-election. It was that struggle that led to your arrest on July 3.²

SAITO: It was a struggle against corrupt power. Ten days later (on April 30), President Toda suddenly fell ill, and one year later he passed away. Even in his weakened condition, Mr. Toda’s concern for you, the person to whom he would entrust the future of *kosen-rufu*, was tremendous.

IKEDA: He was a mentor of immense compassion. He once told me, “If you should die, I would rush to where you were and lay down with you and join you in death.” It was my determination, too, to give my life to protect the Soka Gakkai.

SAITO: This will be our last in this series of discussions on the Lotus Sutra. Having come to this point, I deeply feel that the Lotus Sutra is ultimately a teaching of mentor and disciple. That is the core theme running through the entire work.

The “Expedient Means” (second) chapter, for example, expounds the principle of the true aspect of all phenomena, revealing that all living beings equally possess the Buddha nature. The people of the two vehicles of Learning and Realization (voice hearers and pratyekabuddhas) — who until then, it had been taught, could not attain Buddhahood — then receive a prophecy of future enlightenment.

Throughout the sutra’s theoretical teaching, or first half, the idea that the Buddha (the mentor) and all living beings (the disciples) are inseparable is elucidated in a variety of ways.

IKEDA: That’s right. The sutra also explains [in the “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter] that even evil people and women can become Buddhas.

HARUO SUDA: It proclaims: “All people can become Buddhas!”

IKEDA: A Buddha is one who has awakened to the truth that all people are potentially Buddhas. A Buddha’s enlightenment is none other than this. There is therefore no such thing as a Buddha who is arrogant or who looks down on others. Such behavior would indicate that one is not the genuine article.

A BATTLE AGAINST ARROGANCE

SUDA: In the description of the “three powerful enemies” found in the “Encouraging Devotion” (thirteenth) chapter, all three are labeled as “arrogant.” [They are called arrogant lay people, arrogant monks, and arrogant high-ranking priests.]

I think arrogance itself is the enemy of the Lotus Sutra. In particular, arrogant high-ranking priests are those who, while being revered by others as sages, harbor malice in their hearts. The sutra says that they in fact “despise and look down on all humankind” (LS13, 193).³

ENDO: The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is a textbook example. The Lotus Sutra is a struggle between the Buddha’s spirit to respect all human beings and that of the “devil” to look down on them. In my opinion, the battle with the devil king of the sixth heaven is the sutra’s ultimate teaching.

IKEDA: Exactly. It is when we resolutely carry out this struggle in the unity of mentor and disciple that we first experience the world of Buddhahood welling forth from our life. It is then that the lotus flower of the Mystic Law begins to blossom.

Myo, or “mystic,” corresponds to mentor; and ho, or “law,” to disciple. They are indivisible. Renge, or “lotus flower,” symbolizes the simultaneity of cause and effect. “Cause” refers to the nine worlds and thus to the disciple, while “effect” indicates the world of Buddhahood and the mentor. Hence, mentor and disciple are one. The Mystic Law and the lotus flower both express the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is the meaning of Myoho-rence-kyo.

Buddhahood is found in the faith to spread the Mystic Law far and wide. We should deeply reflect on the Daishonin’s words:

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the

mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. . . . This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. (WND, 832)⁴

Faith means action. It is struggle. To the very last moment of his life, President Toda burned with passion for kosen-rufu. The same was true of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. This world-class scholar and person of outstanding character died in prison! Japan's militarist authorities killed him.

The year that President Makiguchi was imprisoned (1943), he had declared that it was time to save the nation from crisis, and in spring of that year, he began lecturing to students on the Daishonin's treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

He was imprisoned on July 6. Many so-called disciples, who had referred to Mr. Makiguchi as their mentor, suddenly turned around and began denouncing him as a scoundrel and saying he had it coming. The human heart is a fearful thing.

President Toda, on the other hand, was the only one who felt tremendous gratitude toward his mentor. He would later address Mr. Makiguchi in an elegy saying, "In your vast and boundless mercy, you took me with you even to prison."⁵ There could be no starker contrast than that between Mr. Toda and the others.

President Makiguchi passed away in November 1944. He died in prison, where he had poured his life into reading "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

AN AWAKENING IN PRISON

IKEDA: And Mr. Toda, the disciple who shared Mr. Makiguchi's spirit, read the Lotus Sutra and perceived its essence while he was in prison at the same time as his mentor. He realized that "Buddha" is the "great life" that pervades the universe, and that he was a product of that great eternal life—life that from time without beginning has constantly existed and operated in the cosmic world. In other words, he realized that he was a child of the Buddha.

As inquiries about humanity advance, the validity and importance of this profound realization regarding life will no doubt be persuasively demonstrated. We are in fact already entering such a time.

President Toda often said: "This [truth] isn't something I studied and learned. It's something I remembered." As a result of his painful ordeal in prison, President Toda became extremely near-sighted. When reading the Daishonin's writings or some other material, he would take off his glasses and squint his eyes, bringing the object so close that it nearly touched his nose. He would remark: "With my vision the way it is, I don't read the Goshu the way all of you do. The Daishonin's Buddhism is recalled."

When asked a question about Buddhism, he would give his opinion and say: "I'm sure the Daishonin said the same thing. I know it's written somewhere." And sure enough, when we would go and look, we would find the Daishonin's same teaching in the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" or some other writing.

He would also describe how on numerous occasions when pondering a difficult portion of the teachings, the meaning would just come to him as if out of the blue.

President Toda was enlightened to the oneness of mentor and disciple. He "remembered" the truth that he had been exerting himself as a disciple of and with the

same spirit as Nichiren Daishonin since the remote past. Understanding this, how could he begrudge his life?

With nothing but appreciation, we should advance toward kosen-rufu. There is no enlightenment in the Latter Day of the Law and no world of Buddhahood apart from the faith to move eternally in the direction of kosen-rufu. This is what President Toda taught.

BUDDHISM OF THE TRUE CAUSE IS THE BUDDHISM OF HOPE

SAITO: To continually go forward—this is the Buddhism of the True Cause.

IKEDA: Now is eternity. Right now is the “beginning.” The past is gone. The future has not yet arrived. The present moment is all that exists.

The present in an instant becomes the past. We may say that it exists; we may also say that it doesn’t exist. This is the meaning of non-substantiality. Life continues from moment to moment. Apart from this moment, life has no actuality. One moment we might feel happiness, the next, misery.

To view this moment of life as the direct effect of some cause made in the past is to think in terms of the True Effect. To think, in other words, “I did that, so this happened.” But that perspective alone will not give rise to hope.

The key is to view one’s life at the present moment as the cause for creating future effects. This is the True Cause that reaches the very depths of one’s being. It is not a superficial cause.

Temporally, our lives are rooted in the life of time without beginning. Spatially, they are the True Cause that pervades the entire realm of phenomena. This is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the eternal cosmic life, the great principle that moves the entire universe and sparks constant development.

Therefore, when we believe in the Gohonzon as the embodiment of that Law, chant the Mystic Law and take action, at that moment we are experiencing eternity. And it is then that the eternally pure and boundless life force that is “neither created nor adorned, but remaining in its original state” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 759) wells forth. We enjoy complete freedom in both the present and the future. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the Buddhism of hope.

The Lotus Sutra is precious because in its depths is the Gohonzon. If we forget this one point, all of our efforts will amount to nothing.

SAITO: So, the point is that each moment is time without beginning and everything always starts from now.

IKEDA: This is faith based on the Buddhism of the True Cause. Faith means to have boundless hope.

No matter how bad our present circumstances might be, even if it seems we are fighting a losing battle, we must stand up determined not to be defeated, and from there show actual proof of the limitless potential of the Mystic Law. Is this not the true purpose of faith?

Without putting our whole lives into creating something from nothing, we cannot know genuine faith. The intense challenge to create value—to change loss into gain, bad into good, and baseness into beauty; This is the spirit of Soka. This is faith.

The Daishonin says, “If you exert a hundred million aeons of effort in a single moment of life, the three enlightened properties of the Buddha will appear within you at each

moment” (GZ, 790).

We must not become cowardly and craven people who become disheartened and critical of others and think only about protecting themselves when things get even a little bit tough. Those who can pull together in the direst of circumstances are true comrades. Faith is the spirit to give even our very lives for the sake of kosen-rufu and the happiness of the people, whether we gain from it or not.

In the entire world, the SGI is the only group that is working to spread the Mystic Law throughout the world. We must steadfastly protect this noble organization. The SGI is the light of hope for humankind.

THE GREAT MISSION OF THE SGI

SUDA: In a speech last year in Okinawa, Kyrgyz writer Chingiz T. Aitmatov said:

“Humanism” is an extremely important word. Until now there have been systems of thought that served to bring people together in unity within a given ethnic group. But the kind of unity whereby people open their hearts to all others and forge bonds of trust based on friendship is a completely new spirit of unity that has never before been seen.

Such unity cannot be realized without a supreme and sublime philosophy. This philosophy must be spread by an outstanding individual who is a product of the age. Through my long association with President Ikeda, I have come to believe that he is the very person who is promoting just such a philosophy. . . .

If I were asked to describe what kind of age the twentieth century has been, I think I would have to say it has been a century of war and frightening brutality. Some might characterize it as the age of the rise and fall of Communism. Others might describe it as the “age of mass culture” born in the West. In other words, a great many would likely describe the twentieth century as having been the “age of Westernization.”

I would distinguish the Soka Gakkai movement as an undertaking that has transcended all of that, that has gone beyond the ideologies and politics of the past century. The Soka Gakkai emerged during the twentieth century, and it has advanced and developed while overcoming all manner of ordeals and obstacles. It is because of this continuous effort that we have been able to learn of a fresh perspective on the world. Let us all have great pride in this.

Globalization is proceeding as the overall trend of the times. This is true in economics, as well as in the areas of technology and communications. But it is my belief that unless this is accompanied by a “spiritual globalization,” humankind will perish.

If the twenty-first century is really an age of globalization, and if globalization is indeed the way for genuine progress, then all of you, the members of the Soka Gakkai, have a truly immense and profound mission as we enter this new time. . . .

If youth who are thinking about the future come into contact with the idea of humanism and with people who advocate humanism, then humankind will be able to advance even further. I have hope that the twenty-first century will be one of true progress for humankind.

Lastly, I would like to share my thoughts on the Soka Gakkai itself. In addition to enjoying utter freedom, the members of the Soka Gakkai believe in and strive to realize the ideals upheld by the organization. Ordinarily, religious doctrine tends to

restrict in some way the individual's inner realm. But the Soka Gakkai has no such limitation. While each member is free as a unique individual, all are brought together by a common philosophy. Never before have I seen such a wonderful phenomenon. .

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The planet is a legacy that we must pass on to our descendants. Human beings must be prevented from creating any more war, conflict, confrontation and other such destructive activity.

Now, as the twentieth century draws to a close and the twenty-first century is at hand, human reason is steadily approaching a universal perspective. We have entered a time when people are taking a more universal approach to life and thinking on a universal level.

The sea, the mountains, the plains, the earth, the air—it is the responsibility of human beings to protect these treasures.⁶

DEVOTE ONESELF TO THE PRACTICE OF “NEVER DISPARAGING”

ENDO: Dr. Aitmatov's words are very clear.

At the beginning of this series of discussions, President Ikeda, you explained the idea of “cosmic humanism.” It seems to me that the times are inevitably moving in that direction.

IKEDA: When we view the Earth from space, it is easy to see just how foolish it is for this beautiful planet to be divided into some two hundred “nations,” and for them to be constantly at odds with one another. Before we are Japanese or American or Russian, we are human beings. If we cannot grasp something as natural as this, the twenty-first century will be dark indeed. We run the risk of creating an age where brutish violence runs rampant.

We must build a society in which people work with and help one another in a spirit of humanism; we must pursue a peaceful world in which people can lead happy and fulfilled lives with dignity. The basis for doing so is the “spirit of never disparaging” found in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and which is the essence of the Lotus Sutra. It is the philosophy of thoroughly treasuring each person. I have said this many times, but of utmost significance is concrete action. Young or old, the important thing is to treat others with real love and compassion.

Half-heartedness and irresponsibility don't work in Buddhism. Such behavior only degrades the noble work of an “emissary of the Buddha.” Faith is not about leaving things up to others or believing that things will just work out somehow. Thinking that way will not bring about real joy; it will only leave one with regret in lifetimes to come. It is the Soka Gakkai's constant and untiring work to help even one person achieve real happiness that makes it truly great.

IKEDA: At any rate, no matter how flashy and decorated the words, if the actual sufferings of the people are ignored, those words are nothing more than a pretense of sincerity. If we were to place ourselves above others while living alone in peace and tranquillity, the spirit of Buddhism would be dead.

The Daishonin, who appeared in this world to teach others the essence of the Lotus Sutra, chose to be born into positively the lowest station in society. We should carefully reflect on the profound meaning of his declaration that he is the “son of a chandala family” (WND, 202). Born among those who were suffering the most as one of the discriminated, he waged a struggle for human rights against the discriminators while undergoing great

persecution. Such effort itself is the practice of Lotus Sutra.

SUDA: Having studied at Mt. Hiei [of the Tendai school of Buddhism], one of the main centers of learning in Japan at that time, the Daishonin was qualified for the upper echelons. If he had wanted to live in peace at a temple in his home town, I don't think it would have been a problem. But he purposely cast aside such an easy life.

HUMAN BEINGS ARE HUMAN BEINGS!

IKEDA: Though on a different level, the idea of deliberately challenging a difficult path in life brings to mind Pearl Buck's⁷ work, *The Child Who Never Grew*. In it, she gives a candid account of her hardships while raising her developmentally disabled daughter. She describes her pain and how she would vacillate between feelings of hope and despair.

At one point, she was looking for a school that would be suitable for her only child. However, the people she met, though employed as caregivers for children with disabilities, did not possess an awareness that those children were human beings, too. She writes:

The children who never grow are human beings and they suffer as human beings, inarticulately but deeply nevertheless. The human creature is always more than an animal.

That is the one thing we must never forget. He is forever more than a beast. Though the mind has gone away, though he cannot speak or communicate with anyone, the human stuff is there, and he belongs to the human family.⁸

Her words are deeply moving.

“HAPPINESS FIRST AND ALL ELSE FOLLOWS”

IKEDA: Pearl Buck eventually found a school to which she felt comfortable entrusting her daughter. The headmaster of the school had the motto, “Happiness first and all else follows.” He explained:

That's not just sentimentality . . . It is the fruit of experience. We've found that we cannot teach a child anything unless his mind and heart are free of unhappiness. The only child who can learn is the happy child.⁹

This is similar to President Makiguchi's philosophy that education exists for the happiness of children.

At any rate, Mrs. Buck also relays in her book that she learned much from her daughter:

It was my child who taught me to understand so clearly that all people are equal in their humanity and that all have the same human rights. None is to be considered less, as a human being, than any other, and each must be given his place and his safety in the world. I might never have learned this in any other way. I might have gone on in the arrogance of my own intolerance for those less able than myself. My child taught me humility.¹⁰

“My child taught me humility.” How wonderful! The world is becoming a place where people are preoccupied with undermining others. Many go to extraordinary lengths to dig

up others' faults and are ready to do whatever it takes to humiliate them even a little. We live in a society plagued by jealousy and envy.

ENDO: In addition to being a writer, Pearl Buck is also known for her peace activities. A person who respects the dignity of life can't help but try to awaken the same understanding in others.

IKEDA: Exactly. Mrs. Buck knew that a person without humility could not possibly guide others to happiness. She says:

The attendant must be a person of affectionate and invincibly kind nature, child loving, able to discipline without physical force, in control because the children love him or her. Whether this attendant is well educated is not important. He must understand children, for he has in his care perpetual children.¹¹

The same, I believe, applies not only in the realm of education, but to leaders in all fields. Only when we truly care for another can we begin to understand that person's heart, and thus become able to guide the person.

SAITO: This is very inspiring.

The more I think about it, the more I realize just how significant the fact is that the votary of the Lotus Sutra, of the teaching that all people are Buddhas, appeared in this world as "the son of a chandala family" among the lowest class of society.

IKEDA: As practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we must always live as ordinary people, together with the people, and dedicated to the welfare of the people. If in the future leaders should emerge who, having forgotten this point, think they are special and above everyone else, they must be ousted from our movement.

THE BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH ARE PEOPLE OF ETERNAL ACTION

From the Universal Worthy (Fugen) Sutra:

This Mahayana sutra [the Lotus Sutra] is the treasure storehouse of the Buddhas. It is the eye of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences. It is the seed that gives rise to all Thus Come Ones over the three existences. Someone who upholds this sutra upholds the Buddha's body and carries out the works of the Buddha. Know that this person is the emissary of all Buddhas. This person dons the cloak of all Buddhas and World-Honored Ones, and is the child of the true Law of all Buddhas and Thus Come Ones. You should practice the teaching of the Mahayana and not allow the seeds of the Law to be destroyed.¹²

IKEDA: At any rate, it is not enough just to say that all people are Buddhas. Without efforts to widely spread the Law for the purpose of enabling all people to become Buddhas, the concept is nothing more than theory. The essential teaching (second half of the Lotus Sutra) is about actualization. And actualization equates to action.

Earlier, we noted that the theoretical teaching explains the oneness of mentor and disciple. But it is in the essential teaching that genuine practitioners of this principle actually appear. They are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

SUDA: Yes. The essential teaching opens with the emergence of countless Bodhisattvas of

the Earth. These bodhisattvas are really Buddhas in disguise.

IKEDA: Since their true identity is that of Buddhas, they share a bond of mentor and disciple with Shakyamuni. Moreover, though they are Buddhas themselves, they also actively put the Buddha's teachings into practice as disciples. They are bodhisattva-Buddhas advancing toward the realization of kosen-rufu. They are symbols of the Buddhism of the True Cause. It is very significant that the Daishonin describes himself as a "votary of the Lotus Sutra."

ENDO: The Daishonin also refers to Shakyamuni as a "votary of the Lotus Sutra" (cf. WND, 448). ["Votary" is a translation of the Japanese gyoja, which means a person who puts the teachings into action.]

SAITO: They are both people of action. They do not stop once they have attained Buddhahood. They are never satisfied with what they have achieved.

IKEDA: Having declared himself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin proceeds to rigorously examine whether or not his assertion is true. And he does so while undergoing incredible opposition.

SUDA: That was during the Sado Exile (1271–74).

ENDO: He says that at that time "999 out of 1,000 people" gave up their faith (WND, 469). His followers harbored doubts, thinking it strange that the Daishonin should be persecuted relentlessly when he had promised that faith in the Lotus Sutra leads to peace and tranquillity in the present existence. They questioned whether he could really be the votary of the Lotus Sutra when he was not receiving protection from the Buddhist gods.

IKEDA: To quell such doubts, as soon as he reached his place of exile on Sado Island, the Daishonin began writing the treatise "The Opening of the Eyes." He begins this work clearly explaining the reasons he has been so violently opposed. And what he states directly after this explanation reveals his vast state of life.

SAITO: That is in the famous passage: "This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law" (WND, 280).

The passage continues:

Shariputra practiced the way of the bodhisattva for sixty kalpas, but he abandoned the way because he could not endure the ordeal of the Brahman who begged for his eye. Of those who received the seeds of Buddhahood in the remote past and those who did so from the sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, many abandoned the seeds and suffered in hell for the long periods of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas and major world system dust particle kalpas, respectively, because they followed evil companions.

Whether tempted by good or threatened by evil, if one casts aside the Lotus Sutra, one destines oneself for hell. Here I will make a great vow. Though I might be offered the rulership of Japan if I would only abandon the Lotus Sutra, accept the teachings of the Meditation Sutra, and look forward to rebirth in the Pure Land, though I might be told that my father and mother will have their heads cut off if I do not recite the Nembutsu — whatever obstacles I might encounter, so long as persons of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, I will never yield! All other troubles are no more to me than dust before the wind.

I will be the pillar of Japan. I will be the eyes of Japan. I will be the great ship of Japan. This is my vow, and I will never forsake it! (WND, 280–81)

LIVING THE SPIRIT OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

IKEDA: Though the Daishonin makes various arguments in an effort to resolve the doubts of his followers, in his heart, he cares not in the least whether or not the Buddhist gods come to his aid. His spirit is to give his life to propagating the Mystic Law. He swears he will never relent, even if enticed with the most powerful position in the land, or threatened with the beheading of his parents. He declares he will never break his vow to lead all people to enlightenment.

Regarding the Daishonin's spirit, Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, says, "Each time I read this passage, my tears flow ceaselessly. Disciples in later ages should engrave these words in their hearts" (*Commentaries of High Priest Nichikan*, p. 205).

SAITO: Up until this point in the treatise, the Daishonin goes to great lengths to examine whether he is the votary of the Lotus Sutra in light of the sutra's teachings. Once he has done that, he completely transforms his approach.

IKEDA: That's right. He then clearly proclaims his own position as the one living the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, the spirit to achieve kosen-rufu. It's not a question of whether he can prove himself from the standpoint of the sutra. On the contrary, he himself justifies the Lotus Sutra by revealing the sutra's essence. That is, the spirit to enable all people to realize their full potential, come what may.

ENDO: The Daishonin goes from evaluating himself based on the standard of the Lotus Sutra to using as his standard his own vow to lead all people to ultimate happiness and then employing the sutra to aid him in fulfilling that vow.

SAITO: In my opinion, this passage is the most profound reading of the Lotus Sutra. It mustn't be taken lightly. Furthermore, I don't think these words can be truly grasped without challenging oneself to work for kosen-rufu in the same spirit as Nichiren Daishonin.

THE MYSTIC LAW MOVES LIKE A "GREAT WIND"

IKEDA: Kosen-rufu is itself the heart of the Lotus Sutra. It is the rhythm of the cosmic life that is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It is the endeavor to elevate the life-state of all humanity to the world of Buddhahood.

Though we might like it to stand still, time flows ceaselessly. Winter always turns into spring. In the same way, humankind is ever moving in the direction of the wellspring of life that is the Mystic Law, moving toward the world of Buddhahood. As people who are taking responsibility for advancing this movement, we enjoy the highest honor as human beings.

The Daishonin says, "Now when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are like the blowing of a great wind" (GZ, 742). Wind is invisible, but no one can stop it. Wind and water always find their way around any obstruction they may encounter.

The "great wind" of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will not cease no matter who might try to block it. Humankind will without fail awaken to the truth that we are all one with the universe.

On an individual level, those who steadfastly chant daimoku can absolutely steer their

lives onto the path of ultimate fulfillment, like a ship catching a powerful tailwind. To have weak faith is to sail on a weak wind. Strong faith brings forth a great wind. It all comes down to determination.

Even from his place of exile on Sado Island, a place from which people were not expected to return alive, the Daishonin stood up with the resolve to guide the people of Japan—the people who had persecuted him—and all humankind to enlightenment.

This immense compassion is Buddhahood. It is the core of the Lotus Sutra. The Gohonzon is infused with the life of Nichiren Daishonin, the life of the Buddha. This incredible mercy and compassion is the pulse of the living expression of the eternal universal life called Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

RELIGION THAT IS NOT AN “OPIATE”

IKEDA: Karl Marx argued that “religion is the opium of the people.”¹³ Certainly there are religions that function as opiates. Such religions become pawns of the iniquitous nature of authoritarian power, serving to numb the spirit of the people by teaching them to be satisfied with their lot in life and seek happiness only after death. They function to keep the people in a state of ignorance.

But not all religions are opiates. There are religions that, determined to awaken the people, will not succumb to any power, and which are devoted to fighting oppression in an effort to enable all people to live freely and with dignity. This is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. This is the purpose of a religion of the twenty-first century.

SUDA: We can surely say that the aim of the Lotus Sutra is to “open the eyes of the people”—to cause the inherent “flower of the Law” to bloom in the life of each individual.

IKEDA: That aim is to open the world of Buddhahood; to awaken people to the supreme nobility of their existence. The original meaning of “Buddha” is “to open” or “awaken.”

SUDA: Yes. It comes from the Sanskrit word *budh*, which suggests the opening of a person’s eyes or the blooming of a flower. Buddha literally means a person who is awake, a life in which the “flower of the lotus” has blossomed.

IKEDA: The “flower of the Law” blooms within the human being. It shines through our character. The Lotus Sutra is wholly a teaching for human beings.

The purpose of religion is to help each person become happy. But even a teaching whose original intent was to promote human happiness may start to restrict people. Even the Lotus Sutra could be used incorrectly as an “authority” to justify discrimination.

What is necessary to prevent the danger of such distortion from occurring? It is the mentor-disciple relationship. It is the disciple’s inheritance of the resolute spirit and faith of the mentor to lead people to happiness.

ENDO: Because the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has lost the mentor-disciple spirit, they’ve gone completely astray.

INHERITING THE FAITH OF THE MENTOR

IKEDA: It would be terrible if this spirit were to disappear from the SGI. What is the meaning of the oneness of mentor and disciple in Buddhism? Physically, mentor and disciple are of course two different people. It is the heart, spirit, and teaching that each uphold that makes them inseparable. Therefore, it is important to seek a mentor who correctly practices the Law, and to forge ahead with the aim of becoming one in spirit with

that mentor.

A relationship not based on a shared principle or spirit, but where one blindly follows the orders of another in a relationship of boss and underling, or where one claims to be the disciple of the other, but only in form, is not the correct way of Buddhism.

Buddhism is about the disciple taking on the spirit of the mentor to aspire eternally for kosen-rufu. Without the mentor-disciple relationship, there can be no advancement. There can only be decline.

SAITO: It goes without saying that our faith is grounded on Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. He is the original mentor. Based on that understanding, Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's successor, emphasized that the mentor-disciple relationship is essential to one's Buddhist practice. He says:

In this teaching [of the Daishonin], the way to enlightenment is attained through correctly practicing the path of mentor and disciple. If we err in the path of mentor-disciple, then, even though we might uphold the Lotus Sutra, we will fall into the hell of incessant suffering.

SUDA: And as proof that the relationship between mentor and disciple in Buddhism is not just a matter of form, Nikko Shonin clearly stated as his last instructions: "Do not follow even the high priest of the time if he goes against the Buddha's teaching and propounds his own views" (GZ, 1618). What matters is whether one is correctly practicing the Buddha's teaching.

FAITH THAT GROWS STRONGER AND STRONGER

From the "Ten Benefits" (third) Chapter of the Immeasurable Meaning (Muryogi) Sutra:

Good men, this sutra [the Immeasurable Meaning Sutra, which is the preamble to the Lotus Sutra] arouses a spirit of aspiration in bodhisattvas who have not yet aroused a seeking mind; it arouses a spirit of mercy in those who lack a spirit of mercy; it arouses a spirit of compassion in those who are fond of killing; it arouses a spirit of rejoicing in those who are envious; it arouses an inclination to gladly discard attachments in those who have many attachments; it arouses an inclination to make offerings in those who are loath to part with their possessions; it arouses a spirit to uphold the precepts in those who have much arrogance; it arouses a spirit of forbearance in those who have a strong angry nature; it arouses a will to make tenacious effort in those who are lazy; it arouses a spirit of single-minded meditation in those whose minds are disordered and scattered in various directions; it arouses a spirit of wisdom in those who have much ignorance; it arouses a desire to help others in those who are not inclined to help others; it arouses a spirit to perform the ten good acts in those who commit the ten evil acts; it arouses an aspiration for the eternal and ever-lasting truth in those who yearn for continual flux; it arouses a spirit of never-regressing faith in those who are inclined to regress; it arouses a pure spirit in those who are defiled; it arouses a spirit to extinguish earthly desires in those with many earthly desires. Good men, such is the supreme and mystic power of benefit of this sutra.

IKEDA: A disciple is one who carries on the faith of the mentor without any deviation. The important thing is to practice faith that grows ever stronger, without becoming arrogant. In his letters to his followers, the Daishonin repeatedly uses the words “more than ever” and “still more.”

SAITO: This is certainly true in his correspondence with the Ikegami brothers. When they were faced with the hardship of their father Yasumitsu disowning the elder brother, the two brothers fought in unity just as the Daishonin instructed and came out completely victorious.

In addition to praising their joint struggle, the Daishonin strictly instructed them, saying: “No matter what might happen in the future, you must not waver in the least. Exert yourself still more strenuously in faith” (GZ, 1090).

IKEDA: Yes. We cannot let down our guard for even a moment. This is all the more true with regard to evil. Evil must be challenged with an unrelenting spirit.

ENDO: Sure enough, the Daishonin’s guidance to Shijo Kingo when the latter came up against a barrage of opposition was the same. He says: “Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” (WND, 681); “Strengthen your resolve to seek the way all the more and achieve Buddhahood in this lifetime” (WND, 946); and “Spur yourself to muster the power of faith” (WND, 1001).

SUDA: Nichimyo was a believer who traveled to Sado Island with her daughter Oto Gozen to visit the Daishonin. The Daishonin encourages this person of stalwart faith, saying: “All of you are my lay supporters, so how can you fail to attain Buddhahood?” (WND, 615). And he tells her: “Strengthen your resolve more than ever” (WND, 615).

IKEDA: He also instructs followers who have practiced for many years that they, too, should strengthen their faith more and more. To the mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu (the wife of the late Lord Ueno), the Daishonin says: “After hearing it, strive even more earnestly in faith. One who, on hearing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, makes even greater efforts in faith is a true seeker of the way” (WND, 457). To make “even greater efforts in faith”—this is faith of the True Cause. Where such faith exists, the world of Buddhahood manifests, and great benefit thus arises.

SAITO: The Daishonin himself sets an example of faith that grows ever stronger. His life after he moved to Mt. Minobu was definitely not one of idle retirement. While lecturing to several score of his disciples on the Lotus Sutra, T’ien-t’ai’s Great Concentration and Insight (Maka Shikan) and other works, he composed a large number of treatises and letters to his followers, providing detailed encouragement to each.

ENDO: The works he produced during the eight years and four months he spent at Minobu are said to number approximately three hundred. This means that, on average, he wrote one piece every ten days. And these include a number of lengthy writings such as “The Selection of the Time” and “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude.”

Considering that there are nearly one hundred-twenty Gohonzon extant today thought to have been inscribed during this time by the Daishonin, these must have been days of intense and awesome struggle.

THE DAISHONIN'S LAST LECTURE ON "ON ESTABLISHING THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND"

IKEDA: To the very end, until the last moments of his life, the Daishonin lectured on "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

SAITO: Yes. On the eighth day of the ninth month in 1282, about a month before his death, the Daishonin left Minobu. On the 18th, he arrived at the residence of Munenaka, the elder of the Ikegami brothers. Today, this is in Tokyo's Ota Ward.

SUDA: The eleven-day journey must have really taken its toll. Although he made the trip on horseback, the Daishonin's age and ill health would surely have left him completely exhausted after his journey.

ENDO: Despite his poor condition, however, the Daishonin delivered a final lecture for his followers.

IKEDA: That's right. And doubtless he did so wringing every last ounce of strength from his being. This is what a mentor does. For the sake of the beloved disciples, and to forge a path for those to come, the mentor spares no effort. This is a Buddha. A Buddha is someone who fights on to the very end.

"YOUTH IS CONSTANT GROWTH AND ADVANCEMENT"

IKEDA: At the height of the Atsuhara Persecution [in 1279], the Daishonin called on his followers: "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage" (WND, 997). This is the essence of faith.

To the end of his days, President Makiguchi would say: "We are all youth! Youth is not a matter of years according to the calendar. It's about constant growth and advancement." There is no such thing as age in Buddhism. The beneficial power of the Lotus Sutra is "ageless and undying."

Indeed, outside the realm of Buddhism as well, those who are champions of life never stagnate. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe remarked, "For I've been a man for ever / And that means I've had to fight."¹⁴ In Jean Christophe, Romain Rolland states that challenging suffering is the backbone of the universe. And Walt Whitman, whose poetry I loved reading as a youth, sings, "Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary."¹⁵

Kosen-rufu is the same. Human revolution is the same.

It is my hope that the youth who will shoulder the twenty-first century will engrave these words in their hearts. Idleness is the cause of decline. Construction takes tenacious and painstaking effort. Destruction takes but an instant.

What kind of philosophy, what kind of movement, will guide people into the twenty-first century? We must keep in mind that the real struggle is now beginning.

SAITO: For four and a half years we have held these discussions on the Lotus Sutra each month without interruption. During this time, we have delved deeply into the vast and boundless treasures of wisdom contained in the Lotus Sutra.

What really amazes me is how the essential spirit that we have discussed is entirely contained in some impressions that you recorded after listening to President Toda lecture

on the Lotus Sutra when you were in your early twenties, President Ikeda. To conclude our discussion, I would like to introduce those impressions to our readers.

IKEDA: Though we have been studying the Lotus Sutra for many months now, it would be fair to say that we have barely scratched the surface. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is boundlessly deep.

I therefore hope that in the future an even more thorough study of the Lotus Sutra will be pursued based on our discussion thus far. For it is only we of the SGI, who are dedicated to spreading the Mystic Law across the globe, who are able to truly grasp the essence of the sutra's teachings.

IMPRESSIONS ON PRESIDENT TODA'S LECTURES ON THE LOTUS SUTRA [FROM THE SEVENTH SERIES OF LECTURES] (SEPTEMBER 13, 1948)

How I marvel at the greatness and profundity of the Lotus Sutra.
Isn't it the path to salvation for all humankind?
The teaching that enlightens one to the origin of life and the universe,
the fundamental principle revealed to enable all people to acquire the loftiest character
and happiness.

I am twenty-one years old.
Since setting out on my journey of life,
what did I contemplate,
what did I do,
what did I make the wellspring of my happiness?
From this day on, I will advance bravely.
From this day on, I will live resolutely.
I will live within the life of the great Law,
win over my sufferings.
True sadness inspires one to lead a great life.
I now see the true great path and
perceive life's true nature.

Mt. Fuji stands solemnly in the evening twilight.
Graceful, multi-hued clouds.
The august moon rising in the east.
And my own existence.
Within my being pulses the energy of life
and therein exists the zenith of beauty.
I realize my fortune in having encountered the fundamental principles of the immensely
profound and infinite Lotus Sutra.
President Toda will become the mentor of humankind.
Lamenting the condition of his native land, he has the great confidence to advance,
certain of imparting supreme happiness to humanity.
And he has the searing passion of justice that can burn through anything.

I shed tears at the vast compassion of Nichiren Daishonin, who fought tremendous
persecution and lit a brilliant light out of the desire to enable all people to attain

Buddhahood.
Youth must advance, eternally forward.
Youth must advance, for
the eternal prosperity of the Law.

As a follower of the Mystic Law, is there anything shameful in my conduct?
Is my heart free of doubt?
If there is doubt or hesitation, I myself am causing it.

Religious revolution is itself human revolution.
Likewise, it is educational revolution and
economic revolution,
and will also become true political revolution.
The world is confused and polluted.
Who will purify society and the people?
The Soka Gakkai has a profound and great mission.
Its advance alone will decide everything.

Revolution means dedicating one's life.
We devote our lives to the Mystic Law.
Faithful commitment to a noble cause—
this will be the great cornerstone for the salvation
of the country and the world.

Youth, advance embracing great compassion.
Youth, move onward, embracing a great philosophy.
I, at just twenty years of age, know the path
for leading a youth of the highest glory.¹⁶

(This concludes the series "The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra—A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century.")

1. Byakko-tai (White Tiger Brigade): A corps of a few hundred youth organized in March 1868 to oppose the forces of the imperial restoration. Despite its desperate and heroic struggle, the group was decimated. It has come to be a symbol of loyalty, courage and determination.

2. In what has become known as the "Osaka Incident," Mr. Ikeda was arrested in 1957 on trumped-up charges of violating election law. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing.

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

4. Editor's Note: All quotations are from the newly published translation *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (abbreviated as WND) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), unless otherwise stated. The number indicates the relevant page number.

5. At Mr. Makiguchi's third memorial in November 1946. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected

- Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 386.
6. From a speech delivered by Chingiz T. Aitmatov at the Seikyo Shimbun Culture Seminar, held at the Okinawa International Peace Center on November 18, 1998.
 7. Pearl Buck (1892–1973): Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938.
 8. Pearl Buck, *The Child Who Never Grew* (New York: The John Day Company, 1950), p. 42.
 9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
 10. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
 12. *Hokekyo narabini kaiketsu* (the Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1974), p. 688.
 13. *The Macmillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Famous Phrases*, ed. Burton Stevenson (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1948), p. 1948.
 14. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-eastern Divan*, trans. J. Whaley (London: Oswald Wolff Publishers Ltd., 1974), p. 211.
 15. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Everymans Library, 1968), p. 134.
 16. Cf. Daisaku Ikeda, *Kantogen Kogishu* (Collection of Editorials and Lectures) (Tokyo, Soka Gakkai, 1966), vol. 4, pp. 153–155.