

**PERSPECTIVE**  
**THE BODHISATTVA SPIRIT REFRESHES**  
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**WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Soka Spirit is not the new name for the temple issue. Soka Spirit is the basis of Buddhist thought. It is the spirit of the bodhisattva, the spirit of the founder of this Buddhism, Nichiren Daishonin and the legacy of the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai. It is the single directive proclaimed by Shakyamuni Buddha at the end of the “Life Span” chapter in the Lotus Sutra: “Mai ji sa ze nen. / I ga ryo shujo. / Toku nyu mu-jo do. / Soku joju busshin.”

“At all times I think to myself: / How can I cause living beings / to gain entry into the unsurpassed way / and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 232).

We recite that every day when we do gongyo; so every day, we vow that we will think at all times about causing other people to become Buddhas. Yet, in my own life, I know that that was usually the furthest thing from my mind!

Tell me if it sounds familiar: The alarm goes off a few times. Get ready for work, do a quick gongyo, five minutes daimoku and out the door. Race for the Metro, get to work, then work, work, work. Lunch. More work. Head home, get in the door exhausted. Do a quick gongyo, eat, relax...and then to bed.

Talk to members? Please don't bother me tonight—I'm exhausted. Getting out the district schedule? Can't I just send an e-mail? My leader's on the phone? What does that guy want? Compassion for others? Who has the energy?

The truth is that we've forgotten that the bodhisattva spirit is refreshing and energizing. Some of you old-timers may remember the era when we did bodhisattva activities 24/7 — didn't we get great benefits? When we think about those times, we think, “I had the energy of youth!” What we really had was the energy of the bodhisattva!

Here's a story of how important this compassion for others can be: A group of people, (10 or so), escaped from a Siberian prison camp. There were all different kinds — healthy strong men, young people, older folks, etc. In the brutal environment, all died except two. Who were the two who survived? A young mother and her baby. Why did they make it? The mother survived because she had to, for the sake of the baby. The baby survived because of the mother. THAT is how powerful caring for other people can be. It can be the strongest thing in Nature.

The Daishonin had this spirit. He began chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 1253. He had studied the Buddhist texts for many years, and when he realized that this phrase was the essence of those teachings, HIS FIRST ACT was to go back to his home temple and convince his family, friends and fellow monks of this great new practice. He could have gone to a mountaintop or cave or remote temple somewhere and happily chanted for the rest of his life. But he knew that an essential part of this practice is telling others about it.

As his life went on, the Dai-shonin got in lots of trouble because of this practice. He upset many of the other sects of Buddhism. The priests who ran those sects did not appreciate their followers leaving them. The Daishonin could have just said: “Live and let live. I won't bother your followers, if you don't bother mine.” He could have said: “It's a free country—people can believe whatever they want. No skin off my nose.” But he didn't.

He never stopped debating other priests, refuting other sects and remonstrating with the

government about its support for these other sects. He was offered a fine temple if he would lay off the other sects—he refused. He was sent into exile twice and they tried to behead him, but couldn't, all because the Daishonin could not compromise his spirit of compassion—the spirit of the bodhisattva.

All this is recorded in the Daishonin's writings. Again and again, he persuades, cajoles, and argues, all for the sake of spreading this form of Buddhism to people everywhere. He told his followers, "Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386).

After the Daishonin's death, this spirit wavered, flickered and nearly went out. During the next seven centuries, this Buddhism was layered over with ceremonies, customs and traditions. But in the 20th century, a Japanese educator named Tsunesaburo Maki-guchi converted to the Daishonin's Buddhism and immediately saw benefit through his sincere practice. Grasping the spirit of the bodhisattva, Mr. Makiguchi began propagating this Buddhism to everyone he knew. Soon, he and his friend Josei Toda had a vigorous lay organization practicing this Buddhism.

Then the restrictions of the Japanese military mentality began to be enforced—all Japanese citizens had to practice Shinto, the state religion. They had to accept and enshrine the Shinto talisman. Even though the priests of their own sect demanded that they accept the talisman, Makiguchi and Toda refused, because they could never compromise this Buddhism, no matter what the inducement. This was exactly the spirit of the Daishonin.

Toda and Makiguchi were banned from the head temple and then arrested by the authorities. The 70-year-old Makiguchi died in prison, and Toda emerged with his health damaged but his spirit unbroken. Imbued with the spirit of compassion for others, he determined to rebuild the lay organization.

Today, our organization is the result of these selfless efforts. But in Buddhism, we can never be satisfied with our efforts so far—we have to be always building for the future, or else no one will have one. We must never lose the fundamental spirit on which our organization is based.

How can we start to rekindle the Gakkai spirit—this Soka Spirit—in our lives again? Well, it's just basic practice but with a different attitude. It begins with chanting for others. For me personally, this was a difficult thing to do. I always have so many things in my own life to chant about. It was as if I was closed up in the little box of my own life and couldn't be concerned about anything outside it. Anyway, what difference could it make?

I found out that it makes a BIG difference. The mindset you have when you chant makes a powerful difference in your results. For example, many sects chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Some chant it to a Gohonzon similar to ours. So why are the benefits different? The mind one has makes all the difference.

The Daishonin says that "if you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (WND, 385). The mind of Nichiren is "Mai ji sa ze nen"—opening one's heart to others. So, beginning with prayer, we start to do just that. The Soka Spirit group is meeting every Saturday morning at the Washington, D.C., Community Center and chanting sincerely for others—the people in our lives: family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, other members (the ones you see all the time and the ones you don't), members who have been gone for six months, those who have been gone for six years. And for those members, those brothers and sisters of ours, who are being deluded at the temple—we are chanting for their happiness as well. The Daishonin would do the same.

Today, in the year 2000, we can no longer say that we are unaffected by the temple's actions. Due to current technology, information—and MISinformation—is readily available on the Internet. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard that SGI members' friends, relatives, neighbors and co-workers have become negative about the SGI because of some lies they read on the Internet.

In addition, the area in which I practice has the distinction of being the location of one of the six temples in the United States. Many of us pass it on our way to and from activities. I'm not writing this to say how wrong the temple is but to ask for your compassion—the spirit of the bodhisattva—toward the temple members. They have been deceived into a practice that lacks the spirit I have described. They are deluded and suffering. Let's send sincere prayers for their swift awakening.

And let's refresh our own practices and awaken our own hearts to live the lives of bodhisattvas. Let's resolve to take action, as the Daishonin did, in reaching out to our members and friends, practicing for ourselves and especially for others.