living BUDDHISM

January • 2000 Vol. 4 • No. 1

Living Buddhism is the monthly journal of the SGI-USA, an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

2 SGI President Ikeda's New Year's Poem
Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Community and the World

5 General Director's Message
Caring for Each Person

7 Publisher's Commentary
Greet the New Era With Hope and Wisdom

9 Buddhist Concepts for Today's Living (9)
The Three Realms

11 The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin
"The Meaning of Faith"—Study Material for February

15 Faith
By Josei Toda

16 Buddhism and Human Rights: Points of Convergence
Buddha Nature, Karma & Dependent Origination

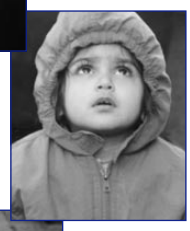
30 Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra #45
The Completion of the Ceremony of Transmission

44 Making a Difference
Exploring the Hidden Depths

46 Recollections of My Meetings With Leading World Figures
President Jerry John Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana











COVER: Image from Corbis

LIVING BUDDHISM (USPS 385-750) (ISSN: 1093-5169)
Formerly Seikyo Times. Published monthly by SGI-USA Publications, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Monica, CA 90401, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster—send address changes and returns to ***Living Buddhism,*** SGI-USA Subscriptions, P.O. Box 1427, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1427. Copyright© 2000 SGI-USA. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription rate: $50.00 per year, $90.00 for two years. RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED.





SGI President Ikeda's New Year's Poem

Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Community and the World

New Year's Day, 2000—
The door of the new century has opened!
In this momentous year we celebrate
The twenty-fifth anniversary of the SGI's founding
And the fortieth anniversary of worldwide kosen-rufu.
The curtain has risen on the start
Of a deeply significant history
For the future of humanity and kosen-rufu!

My noble friends who have emerged from the earth,
Who with me have scaled
The precipitous peak of the twentieth century
To usher in this brilliant dawn,
Let us embark once more—
Aiming for the distant peaks of the third millennium,
Advancing our movement of hope
In harmonious unity!

The old century was an interplay of darkness and light
Created by science, industry, military might and national strength.
The worship of these powers was also a form of culture.
It is known as the "culture of war"—
The name given to that which bred the seeds
Of countless tragedies.

A transformation from the pursuit of economic profit above all;
Respect for human rights and freedom;
Rejection of war and violence;
Moving from patriarchy to an age of women;
Casting off selfishness—
Herein lies the "culture of peace."

We can clearly hear the deep far-reaching reverberations
That indicate the world is moving
From a culture of war to a culture of peace.
The pure melody of the rushing stream
Of the Century of Life.

Beyond the ever more pervasive information age we live in,
The giant form of an ecological age is visible.
"All things are interconnected"—
This is an underlying principle of ecological thought
And also the insight of Buddhism.

All life on this blue planet of water—
No, the entire universe itself—is a single living entity.
Even the most microscopic being is an important part of the whole.
The world is in need of a deeply religious spirit.



Even the macroscopic ideal of peace
Is actualized only when it connects with the life of each individual.
Peace is not found in some distant place;
It lies close at hand, in the vibrant sense of fulfillment felt
By each person taking earnest action
For the welfare of their community, society and fellow citizens.

By a mystic coincidence,
The United Nations has designated this year
As the International Year for the Culture of Peace,
and next year as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Let us recall that appointed gathering in Guam,
That pledge made twenty-five years ago,
On the start of our SGI movement!
I called on those present:
"I hope you will dedicate your whole lives
To sowing the seeds of the Mystic Law
For the sake of peace throughout the entire world.
I shall do the same thing."

Let us now, with renewed commitment,
Plant in people's hearts the seeds of trust and friendship,
The seeds of philosophy and happiness,
The seeds of peace!
In our immediate environments,
Let us spread gardens of peace,
Green and full of flowers,
With deep prayer and patience!

In the global solidarity of such "people's power"
Lies the future, lies hope, lies a way forward.

The morning skies of the new millennium
Are dyed with the rays of the rising sun
That illuminate the centuries ahead.
Together let us advance afresh!
Toward that brilliant dawn,
Toward a future of unsurpassed wisdom and creativity
For humankind!

New Year's Day, 2000

To my beloved fellow members
in 128 countries and territories around the world:
I pray for your good health.
I pray for your happiness.
I pray that your life's noble mission
Will bring you glory and triumph.
With my deepest respect and affection.

Palms pressed together in reverence.

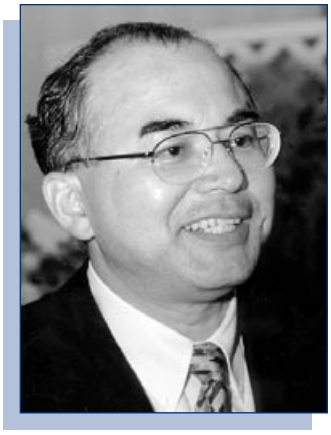
Daisaku Ikeda
World Poet Laureate

Last month, as most of our readers may already know, Daniel Nagashima, was appointed the new General Director of SGI-USA. The previous General Director, Mr. Fred M. Zaitsu, becomes SGI-USA's executive advisor.

Until now, Mr. Zaitsu has been contributing to this magazine a monthly editorial called "Publisher's commentary." This month we have a final installment of this column from Mr. Zaitsu, and Mr. Nagashima's first editorial contribution in his capacity as the SGI-USA's new general director.

Mr. Zaitsu retains his title as publisher.

General Director's Message



Care for Each Member

To all the readers of *Living Buddhism*, I hope that this auspicious year is the happiest and most significant one for all of you! Let me begin the new year by offering you all my warmest greetings.

Last month, I was appointed the SGI-USA General Director. Mr. Fred Zaitsu has held that position for the past seven years, during a meaningful time of transition and development in our organization. With his leadership, all of us have truly developed ourselves and our beloved SGI-USA, to the point where we can say with confidence that we are ready to move into the 21st century. We did this together based on the guidance of SGI President Ikeda which he gave us during his historic visit in February of 1990. At that time, he asked us to "advance steadily with the awareness that you are laying the foundation for the next thousand years of the kosen-rufu movement in the United States." He asked us to remember that "the task of building the foundation of the castle of the Law, which will endure for a thousand years, is in the hands of the current generation of [SGI-USA] members" (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 9).

I did not fully understand the significance of his words at the time. However, now, ten years later, I believe that all of the difficulties, all of the struggles, and all of the hard work we have done has been exactly in accord with what President Ikeda said. Because of this, we can begin this new year confident that we have exerted ourselves to lay the foundation for kosen-rufu in the new millennium.

Mr. Zaitsu, Mrs. Wendy Clark, as well as our first General Director Mr. George M. Williams and all the pioneer members, laid the foundation for the spread of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in our country based on President Ikeda's guidance. Through their efforts, we have something today that was almost unimaginable a few decades ago — an American Buddhist organization that is earning the trust and respect of people throughout our society. This is because we show the public a positive and engaged Buddhism that is committed to helping people become happy, and to generating a spiritual renaissance in America. We should not forget that we owe our deepest appreciation to all those pioneers who have dedicated their lives so that we could advance to this point. I sincerely believe that the only way we can repay the debt of gratitude we owe them is to protect this wonderful organization, this "castle of the Law"

that they have built, and to build something even more wonderful on the foundation they have laid. I am determined to dedicate my life to that task, to building an SGI-USA that is a treasure of American society, and that gives all of us the greatest pride.

Assuming the responsibility of general director is a daunting challenge. The only way for me to begin is to exert myself based on the guidance of our SGI President Ikeda and become a "servant of the members," as he said in 1990:

> A leader in an organization is not someone who stands above others but one whose role is to serve and support everyone else. This is something that the second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda used to explain by saying, "Leaders are servants of the members." In a sense, a true leader of kosen-rufu is one who is determined to sacrifice himself for the sake of the members. (March 1990, *Seikyo Times*, p. 50)

This is not simply a matter of how you act around others, it is a matter of heart. The determination in your heart to dedicate your life for others' happiness — not seeking thanks or praise for yourself — is the heart of selfless dedication that was shown to us by the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai. This heart gives rise to actions which generate growth in our membership, and in our lives. While American society tends to focus attention on the lives of the rich and famous, from the perspective of Buddhism, we should never forget that it is those who have dedicated their lives to serving others who are great and who will be respected. People like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa and Nelson Mandela stand as models of humanity for people throughout the world. Without showing the same kind of selfless dedication to serving people, no movie star, no national ruler, no multi-billionaire could hold such a place in people's hearts.

Therefore, I am resolved to do whatever it takes to create an SGI-USA whose leaders are known throughout the world for their sincerity, concern, vision, and devotion to peoples' happiness.

Next year, 2001, Soka University of America at Aliso Viejo will open its doors, marking an important step in realizing President Ikeda's far-reaching dream of humanistic education. I am confident that this is only the beginning. As we continue our brilliant development, we will naturally create many important humanistic institutions, such as museums, music and cultural associations, or even research centers and think tanks devoted to improving our communities and creating peace. I hope all of you feel genuine confidence that our movement will certainly develop in such a meaningful and significant way.

Therefore, we need to continue to grow as a movement in terms of our capacity, in terms of the good fortune of the membership, and of course, in terms of size. This will only be possible if each one of us — as individuals — deepens our prayer, our joy, and our passion to work for this task. I pledge to do my best to meet and talk with as many of you as possible, even visiting you at home and meeting your families. I want to listen to your voices, learn your opinions and concerns, and share your sufferings and joys. What I learn from all of you — what we all learn from each other — will become the basis for creating a wonderful future for SGI-USA. I believe that this is what SGI President Ikeda expects of me, and what all of the SGI-USA members deserve.

Nichiren Daishonin expended every last ounce of his energy writing to his followers about this great Buddhism. Even when he ran out of paper and was cold and hungry, he found a way to write. SGI President Ikeda, too, has continued to pour his heart into speech after speech, book after book, article after article, with the sole intent of sharing with us his hope and vision for kosen-rufu. As general director and publisher, Mr. Zaitsu has written some eighty-five publisher's commentaries for this magazine.

Now it is my opportunity to challenge myself in this area. My English is not perfect, and I ask the support and patience of the editors. In this column, I would like to share with you my hopes, dreams, determinations and observations concerning our movement to communicate the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin here in the United States. I will also be reviewing what I have learned from you, my precious fellow SGI-USA members and *Living Buddhism* readers, and from the example and encouragement of our mentor, President Ikeda.

Once again — Happy New Year to all of you! Thank you all in advance for your support and your continued readership.



Danny Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director

Publisher's Commentary



Greet the New Era With Hope and Wisdom

Happy New Year 2000! For seven years, my SGI-USA friends, I have been privileged to talk to you in this column. Looking back I was amazed to realize that this is my eighty-fifth article in the publisher's commentary column. It has been a wonderful challenge — although at times deadlines seemed to come upon me so fast I often felt it was a weekly, rather than monthly, column!

What encouraged me to meet this challenge was your response and support. This column was my chance to hold a dialogue with you in my mind. I would like to have visited and talked with each of you in your homes, but as that was impossible, this was at least an opportunity to share with you what was in my heart.

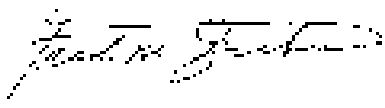
I was surprised that what often struck a chord with you was some simple anecdote about my life — my childhood, family or early practice as a Soka Gakkai member. It reminded me that we should never underestimate the value of personal experience in explaining Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Once we have established heart-to-heart communication through sharing our life experience, then talking about the philosophy or theory of Buddhism is more meaningful.

In his thesis "The Selection of the Time," the Daishonin explains the importance of understanding the relationship between events and the time in which they occur. As the year 2000 approached, I began to ponder what this meant to our organization. It is the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai and the fortieth anniversary of President Ikeda's inauguration as third president and first overseas visit to the United States. I realized that it should also be the time for me to pass the baton of leadership as general director to another. Even though I still have two years left in my present term, I keenly felt that this time was best for kosen-rufu of America. SGI President Ikeda says that change creates energy. Change leads to a dynamic future — it creates momentum, and this is how I wanted the SGI-USA to enter the year 2000.

Therefore, I recommended that Danny Nagashima succeed me for the remainder of my term. Please join me in supporting him as our new central figure as we stand to greet the new era with hope and wisdom. He is a man of action and great passion. I have absolute trust in him to lead our precious organization into the year 2001 and May 3. In my new position as executive advisor to the SGI-USA, I promise you I am not going to slow down nor will my sense of responsibility and mission for kosen-rufu diminish at all.

We should not be afraid of change; rather, we should welcome it with courage because this is how we generate the power necessary to face the coming millennium. Once again, I want to tell you how much I appreciate your support for the past seven years.

Sincerely,



Fred M. Zaitsu

GLOSSARY

Buddha

One who perceives the true nature of all life and leads others to attain the same enlightenment. The Buddha nature exists in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion and life force.

Gohonzon

It is the embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the life of Nichiren Daishonin in the form of a scroll, which SGI members enshrine in their homes. *Go* means *worthy of honor* and *honzon* means *object of fundamental respect.*

karma

Sanskrit word meaning *action.* The life tendency or destiny each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds that exert an often unseen influence over one's future.

kosen-rufu

Literally, it means to *widely declare and spread* (Buddhism); to secure lasting peace and happiness for all humankind through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Lotus Sutra

The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members' daily Buddhist practice.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

The fundamental component of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it expresses the true entity of life that allows people to directly tap their enlightened nature. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is revealed only through its practice, the literal meaning is: *Nam* (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; *myoho* (Mystic Law), the entity of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; *renge* (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; *kyo* (Buddha's teaching), all phenomena.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82)

The founder of the Buddhism upon which the SGI bases its activities. He inscribed the true object of worship, the Gohonzon, for the observation of one's mind and established the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the universal practice to attain enlightenment. *Daishonin* is an honorific title that means *great sage.*

Shakyamuni

Also known as Siddhartha Gautama. Born in India (present day southern Nepal) about three thousand years ago, he is the first recorded Buddha and founder of Buddhism. For fifty years, he expounded various sutras (teachings) culminating in the Lotus Sutra, which he declared his ultimate teaching.

Ten Worlds

Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. They are interpreted as potential states or conditions of life.

living BUDDHISM

EDITORIAL STAFF:

Publisher: Fred M. Zaitsu
Assistant Publisher: Greg Martin
Editor in Chief: Ted Morino
Managing Editor: Jeff Kriger
Assistant Managing Editor: Dave Baldschun
Associate Editor: Shin Yatomi
Graphic Design: Stephanie Sydney
Volunteers: Curtis R. Young, Marianne Winfield, Alice Ross, Kitty Scalzo, Mark Gabor

BUREAU CHIEFS:

Atlanta: Sam Harris
Boston: Anne Hudson, Beth Zimmerman
Chicago: Bill Endsley
Florida: Terry Ellis
Hawaii: Joanne Tachibana
Los Angeles: Tesfaye Abagaz, Kathleen Slattery, Laura Aved, Patti Brundige
Midwest: Jim Celer
New York: Nikki Amdur, Brigid Witkowski, Steve Piontek, Leslie Wines, Paul Grossman
Philadelphia: Claude Lomden
Rocky Mountain: Rodney Richards
San Diego: MJ Warrender
San Francisco: Ron Baird
Seattle: Aaron Franklin
Texas: Nellda Gallagher
Washington, D.C. : Patricia Elam Ruff

DOMESTIC SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES:
$50 per year, $90 for two, $125 for three
Subscriptions Department: (800) 835-4558
Subscriptions: SGI SUBS@aol.com

INTERNATIONAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:
Canada, Mexico & Caribbean: U.S. $65 per year
Latin America: U.S. $75 per year
Europe and Africa: U.S. $83 per year
Asia, Oceania and India: U.S. $90 per year
Send money order in U.S. funds to:
606 Wilshire Blvd. Santa Monica, CA 90401

WRITTEN/ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS:
Send all written, photographic or fine art submissions to your local Living Buddhism Bureau Chief or to the above address or e-mail: LivingB1@aol.com

Contributors assume liability for all copyrighted material. All written submissions become property of SGI-USA.

Frequently Cited Sources

For convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:

— *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*: **WND**, followed by the page number.

— *Gosho Zenshu:* (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese) **GZ**, followed by the page number.

— *The Lotus Sutra*, by Burton Watson: **LS**, followed by the chapter and page number.

Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (9)

The Three Realms of Existence

The relationship between each of the Ten Worlds and the environment

Most of us have heard of the Buddhist principle of "three thousand realms in a single moment of life" (Jpn *ichinen sanzen*). It indicates the vast complexity and inexhaustible potential that life possesses. The term three thousand is a product of multiplying four numbers: 10 (representing the ten worlds) x 10 (the ten worlds again, equaling 100 to represent the mutual possession of the ten worlds) x 10 (the ten factors of life) x 3 (the three realms of existence). This article focuses on this final "3."

The three realms of existence are: 1) The realm of the five components, 2) the realm of living beings, and 3) the realm of the environment (or land). Of these, the third, the "realm of the environment" is perhaps the easiest to explain and understand. It refers to the place where living beings exist and carry out their activities. The natural environment, for example, is a "realm of the environment" as is a city in which many people live. This concept is extremely important as it expands the Buddhist view of life from the individual to the dynamic relationship between the individual, society and the environment.

"Realm" here comes from the Japanese term *seken*, which, in Buddhism, also means "distinction" or "difference." For our purpose, we can also think of it as "diversity." Thus the term "three realms" can also be taken to mean "three spheres of diversity" or "three kinds of distinction."

These differences mean differences in how life's potential conditions, known as the Ten Worlds (see glossary, p. 8), express or manifest themselves. In other words, a living being who manifests the world of Hell is quite different or distinct from one who manifests the world of, say, Humanity, or Learning, even if it is the very same being. Our "angry" self is quite different from our "grateful and caring" self, or our "inquisitive" self, for example.

Nichiren Daishonin writes in "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime": "If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4). The "good or evil of our minds" here can be interpreted to mean which state of life — which of the Ten Worlds — dominates our inner lives from moment to moment. The "land" tends to express the same state of life as the "living beings" who inhabit it. We know how the different "selves" mentioned above can create a completely different atmosphere around the dinner table, for example.

People who are in the depths of suffering are "living beings in the state of Hell." People overwhelmed with joy at some development in their lives are "people in the state of Heaven." And people who dwell in a condition of absolute happiness and satisfaction are "living beings of the world of Buddhahood." These are distinctions in the realm of living beings.

And as I suggested above, the realm of living beings represents such distinctions even within the same individual from one moment to the next.

Distinctions of the Ten Worlds within the Constituent Elements of Life

While the realm of living beings and the realm of the environment are fairly self-explanatory, the "realm of the five components" is a bit more complex. Buddhism traditionally defines living beings as being formed of five constituent elements, or "components." These are form, perception, conception, volition and

consciousness. The realm of the five components refers to the way each of the ten worlds expresses itself throughout these five components.

"Form" means the body and its five sensory organs that perceive the world. "Perception" means the reception of sensory information through those sense organs. "Conception" is the function of becoming aware of and forming an idea or conclusion about what we have perceived. "Volition" means the will to initiate action in response to what we have perceived and conceived. And "consciousness" is the integrating factor of life, the discerning function that makes value-judgments, distinguishes right from wrong, etc. It is both the source of and the harmonizing force behind the other components. While "form" describes life's physical aspect and the other four the "spiritual," none can exist in a living being without the others.

In his work "The Three Secret Teachings" 26th High Priest Nichikan states, "What we call a living being is a temporary harmonizing of the five components." In other words, a single human life is viewed as a merging and harmonizing of the physical and spiritual potentials of life. And the differences these components display in response to each of the Ten Worlds describes the "realm of the five components."

Thus the realm of living beings and the realm of the five components indicate distinctions within life itself—different states manifested by life's constituent elements and within the living being as an integrated whole. The realm of living beings can also be described as including all of human society, since Buddhism teaches that no single living being arises or exists independently of others.

But what do these distinctions have to do the ultimate goal of Buddhism which is the attainment of enlightenment, or absolute happiness?

The Principle of Human Revolution and Reformation of the Environment

From the perspective of life and its environment, the realms of the five components and of living beings represent life in its many diverse forms and modes. The realm of the environment corresponds to the external world—the environment, and the diversity and potential for change it contains. A human life at each moment encompasses both life and its environment. When there is a change in the depths of a person's life, that change is reflected in the whole person—in all of his or her component functions, activities and relationships—and in the surrounding environment. The principle of the three realms of existence explains the potential for transforming an individual human life. This is what human revolution means. It also predicts how that inner revolution can transform the environment.

> *"If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds."*

If the environment had no relationship to the inner condition of people's lives, then changes in the environment would be independent of and unrelated to the human condition. The doctrine of the three realms of existence thus forms an important basis for our understanding of both human revolution and "environmental revolution," and of how the two are related. It tells us that when there is a distortion in the inner lives of individuals, this will invite a negative change in the environment. When the inner lives of human beings and their interrelationships are harmonious and enriched, their environment will flourish and be at peace.

The three realms of existence gives us hope in that it explains that life possesses tremendous flexibility and potential for change. When we change our inner condition, everything changes. It also explains why no two people are alike. With regard to the five components, for example, no two people possess the same form, nor will they perceive, conceive, or act on the same stimulus in the same way. Even if they are both "people of the world of Learning," for example, their five components will function differently, uniquely.

This concept also reminds us, then, that human life is infinitely diverse, yet that everyone, no matter how different from ourselves, has the potential for the most noble state of Buddhahood and is therefore a precious being.

By Jeff Kriger, Managing Editor

Study Material for February

"The Meaning of Faith"

(The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 1036)

For the past two years, our bimonthly study material has been taken from SGI President Ikeda's book Learning from the Gosho: The Eternal Writings of Nichiren Daishonin. *This month, we return to our previous format of presenting a writing or excerpt from Nichiren Daishonin accompanied by an explanation prepared by the SGI-USA study department. This month's Gosho, "The Meaning of Faith," is intended as the SGI-USA February Gosho study material. Following it is an article written in 1956 by the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, titled "Faith." We felt it related well to the message of "The Meaning of Faith."*

Background

This letter was written at Minobu in the fifth month of the third year of Koan (1280). The lay nun Myoichi was a relative of Nissho, one of Nichiren Daishonin's six senior disciples, and lived in Kamakura. She was an earnest believer and fairly well educated, but suffered from poor health. Her husband was also a believer, and their estate was confiscated because of their faith. After her husband died, the lay nun was left with two small children, but despite her many difficulties, she remained loyal to the Daishonin.

What is called faith is nothing unusual. Faith means putting one's trust in the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, and the heavenly gods and benevolent deities, and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a woman cherishes her husband, as a man lays down his life for his wife, as parents refuse to abandon their children, or as a child refuses to leave its mother.

Not only that, but one should ponder the sutra passages "Honestly discarding expedient means"[1] and "Not accepting a single verse of the other sutras"[2] without the slightest thought of casting them away, as a woman refuses to part with her mirror, or as a man wears his sword.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the fifth month
Reply to the lay nun Myoichi

Commentary

What is called faith is nothing unusual. Faith means putting one's trust in the Lotus Sutra, . . . as a child refuses to leave its mother."

After her husband's death, Myoichi struggled to raise her sickly children despite her own poor health. It is difficult to imagine today how much hardship an infirm widow had to endure in feudal thirteenth-century Japan. With the social structure, norms and physical demands of that society, most women had to rely on their fathers, husbands or adult sons for their sustenance and survival. But Myoichi was alone. Moreover, since the family's estate had been confiscated by the government because of their faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, her life was unusually difficult.

In a letter dated 1275, the Daishonin refers to Myoichi's circumstances, saying: "Your late husband had an ailing son and a daughter. I cannot help thinking that he may have grieved that, if he were to abandon them and leave this world, his aged wife, as feeble as a withered tree, would be left alone, and would probably feel very sorry for these children" (WND, 535-36). The title of the letter we are studying this month, "The Meaning of Faith," was the name given to it in later years. In it, the Daishonin encourages his disciple, of whose hardships he is keenly aware, to continue developing her faith in the Gohonzon. Though short, the letter explains the meaning of faith with simple, concrete analogies. The Daishonin's purpose in making these comparisons appears to have been to encourage Myoichi in her Buddhist practice and to spark in her the faith she would need to challenge her circumstances.

First, the Daishonin explains that faith is nothing special—nothing beyond our ordinary experience. Buddhist faith is very much like the love between husband and wife, or parent and child. As a wife cherishes her husband and a husband would risk his life to save his wife; or as parents selflessly care for their child's welfare and children refuse to leave their mothers' sides, we should believe in the Gohonzon and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin explains. Faith, in other words, is a natural expression of our humanity. Here the Daishonin points out that what we call faith is our sincere desire to embrace the Gohonzon and continue our Buddhist practice.

Put simply, faith means the heart or will to cherish something. In our case, we cherish the Gohonzon as an embodiment of the supremely noble state of life called Buddhahood existing within the lives of all people. We are all capable of cherishing something that we find dear. That such a feeling is perfectly natural and nothing out of the ordinary is the point the Daishonin makes here so poetically.

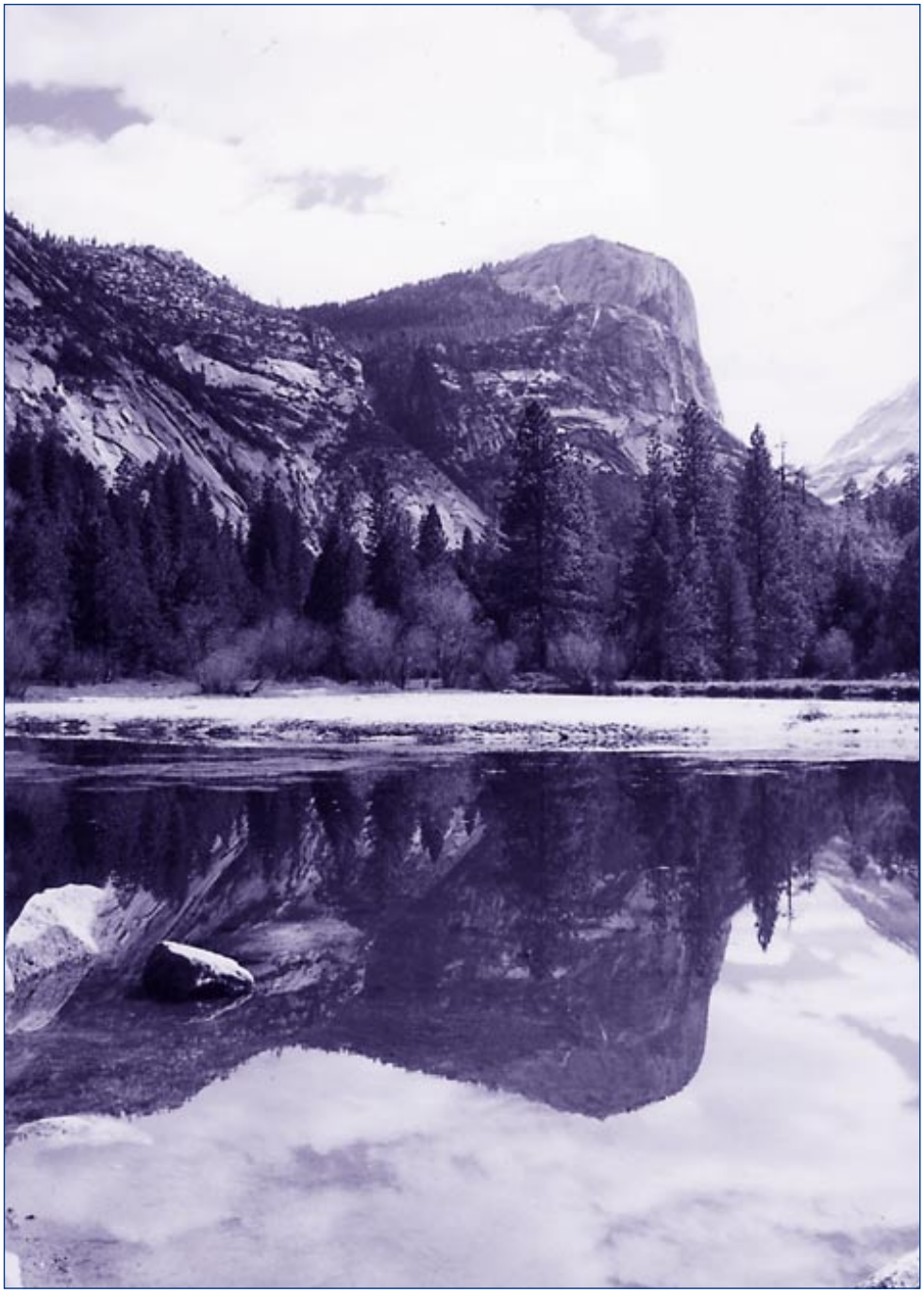
Often when they talk about faith, people tend to portray it as something special or unusual. Some view it as a transcendent religious state of some sort. But here the Daishonin overturns this perception. While some religious teachers shroud the meaning of faith in the veil of mysticism and place it beyond our grasp, the Daishonin expresses its meaning in terms of our everyday reality.

Most, if not all, of us want to lead happy and fulfilled lives and die peacefully. Faith and prayer are born out of this fundamental human desire for peace and happiness. The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon in response to, and in order to fulfill, this natural desire. Our prayer to the Gohonzon should therefore be as natural as our wish for peace and happiness in our lives. We don't have to pray as if we are someone or something we are not. Just as children share their dreams and worries with their parents or friends, we can express whatever is dear to our hearts in our prayer to the Gohonzon. As we continue to pray to the Gohonzon naturally and honestly through both good times and bad, we will solidify the condition of Buddha as the foundation of our lives. Herein lies the meaning and purpose of our faith.

In this letter, the Daishonin describes our faith in the Gohonzon as "putting one's trust in the Lotus Sutra . . . and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." Here "the Lotus Sutra" indicates the Mystic Law implicit in the sutra. In other words, the Daishonin refers to the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the pure manifestation of the Law of life and the cosmos. He then lists Buddhas, bodhisattvas and heavenly deities as the representations of beneficial workings of the Mystic Law permeating all life, including our own.

When we cherish and embrace the Gohonzon, we will naturally tap the immeasurable benefit of the Gohonzon from within our own lives. In this regard, SGI President Ikeda remarked: "What is important is to have faith such that we say, 'I love the Gohonzon!,' 'I love doing gongyo!' and 'I love doing Gakkai activities!' If you develop such faith, living in and of itself becomes enjoyable, and you'll come to love your life" (October 1999, *Daibyakurenge*, p. 55).

Gongyo and daimoku help us establish the Gohonzon as a foundation of our lives. They are Buddhist practices that enable us to tap the infinite power within us that is one with the power of the Gohonzon. The more we practice, the more of this result we experience. Because of this, we grow to cherish the Gohonzon and our Buddhist practice. As we enjoy our practice and our faith deepens, we naturally develop a desire to communicate the greatness of the Gohonzon to others. The spread of Buddhism in this sense is a direct result of our joy in faith. It is faith as the Daishonin describes it in this letter that allows us to feel true joy in our lives, and this is the source of the spread of Buddhism. After all, the Daishonin explains that enjoying and loving what we do as Buddhists is precisely what it means to have faith. At the same time, the simple act of communicating this joy to others — of shakubuku or propagation — further deepens our sense of joy and experience of benefit.



JAN SIBERT

Yosemite

"Not only that, but one should ponder the sutra passages . . . without the slightest thought of casting them away, as a woman refuses to part with her mirror, or as a man wears his sword."

Here the Daishonin quotes two phrases from the Lotus Sutra. First, he cites the phrase "Honestly discarding expedient means" from the "Expedient Means" chapter. With this statement the Buddha declares that in revealing the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra he discards his provisional teaching, which he expounded as an expedient means. From the standpoint of the Buddha's disciples, the passage also indicates that, upon hearing the true teaching from the Buddha, the disciples should

discard their attachment to the Buddha's earlier teachings, which are provisional "expedients" intended to lead people to the truth. They are not the truth itself, however. Next the Daishonin cites the phrase "Not accepting a single verse of the other sutras" from the "Simile and Parable" chapter. This passage also urges the Buddha's disciples to take faith in the Lotus Sutra while severing their attachment to the provisional teachings.

From the viewpoint of the Daishonin's Buddhism, these passages from the Lotus Sutra indicate that we should seek the direct path to our enlightenment in the Daishonin's teaching while discarding our attachments to other teachings. Ambivalence in what teaching leads to true happiness, liberation and enlightenment can inhibit our progress toward those goals. On the other hand, a firm conviction that living by and sharing the Daishonin's teaching with the world is the most noble way to live will be a force for unparalleled growth and happiness.

The Daishonin here encourages Myoichi to hold fast to the Gohonzon without being swayed by other teachings. Although we possess the Gohonzon, if we are constantly wondering whether or not there is an easier way to attain happiness and enlightenment, we cannot consider our faith to be genuine. Resolute faith in the Gohonzon will guide our lives along a direct path toward happiness, while confusion in the realm of faith will be mirrored in our daily lives as confusion and disorder. This is what is meant by the Buddhist principle that "faith equals daily life." In "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind" Nichiren Daishonin writes, "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs" (WND, 376). Here we can interpret "knowing the Lotus Sutra" to mean a strong conviction that the Law of enlightenment revealed in the sutra and expressed by the Daishonin in the form of the Gohonzon exists in our own lives. And by dedicating ourselves to practice based on the Gohonzon, we can actualize that law in our lives. We can then put the wisdom, life-force and courage we gain to work in the real world.

In this sense, SGI President Ikeda comments in this month's installment of "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra": "How much are we thinking about kosen-rufu? About the Gohonzon? About the SGI or our fellow members? How much action did we take or not take? The net balance of these determines our state of life. Faith is not a matter of formality. 'It is the heart that is important' (WND, 1000)." In one sense, then, faith means to develop the conviction that true happiness lies in praying to the Gohonzon and striving for the happiness of others—just as we encourage one another to do in the SGI. And this is what it means to practice in accord with the intent of the sutra phrases "honestly discarding expedient means" and "not accepting a single verse of the other sutras."

1. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.
2. Ibid., chap. 3.

Topics for Discussion:

1. The Daishonin says that faith is "nothing unusual." But some of us at times become preoccupied with "how to chant" or "what to think about" in our prayer. How can we simplify our practice and free our minds from our preoccupation with being correct? Can we be naturally correct in our practice?

2. The joy we experience through faith is a driving force behind the dynamic spread of Buddhism, not to mention daily living. Practicing out of force of habit or a sense of obligation will dampen our enjoyment, and stifle our benefit and growth. Can you recall why you felt so excited about this Buddhist practice and the SGI and what moved you to tell a friend about it for the first time? How can we make our Buddhist practice as enjoyable as possible and help others do the same?



Faith

By Josei Toda

The following essay by second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, appeared in the January 1, 1956 issue of the Soka Gakkai's study magazine, *Daibyakurenge*. This year marks the 100th anniversary of his birth.

There was a member I once knew, a middle-class housewife, who was not particularly well-educated, nor did she engage in propagation efforts very strongly. She was a good-natured, easygoing person, but she believed in the supremacy of the Gohonzon, and was confident that the guidance of the Soka Gakkai was the best guidance a person could follow. At the time she was leading a peaceful life, so she naturally thought that it would continue that way. "I have good fortune," she thought. "The Gohonzon takes good care of me." She felt that because of her husband's strong faith, the Gohonzon would protect her even if from time to time she only read once through the sutra during gongyo.

Then a disturbing thing happened. Her only son, perhaps due to the emotional stress of adolescence, suddenly became depressed and lethargic and stopped attending school. To this woman, his mother, it was like a sudden storm. Thrown into a state of confusion, she suffered day after day, becoming even unhappier than her son. Realizing that nothing good could happen unless she did gongyo, she began to ponder her situation deeply. Then, the Gohonzon rose to the forefront of her thoughts much more clearly than in the past.

One night, as if drawn by her own suffering, she marched off to a discussion meeting. There she heard someone explain how the deceased could attain enlightenment through the prayers offered for their sake by the living. At that time she reflected deeply. "If daimoku can even help a dead person change, then there is no reason why my son, who is still living, can't recover through the power of daimoku," she thought.

From that point on, she devoted herself to praying to the Gohonzon day and night. Until then she had lectured to her son, argued with him, tried to find someone who could talk sense into him, or in some way or another tried to win his favor. But now she completely abandoned all such tactics. Instead she prayed for her son with all her might to the Gohonzon. Within about two weeks, her son recovered his vitality and cheerfully returned to school.

Actually it wasn't her son who was saved by the Gohonzon; it was she herself who was saved. Her face began to shine and her life became peaceful once again. One morning her husband turned to her and asked with a laugh, "Now what do you think about the Gohonzon's great benefit?" "I'm in love with the Gohonzon!" she exclaimed with a big smile. From then on she told people that no matter what problem they might have, they could solve it with the Gohonzon.

Some time later she and her husband were visited by her nephew. He was unemployed and pleaded with his uncle to find him a job. She later turned to her husband and said, "His attitude is no good. It's wrong to think that you can rely on other people. He should first have a mind to pray to the Gohonzon." "Did you tell that to your nephew?" her husband inquired. She replied with a bright smile, "I told him a story about a woman I know. She was upset because she had no spending money, so she prayed with all her heart to the Gohonzon, and her daughter who had been out of work found a find a job earning 250 yen a day. She had not the slightest inclination to borrow money. Instead, when she was hard pressed, she relied totally on the Gohonzon. I told him that I really respect that woman's attitude."

I think that there is something to be learned from this woman's experience of how to practice this faith. Also, "I'm in love with the Gohonzon" is an interesting expression, isn't it? ❑

Buddhism and Human Rights: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE

How can Buddhism clarify the modern view of human rights?

By TORU SHIOTSU
Associate Professor, Soka University,
Chief Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Philosophy

The purpose of this paper is to explore the philosophy of Buddhism from a legal, in particular, constitutional law perspective and to attempt to identify correspondences between certain Buddhist concepts, especially those found in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, and modern human rights theory. I hope to identify issues that can contribute to the further widening and development of the discourse on human rights. This attempt is not without its difficulties. There is still a paucity of literature on the relationship between Buddhist thought and human rights; and it is difficult to find direct correspondences between the classical texts of Buddhism and modern enunciation of human rights. There is also a need for the Buddhist tradition as a whole to take full stock of its impact—both positive and negative—on the realization of human rights, including its relationship with the structures of power and control in those societies where Buddhism has been an important cultural presence.

In the case of Japanese Buddhism, the relationship between Buddhism and state authority during the Edo period (1600–1867) is especially problematical. This relationship must be acknowledged as one of collusion with the apparatus of control and oppression, in which Buddhist temples acted as agents of administrative control and this worked against the interests of human rights. This paper is an attempt to reconcile this failure (reproduced in various degrees in other cultural and historical settings) with what I perceive to be the important contributions to human rights which are equally part of the core philosophical stance of Buddhism.

From a Constitutional Law Perspective

If we examine recent trends in the constitutional law discourse on human rights in Japan, there is reason to believe that new opportunities are coming to the fore to find areas of commonalty with Buddhist thought. Specifically, the search for the basis for a new gener-



CORBIS/Burstein Collection

Woodblock of street scene during Japan's Edo Period (1600–1867). During this period there was collusion between state authority and Buddhist temples to control and oppress the populace.

ation of human rights (such as the right to privacy) not explicitly codified in the existing constitution has sparked new debate and led to a search to clarify the basis on which fundamental human rights rest. This has meant moving beyond narrow positive-law readings of specific articles and clauses and has involved questions that best fall within the realm of the philosophy of law. For example, Article 13 of the Japanese Constitution declares that "all of the people shall be respected as individuals." From this effort, an important school of thought has emerged that identifies "human dignity" as the basis for human rights. The noted constitutional scholar, Ashibe Nobuyoshi, for example, has stated that human rights "derive from the inherent dignity of the human being," a view widely shared by many other scholars in the field.

The question that remains is what, in concrete terms, is "human dignity"? One answer is to be found in the natural rights tradition that finds its classical expression in the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen: "All people are born free and equal." As the language used makes clear, natural rights philosophy seeks to base this assertion on the existential foundation of what "is" — that we "are" born free and equal. A cursory examination of social realities, however, will find people to be both unfree and unequal, and contemporary human rights thinking has had to abandon the descriptive "is" for the prescriptive "should be." Further, the actual content of human dignity — the integration of the qualities of freedom and equality (or the foundation for these) — has been conveyed as an ideal image of humanity encapsulated in such



CORBIS/Sakamoto Research Laboratory

Tokugawa Ieyasu, shogun during the Edo Period.

phrases as "personal autonomy" and "individual self-determination."

It is, of course, not possible to offer empirical verification that these qualities in fact represent a definitive understanding of the nature of human dignity. Rather, the adoption of these qualities as ideals provides a reasonable theoretical structure on which to formulate contemporary efforts to guarantee human rights. In this instance, reason indicates that which, because of its logical consistency, can be adopted as the widely accepted consensus in human societies. In this way, we can see that the current human rights discourse within the constitutional law community has a distinctly normative thrust in that it seeks to clarify desirable ideals of human existence and behavior.

For its part, the Buddhist tradition, at least in its classical texts, contains no direct references to specific human rights, such as freedom of expression, etc. Buddhism does, however, seek to address questions such as the nature of existence and of human dignity. It should thus be possible, by focusing on their respective arguments regarding the nature of human dignity, to find points of contact between Buddhism and the normative thread of the constitutional human rights discourse.

Limitations of Institutionalized Buddhism

In seeking to verify the theoretical possibilities of Buddhism in relation to human rights, it is not appropriate to limit ourselves to merely examining the various statements found within the Buddhist canon. Rather, it is vital that we reinterpret the philosophical content of the Buddhist classics in light of modern human rights theory and the problem it seeks to address. At the same time, to be relevant, the theoretical possibilities of Buddhist thought must be clarified within the context of the tensions between those possibilities and the history and present realities of the Buddhist church. Buddhism has, of course, been an important influence in the development of a wide range of cultural traditions and any attempt to offer a comprehensive survey of the impact of that influence on the enjoyment of what we now know as "human rights" is beyond the scope of this paper. In this context, Japanese Buddhism's relation to the structures of social control in the Edo Period offers an extreme, but not entirely unique example of the Buddhist church acting counter to the interests of human rights. What this most powerfully illustrates is Buddhism's historical failure to transform itself and its subsequent

failure to realize its potential to make positive contribution to the enjoyment of human rights.

The Parishioner System in the Edo Period

During the Edo Period, the Japanese shogunate government engaged in the ruthless persecution of Japanese Christians. The Buddhist church was enlisted in this effort, as all births and deaths were required to be registered with a Buddhist temple. In this way, the previously voluntary parishioner system of local temples fell under the control of the shogunate government, and was effectively integrated into the overall system of national administration. At the same time, the Buddhist church acquiesced in having all acts of "praising ones own sect and disparaging others" outlawed, an effective prohibition on religious debate and propagation. In this sense the "Rules of Sect Parishioners" is emblematic. Although said by some to be a later forgery, this document demonstrates the willingness of the Buddhist church in Japan to use the name of founding shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, to establish a legal requirement for citizens to attend funerary and other ceremonies held at Buddhist temples. Here Buddhism abandoned its original mission of providing spiritual sustenance to people and chose instead to act as an agent of control for secular political authority. Local temples were institutionalized, in other words, as the administrative unit in most direct contact with the Japanese populace. What were the effects of this?



CORBIS/Kevin R. Morris

Saint Francis Xavier (1506–52), the Jesuit priest who brought Christianity to Japan.

First, by taking a sanctioned place within the governing structure, Buddhist priests were established in a position of clear superiority to lay believers. Because the temples were the only organ that could issue, in the form of a posthumous Buddhist name, definitive proof that a person and his family were not Christian, they exercised an absolute authority over the lives of believers. (Incidentally, the abuse of these posthumous names was not limited to the Edo Period. Even in the post-war period, certain temples persisted in only issuing to so-called *Burakumin* posthumous names that clearly identified their bearers as *Burakumin*, thus contributing to the continuance of a range of discriminatory practices against the former members of Japan's untouchable caste.)

Equally problematic is the subversion of the Buddhist theory of causation and karma. This theory, originally a teaching that posits a universe governed by an impartial law of causality, encourages people to take responsibility for shaping their own destinies. It was reinterpreted to justify oppression, as the victims of discrimination, poverty and other forms of social marginalization were told that their present unhappiness stems from evil acts they committed in past lives. What should have been a teaching of individual responsibility and empowerment thus became a teaching of predestination and disempowerment, urging people to accept the karmic inevitability of their plight.

As these examples show, institutionalized Buddhism in Japan has been accomplice to societal discrimination, providing a religious basis and justification for such practices.

A Failure to Reform

The role of Christianity in the establishment and development of the modern theory and practice of human rights is often noted. Christianity's contributions were importantly facilitated by reforms and regeneration that issued from within the Christian church and community. As a result, there was a fundamental rethinking of the role and significance of religion in human life, the function of clerics, and relations between church and state. Although also a religion with historical roots in antiquity, Christianity, through its energetic efforts to confront and respond to the changing currents of history, was able to become an active participant in the discourse around the core problems of modernity — the emergence of the individual; the question of freedom and the national state; and, for our purposes most importantly, the enunciation of human rights and the establishment of the institutional means of protecting them.

The contrast with Buddhism, particularly in Japan, is striking. It is true that the pernicious institutions of the Edo Period referenced above no longer exist, and the postwar constitution guarantees a degree of actual religious freedom unthinkable under the Meiji Constitution (1889–1945). In this sense, Buddhism in Japan is no longer directly linked to the mechanisms of political and social control as in the past. The question remains,

This means not being content with the philosophical study of classical texts, but aggressively mining Buddhist thought for its rich insights into the nature of human dignity, which can enhance human rights theory and practice. Only then can Buddhists be said to be exercising the freedom to creatively generate new ethical norms and standards.

however, as to how far it has been intellectually liberated from the legacy and constraints of past institutionalization. The mere fact that there are now constitutional guarantees of freedom of belief does not in itself mean that Buddhism in Japan has returned to its intellectual and spiritual roots to become an active and contributing participant in the social discourse. In this context, the observation by political scientist Maruyama Masao is relevant: Authentic freedom involves more than the mere freedom from restraint; it is the freedom to creatively generate ethical norms and standards through rational decision-making.

For Buddhist thought to contribute to the furtherance of human rights, its adherents must not be satisfied with religious freedom as mere freedom from constraint, but must view this as an opportunity for the reexamination and reformation of views and practices. This means not only making a clear accounting of the historical record, but also striving to expunge those accretions and attitudes that continue to lend support to relations of discrimination and domination. This further means undoing the state of intellectual atrophy that has resulted in Buddhism's avoidance of active engagement in the issues of the day, the passive acceptance of prevailing social conditions and mores. Without this kind of inner-driven reformation, Buddhism cannot hope to serve as the basis for the kind of rational decision-making that can give birth to a new social order. Finally, this means not being content with the philosophical study of classical texts, but aggressively mining Buddhist thought for its rich insights into the nature of human dignity, which can enhance human rights theory and practice. Only then can Buddhists be said to be exercising the freedom to creatively generate new ethical norms and standards.

As a religion that seeks enlightenment and spiritual emancipation, the Buddhist tradition has historically been deeply concerned with the nature of human existence and of human dignity. It is here that it is possible to identify points of contact with the theories of human rights in the constitutional law tradition. Specifically, the following Buddhist concepts can be said to intersect with the idea of human dignity set out in modern human rights theory: the idea of the universal possession of a Buddha nature; the theory of dependent origination; and the teaching of karma.

The following Buddhist concepts can be said to intersect with the idea of human dignity set out in modern human rights theory: the idea of the universal possession of a Buddha nature; the theory of dependent origination; and the teaching of karma.

Here I would like to clarify what I see as some of the points of commonalty, as well as difference, between the concept of human dignity as understood in Buddhism and in modern human rights theory.

Buddha Nature and Human Equality

Of all Buddhist doctrine, the Mahayana Buddhist teaching that all people (in fact all living beings) possess a Buddha nature perhaps bears most directly on the question of human dignity. This can also be understood as a teaching of human equality.

The religious philosophy known as Buddhism is at once what the Buddha teaches as well as a teaching by which people may themselves become Buddhas. Christian tradition, in contrast, is predicated on a God whose existence transcends that of human beings. From the Christian perspective, human dignity derives from the idea that humans were made "in the image of God," but not because they have the potential to become God. And while Christianity asserts the equality of all people in the eyes of God, there remains, in most interpretations, an unbridgeable distance between humans and an absolute and transcendent God. The equality of all people before God is further undermined when clerics are elevated to the position of a

The idea of human equality is further emphasized by the methods by which this potential for enlightenment is to be realized—which are all rooted in the autonomous efforts of the individual. Within this tradition, Buddhist monks are not granted special access to the will of the Buddha.Rather, as the Buddha himself is said to have taught, we must "realize our own salvation!" Thus, people can and must attain enlightenment through the workings of their own will.

necessary intermediary between humans and God. (This is, of course, a very broad generalization and does not attempt to address those within Christian tradition who stress the immanence of the divine.)

An even more sweeping concept of equality is set out in the Lotus Sutra and other key texts of the Mahayana tradition. The Nirvana Sutra for example contains the phrase "all living beings without exception possess the Buddha nature," expressing the view that all people have the potentiality to attain enlightenment and become Buddhas.



CORBIS/Bettmann

"Adam and Eve" by Lucas Cranach the Elder. From the Christian perspective, human dignity derives from the idea that humans were made "in the image of God."

This teaching radically truncates the distance between human beings and Buddhas and establishes their equal capacity to become enlightened as the basis for the equality of all people.

The idea of human equality is further emphasized by the methods by which this potential for enlightenment is to be realized — which are all rooted in the autonomous efforts of the individual. Within this tradition, Buddhist monks are not granted special access to the will of the Buddha. Rather, as the Buddha himself is said to have taught, we must "realize our own salvation!" Thus, people can and must attain enlightenment through the workings of their own will, that is, through their determination to carry out an altruistic practice to alleviate the sufferings and augment the happiness of others. Identifying autonomous religious practice as the means of realizing the potential equally present in all people deepens and concretizes our appreciation of human equality.

At this juncture it is important to clarify that the idea of Buddha nature refers to the *possibility* of becoming a Buddha. Within the Mahayana tradition there are cases, such as the "original enlightenment" theory in the Tendai School in Japan, which assert that the idea that all people possess the Buddha nature means that they are already enlightened. The effect of this interpretation has been to extend a blanket affirmation to present human realities, undermining the need for continuous striving toward self-improvement. This view has also had the effect of promoting an unquestioning acceptance of social conditions. When, however, Buddha nature is understood as an immanent potentiality, it inspires a critical examination of personal and social realities, and occasions the limitless pursuit of the ideal of developing the possibilities of human existence.

In the West, modern natural

Within this tradition, Buddhist monks are not granted special access to the will of the Buddha. Rather, as the Buddha himself is said to have taught, we must "realize our own salvation!" Thus, people can and must attain enlightenment through the workings of their own will, that is, through their determination to carry out an altruistic practice.

rights theories have had a clear impact on reality by providing, for example, the intellectual and philosophical basis for resistance to absolute monarchy and other oppressive institutions. In contrast, while the idea that all people possess Buddha nature has undergone rigorous theoretical elaborations, one can only lament the general failure to put its clear implications into practice.

Again, Buddhists cannot deny those instances when their faith has been used to provide support and fixity to conditions of social inequality under the patronage of state authority. It is clear that the historic Buddha was himself critical of social discrimination such as the caste system and struggled against various forms of discrimination and prejudice. It is vitally important that Buddhists return to that original spirit, using it as a lens for viewing present realities and giving full expression to the necessary implications of the assertion that all people, without regard to social status or economic standing, equally possess the potential to achieve a state of freedom, inner perfection, courage and wisdom.

Manifesting Buddha Nature Amidst the Concrete Realities of Life

It should also be affirmed in this context that "becoming a Buddha" does not in any sense mean to cease being human. Humans are compelled to live within their present circumstances, what might be termed the concrete realities of life. In the Mahayana tradition, it is only within the context of these realities that enlightenment or salvation is possible. This is the significance, for example, of the Chinese Buddhist Chi-i's (T'ien-t'ai 538–97) theory of the "mutual possession of the ten worlds." In Chi-i's schema, human experience can be categorized into ten distinct realms, which range from hell to Buddhahood. These states are neither strictly subjective nor objective; they represent the subtle interaction between inner subjective processes and external objective conditions. In the Buddhist view, the individual always has both the capacity and responsibility to react positively to her or his circumstances, and to transform them. Chi-i expresses this possibility as the mutual possession of the ten worlds, meaning that each state or "world" contains within it all the other states. Of the ten worlds, the first six — Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity and Rapture — refer to the experiences of desire, hope, suffering and joy commonly seen in people's lives.

In the present context, what is most important to note is that the world of Buddhahood is neither discontinuous nor isolated from the other states of life. The sufferings and delusions of the other nine worlds are considered to be integral to — even necessary for — the enlightenment of the tenth world of Buddhahood.

Buddhist tradition refers to the Buddha as one who has successfully struggled with delusion and attachment, transmuting these into awakening and truth. The ideal of Buddhahood thus is not something apart from the realities of the world and daily life. Concretely, the universal possession of Buddha nature indicates the capacity — which all people possess — to participate in this dynamic process, to deploy wisdom amidst the trials and struggles of daily life, to discover meaning and create value, to improve themselves and their circumstances. The teaching of Buddha

In the present context, what is most important to note is that the world of Buddhahood is neither discontinuous nor isolated from the other states of life. The sufferings and delusions of the other nine worlds are considered to be integral to — even necessary for — the enlightenment of the tenth world of Buddhahood.

nature thus acknowledges the concrete realities of individual human lives while asserting that all people possess dimensions of possibility that can be termed transcendent.

Here we may note a point of distinction between the Buddhist perspective described above and the personal autonomy, which, according to constitutional legal scholarship, constitutes the foundation of human dignity. In Japan, theories of personal autonomy are said to have



CORBIS/JBethmann

German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).

been largely influenced in their development by German theorists, in particular the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.[1] In Kant's view, human dignity refers to the capacity of a person to use practical reason to make rational decisions, and to take responsibility for those decisions. This view of personal autonomy emphasizes certain abstract qualities such as reason and spirituality and is predicated on the assumption that a person is able to make full use of these qualities and capacities. It undeniably represents, in this sense, an idealization of human existence. Likewise, the social and economic conditions that facilitate this kind of personal autonomy are ignored, leaving us with an inadequate portrayal of human beings struggling to live amidst the exigencies of real life. Thus, even if we recognize the value of an abstract conceptualization of personal autonomy, we must also understand that this can only find effective expression when it is mediated through the concrete realities and experiences of life. The teaching of the universal possession of Buddha nature, elaborated as the mutual possession of the ten worlds, emphasizes the importance of deploying human wisdom within the context of the actual problems of living and in this sense can help us arrive at the more concrete and immediate understanding of human dignity that we require.

Buddha Nature and Individuality

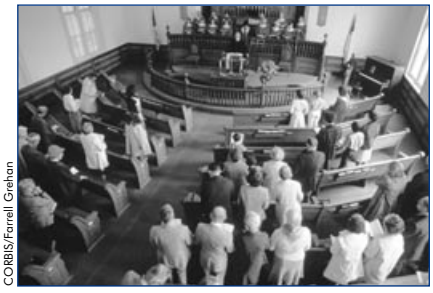
In looking at the teaching of the universal possession of the Buddha nature, we have seen that it can be considered a teaching of quality in that it assumes that all people equally possess the possibility of enlightenment. This does not, however, mean that all people are, in their actualities, equal, nor is it a mechanistic egalitarianism that posits sameness or uniformity as a desirable human condition. The human quality posited in this teaching is the equality of immanent potential possessed by all people. At the same time, this teaching requires that we maintain a firm respect for this potential in others as a necessary condition for realizing that potential ourselves.

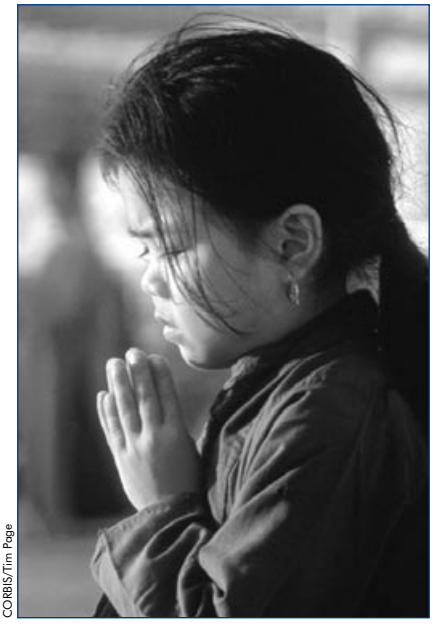
Earlier we defined the Buddha nature as the ability to deploy wisdom in the process of living more fully. Since each human lives within the context of a unique set of physical, psychological and social conditions, the manner in which each person lives more fully will naturally also be unique.

Individuality here does not, of course, refer to the mere assertion of superficial difference in relation to others. One of the key Mahayana texts is the Lotus Sutra. A central image in this teaching is the dramatic emergence of a vast "treasure tower" adorned with precious jewels. This symbolizes the manifestation of the inherent capacities for wisdom, courage and compassion that all people possess. Nichiren, the 13th-century Japanese Buddhist teacher who based his teaching on the Lotus Sutra, wrote to one of his followers: "You are the treasure tower; the treasure tower is you." With this he clearly identified that


CORBIS/Annie Griffiths Belt


CORBIS/Annie Griffiths Belt


CORBIS/Farrell Grehan


CORBIS/Tim Page

"All people are born free and equal." A key component to international human rights is freedom of worship.

The basic thrust of the theory of dependent origination is that nothing exists in total independence from other things, that all things (and people) exist within the framework of relationships with other people and things.

which is of highest possible value within the life of an individual.

Again, the teaching of Buddha nature emphasizes the possibility that all people can attain enlightenment. The stance here is not simply to seek to understand people in their present realities, but to secure a realm of immanent possibility. This forestalls the wholesale rejection of cases in which people are unable, for whatever reason, to fully exercise those inherent capacities. It embraces the possibility of instances in which a degree of assistance, of an either private or social nature, will enable those latent potentialities to be realized, while at the same time fully respecting the initiative and independence of the individual. This stance can help to counter the tendency to view children or people with disabilities in the limited light of their present capacity, with the attendant result of either marginalizing them or regarding them as the passive objects of charity. How societies can avoid these pitfalls and learn to regard people with diverse capacities as the possessors of universal human rights is a critical challenge, one that hinges on our basic understanding of what it means to be human. I believe that the Buddha nature teaching discussed here is an expression of maximum respect for the potential of the human being, and as such can importantly contribute to the expansion of the actual practice of human rights.

The Theory of Dependent Origination and the Critical Outlook

The teaching of dependent origination is another rich source of ideas for considering the question of the nature of human dignity. As the language suggests, this is a teaching of interdependence at the most fundamental, existential level. In the Zhong a han (Skt. *madhyamagama*) Sutra we find this phrase: "Because this exists, that exists. If this does not exist, that does not exist. That arises because this arises. That declines because this declines." The basic thrust of the theory of dependent origination is that nothing exists in total independence from other things, that all things (and people) exist within the framework of relationships with other people and things. This is, in other words, a view of life that stands in contrast to all essential assertions of fixed identity. This theory has two main areas of significance for the present argument, one negative and one positive.

By negative, I refer to the denial of fixed identity. The Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna characterized all things, from the perspective of dependent origination, as being devoid of a fixed, unchanging essence. The practical implications of this are as follows: By understanding any present condition as the confluence of a multiplicity of (constantly changing) elements, we are encouraged to view reality, not as something beyond our capacity to change or influence, but something subject to human will and wisdom, which can always be changed for the better. As individuals, this teaching urges us to shed attachments to certain fixed views or modes of understanding. On the social plane, it encourages us to resist attempts to project customs, ideas and social practices as inevitable. It arms people against the tendency to accept existing systems as manifestations of immutable "truth." While this stance of skepticism toward present realities may correctly be termed negative, the endeavor to create something new and better always begins with the work of doubting what exists. Thus, the negative implications of the teaching of dependent origination contain the occasion for creativity. For example, no single enunciation of the experience of human dignity can be equally valid in all eras and social settings. In this sense, even human rights should not be regarded simply in terms of existing institutional arrangements for their protection, but in terms of an open-ended effort to clarify the ideas and principles that underlie them. As the Japanese constitutional scholar Higuchi Yoichi has noted, we must always interrogate the systems of human rights protection in light of the underlying ideas of human rights.

The most important positive implication of the teaching of dependent origination lies in the way that it views humans, not as isolated entities, but as embedded in a fabric of coexistence.

Dependent Origination: Positive Implications

The most important positive implication of the teaching of dependent origination lies in the way that it views humans, not as isolated entities, but as embedded in a fabric of coexistence. From this naturally follows an emphasis on creative interdependence. If individuals were indeed entirely independent, attention to the well being of others would indeed be "optional." Buddhism views our profound interdependence as that which makes relations of trust and consideration essential to human survival. But it goes beyond this minimalist, survivalist stance, and asserts that the work of assisting others to develop their highest potential (their Buddha nature) is crucial to developing this potential in ourselves.

The Buddhist approach represents a fundamental critique of the concept of the "individual" and "individual rights" which forms the core of the human rights theory that grew out of the Western Enlightenment.[2] A Buddhist would thus never accept the Hobbesian[3] vision of presocial humanity as atomized beings in a world of universal conflict. While recognizing the reality of conflict, a Buddhist would not accord conflict the kind of ontological necessity that Hobbes does, but would see even entrenched cultural violence as supported by deeper, more essential strata of interdependence.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the highest ideal of human behavior is expressed in the character and the practice of the bodhisattva. This ideal contains a moral imperative to rise above the limitations of the individual ego and to act in a spirit of compassionate altruism. The actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, described in the Lotus Sutra, are emblematic. In the sutra, this bodhisattva is portrayed as expressing his profound reverence for the Buddha nature he perceives in each person he encounters. He is shown persisting in his efforts to awaken people to their own limitless potentialities, regardless of the criticism, disdain or even outright hostility he encounters. His name derives from his refusal to demean or despise any person.

The essence of the Buddhist idea of compassion is found in the conscious effort to develop empathy for the sufferings of others. In other words, it is only through undertaking a practice that is demanding and profoundly challenging—such as that to which Bodhisattva Never Disparaging committed himself—that we can genuinely feel the pain of others.



CORBIS/Archivo Iconografico, S.A.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) provided a formula in which all citizens lived under a social contract.

In this sense, dependent origination also implies a critique of the kind of primitive, vague sense of community that would subsume individual concerns. Rather, it is an ethic of community developed and mediated through autonomous individuals clearly aware that their own highest potential can only be made manifest through committed efforts on behalf of others. Further, it is rooted in the imperative to respect the Buddha nature of each individual and work with them toward the realization of this vast inner potential.

One of the distinguishing aspects of dependent origination is that it applies not only to relations between humans but embraces relations between humans and nonhuman nature.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhism adopts a deeply pliant understanding of identity, rejecting any fixed or essentialist approach to either individual or collective identity. The work of directing this interrogative gaze upon our "self"—challenging embedded assumptions about ourselves (and by implication received social prejudices)—is seen as a precondition to manifesting our own Buddha nature. The work necessitates developing empathy and respect for others and the potentials implied by their possession of Buddha nature.

I believe that this Buddhist stance can successfully shore up the core weakness of a human rights theory that, as mentioned, is predicated on the abstract notion of the "individual" and the putative equality of all individuals.

The problem, of course, is that people are not, in fact, equal—not in their physical or mental capacities, or in wealth, status or social standing. Thus, the emphasis on respecting the will of the individual is meaningful only for those who are adequately

empowered in the above senses. In the face of the manifest inequality of social relations, the abstract and blanket assertion of equal rights can only have the effect of reinforcing those relations; permitting the powerful to maximize their strengths while the disempowered are left to fend for themselves as best they can.

Buddhism is not, of course, the only voice questioning the ideology of unrestrained individualism. The science of ecology, for one, finds in the example of the interdependence of natural systems a fertile basis for questioning the limitations of individualism. John Rawls's[4] theory of justice is a renowned example of an outlook that does not deny individualism, but seeks to address and correct its failings in the search for genuine community. Expanding on Immanual Kant's categorical imperative that the humanity of each person must always be treated as the objective and never as a means to another end, Rawls proposes a new sense of community. He insists that those who have been blessed by nature, and who are aware of this, can only profit from their happiness to the extent that they work to improve the conditions of those who are not blessed with similar talents and capacities.

To appreciate the full scope of the teaching of karma requires acceptance of the idea of an eternal continuity of existence, in which causes from previous lives have created the circumstances of the present life and causes made now will continue into future lives.

Since the natural environment itself is seen as endowed with the infinitely precious Buddha nature, this acts as a powerful injunction against the wanton exploitation or destruction of nature by humans.

Rawls's "sense of community" offers a valuable perspective from which to rethink a theory of human rights that remains heavily weighted toward abstract, disembodied individualism. The Buddhist idea of dependent origination, and the profound and essentially creative interdependence that it posits, can offer an important resource for developing a theory of human rights that is both more balanced and more closely follows the contours of life as it is actually lived.

Dependent Origination and Environmental Rights

One of the distinguishing aspects of dependent origination is that it applies not only to relations between humans but embraces relations between humans and nonhuman nature. As mentioned, many schools of Buddhism assert that Buddha nature is something possessed by all sentient beings. Chinese and Japanese forms of Buddhism, in particular, go even further, claiming that even insentient life forms, such as plants and trees, as well as the very earth itself, are capable of attaining enlightenment. Since the natural environment itself is seen as endowed with the infinitely precious Buddha nature, this acts as a powerful injunction against the wanton exploitation or destruction of nature by humans. The 8th-century Buddhist teacher Chan-jan (Miao-lo) elaborated a theory on the indivisibility of subject (self) and object (surroundings). This can be transposed to the relationship between humans and the natural environment, in which case it demonstrates the necessity for a relationship of creative symbiosis between people and nature.

In terms of human rights theory, the right to a healthy natural environment has been posited as an element of a new generation of human rights. This has yet to be supported, however, by either a clear theoretical consensus or a body of judicial precedent. When courts have ruled, redress has been limited to those cases in which humans suffered important damages. In other words, to the extent that the right to a healthy environment has been recognized, the locus of the right has been humans and their interests. The idea of nature itself as the subject-possessor of rights at this point remains only a distant theoretical possibility. Present human rights thinking offers scant resources with which to construct a more sweeping theoretical and practical structure of environmental rights, a gap that I believe these Buddhist concepts can help fill.

The Teaching of Karma: Autonomy and Ethical Responsibility

Comparing the understanding of human dignity in traditional human rights theory and in Buddhism, we find that Buddhism stresses an image of

The idea of karma is not without its pitfalls, however, and these come especially to the fore when it is subverted to become a past-oriented — rather than future-oriented — worldview. This is another area in which institutionalized Buddhism must accept responsibility for having worked counter to the cause of human rights. In other words, the teaching of karma has been coopted by those in socially or economically privileged positions to justify that privilege as the natural outcome of their past "good causes."

humans as autonomous actors with ethical responsibility for their actions. This is especially evident in the theory of karma.

The teaching of dependent origination touched on earlier, stresses the interrelatedness of all phenomena, along both the spatial and temporal axes. Within this context, the theory of karma describes causal relationships over the course of time. In other words, past, present and future are viewed as the seamless flow of cause and effect, with the causes of the past becoming manifest as reality experienced in the present, which in turn is the context within which we create causes for the future. The proper emphasis of this teaching is that we should not be caught up in the past, nor overwhelmed by the present, but should focus on creating causes now for a better future. Karma in its original sense means actions or behavior. It is a teaching of human responsibility and autonomy. Negative, destructive acts are causes that will bring negative results, for which the author of those acts must bear responsibility. To appreciate the full scope of the teaching of karma requires acceptance of the idea of an eternal continuity of existence, in which causes from previous lives have created the circumstances of the present life and causes made now will continue into future lives. Even without accepting this essentially religious perspective, however, the idea of personal responsibility for creating one's own life in the present has strong parallels with existentialist philosophy and as such has a potent ethical content that can advance our understanding of human dignity.

In the Buddhist view, karma is enacted in three realms: our thoughts, words and actions. The inclusion of the ideational and verbal realms of behavior in this sense provides a broader, more embracing ethical framework within which to understand human behavior and its consequences.

The idea of karma is not without its pitfalls, however, and these come especially to the fore when it is subverted to become a past-oriented — rather than future-oriented—worldview. This is another area in which institutionalized Buddhism must accept responsibility for having worked counter to the cause of human rights. In other words, the teaching of karma has been coopted by those in socially or economically privileged positions to justify that privilege as the natural outcome of their past "good causes," while encouraging the marginalized elements of society to accept their status as the result of their past "bad causes." The concept of karma has thus historically been subverted into a teaching of fatalistic acceptance.

One of the oldest Buddhist scriptures is the Sutta Nipata, a record of Shakyamuni's travels and teachings. There we find these words to this effect: people are neither base nor noble (Brahmans) by birth; they are made base or noble by their acts. Thus Shakyamuni was sharply critical of the caste system prevalent in his age, rejecting any form of discrimination on the basis of social standing or status. Human beings, he urged, must be seen always in the light of what they do (behavior) and not who they are (birth).

Again, karma is a teaching of personal responsibility and empowerment. That is, regardless of how difficult present circumstances may be, humans are capable of creating, through their thoughts, words and deeds, the causes for a better future. Because karma is properly understood within the context of the profound interrelatedness of all being that forms the core of Buddhist philosophy, humans are empowered even to transform the manner in which negative circumstances function in their lives. Causal relations in Buddhism actually comprise three stages: cause, condition and effect. Thus, even extremely trying circumstances (condition) can be transformed by a powerful act of will (cause) so that they function to assist in the creation of a positive outcome (effect).


CORBIS/Michael Freeman

Where Buddhism failed in its original mission was taking a position of superiority to lay believers.

The implications for the idea of autonomous decision-making as a basis for human dignity are profound. Through autonomously arrived-at decisions, humans are capable of actively transforming the influence of negative social conditions, harnessing these to work for their own improvement, for others and for society as a whole. Within Buddhism, the centrally important idea of individual enlightenment can be understood as the process of enhancing the capacity (wisdom) of the individual to make decisions. Ontologically, individuals are accorded full freedom to decide in any manner they choose. They are not, however forced to do so in an ethical vacuum. The basic ethical framework for decision-making is that outlined above: because radical dichotomies between self and other are denied, altruistic actions that benefit others at the same time benefit ourselves. Actions that benefit self and other, contributing to the larger cause of human happiness (and in fact, of all life) are "good." As mentioned, the basis for the most effective praxis of this ethic lies in acknowledging and reverencing the infinite positive potential (Buddha nature) of each living being.

The teaching of karma—its emphasis on personal autonomy, wisdom in decision-making and ethical responsibility—has important parallels in the human rights tradition. There are also differences. As mentioned, where human rights theory has traditionally stressed the individual and individualism, Buddhist ethics require that we actively consider the well-being of others. Another point of distinction with the positive law tradition, in which external actions are highly prioritized, is that Buddhism places an equal emphasis on the quality—the positive or negative orientation—of our inner processes.

This is, of course, a religious-ethical perspective, and to stress this is not to attempt to skirt the genuine difficulties of judging (in a positive-law sense) anything other than the actual, visible actions of individuals. Nor is it to suggest that it is in any way appropriate to introduce a religious component into the relations between people and states that are a central concern of human rights theory (in both the negative sense of protecting people from the encroachments of state authority and in the positive sense of requiring states to afford active protection to people's rights). However, the Buddhist perspective can be of value in offering a viable ethical foundation for an expanded understanding of human rights as well as in countering an excessive emphasis on the isolated individual in the modern human rights tradition.

The Concept of Collective Karma and Societal Ethics

Incidentally, the idea of karma is not restricted to individual behavior and its consequences. Through the concept of shared or collective karma, it includes important social implications. In other words, a pattern of action or behavior that may start with an individual will come to influence others, and may be adopted by them, giving rise to mores, customs and institutions.

The idea of collective karma has two principal vectors. The first describes the relation between ideas widely received within a society and the structures and systems of that society. The second regards the relation between individual awareness and societal institutions.

To examine the first of these, the role and function of a society's systems are, of course, largely influenced by the awareness and expectations of the constituent members of that society. In Japanese legal interpretations, reference is regularly made to "socially accepted ideas/norms" (which may be understood as a collective expression of the "reasonable person" in the common law tradition) as a source of legitimacy. The difficulty is that a socially accepted norm may represent nothing more than the views of a numeric majority, and may lack any deeper moral legitimacy. For example, widely held discriminatory attitudes against women, the disabled or other minorities can render null and void institutional efforts to assure the human rights of the members of those groups. The teaching of collective karma seeks to clarify the relation between widely held attitudes and social structures. As such it underscores the need to address discriminatory tendencies that lie buried deep in the human unconscious.

Regarding the relation between individual awareness and social systems, the teaching of collective karma refuses to dissociate social systems from individual will and action. Because of this stance, Buddhism sees the reawakening of individual awareness as the starting

For Buddhism to return to its original spirit, it is imperative that practitioners actively develop links between core Buddhist concepts and the pressing concerns — key among them human rights — of the day.

point for the reformation of the ideational and ethical patterns of a society, as well as the structures and institutions of society. Needless to say, the process by which individual awareness influences the commonly held views within a society and how this in turn shapes social systems is extremely complex. The classical teaching of collective karma lacks the kind of rigorous elaboration of these processes such as is attempted by the contemporary social sciences. At the very least, however, to the extent that this teaching asserts that a change in individual awareness holds the potential for larger social change, it stresses an autonomous norm and praxis of considerable potential significance.

The Role of Buddhism: Issues and Possibilities

Because the central focus of Buddhism has always been the question of how real human beings can be saved from suffering, it has adapted flexibly to a variety of social and historical settings. Within certain broad parameters (such as adherence to the core values of non-violence and compassion) practitioners have enjoyed wide latitude in the interpretation and application of Buddhist principles to the social realities they have encountered. In this sense, "living Buddhism" has profound stores of creative potential. In those eras and settings when its practitioners have lost sight of the values of creativity and independence of thought, the Buddhist church has lapsed into institutional passivity. As a result Buddhism has either been coopted by political authority or has retreated from engagement in society. For Buddhism to return to its original spirit, it is imperative that practitioners actively develop links between core Buddhist concepts and the pressing concerns — key among them human rights — of the day. To adopt this stance, which has been described as "engaged Buddhism" is, in the author's view, to return to the original spirit of Buddhism.

Contemporary efforts toward the universal implementation of human rights have moved beyond merely interpreting the "letter of the law" (whether that be a domestic law, a national constitution or an international instrument) and have sought to address the question of how humans ought to live together and behave toward each other. This has led inevitably to a deeper probing of such issues as the nature of human dignity and given these efforts a distinctly normative thrust.

Human rights have correctly been described as the open-ended effort to create those conditions in which all people can experience the full dimensions of their personhood. This can be thought of having two directions. One requires that we be relentless in the effort to empower people to discover and reveal those aspects of personhood that have been silenced, neglected, or otherwise marginalized. The other requires that we be deeply attentive to all those cultural "voices" that have spoken to core or underlying concerns of the human rights agenda, even when they have not done so in the historically acknowledged language of "human rights."

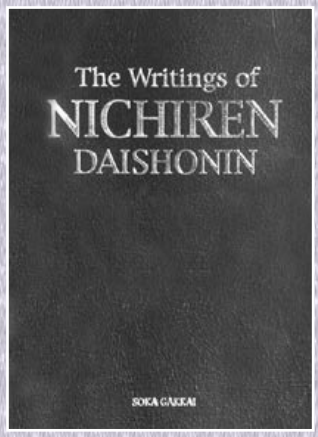
In both senses, Buddhism merits renewed attention. As I have attempted to demonstrate in this article, the Buddhist tradition can be a rich source of tools for developing a deeper and more concrete understanding of the nature of human dignity, the role and responsibility of the individual, and the psychology of human interactions. Despite this great potential, Buddhism has been largely silent about or absent from the process by which human rights were enunciated in the modern era, and by which universal human rights were elaborated in this century. The time has come for the Buddhist tradition, while taking careful stock of its historical record, to become an active participant in the process by which a robust, global culture of human rights is created.❑

Footnotes:

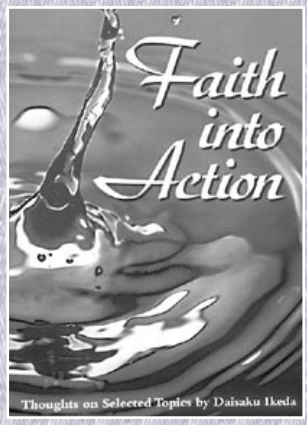
1. Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804). He set forth a chain of explosive ideas that humanity has continued to ponder since his time. He created a link between the idealists — those who thought that all reality was in the mind — and the materialists — those who thought that the only reality lay in the things of the material world.
2. Western Enlightenment: Refers to the rationalist, liberal, humanitarian, and scientific trend of 18th-century Western thought; the period is also sometimes known as the Age of Reason.
3. Hobbes, Thomas (1588–1679). The English political theorist lived during the decades when kingly absolutism in Europe was drawing to a close and sentiments for popular democracy were emerging. In his book *Leviathan* (1651), he provided the formula for an ideal state in which all citizens would live together under terms of a social contract. To keep everyone from exercising too much freedom, however, there would be an absolute monarch.
4. Rawls, John (1921–), American philosopher; b. Baltimore. His *A Theory of Justice* (1971) greatly influenced liberal thinking. It gives a systematic account of justice as fairness, outlines the proper reach of (and limitations on) individual liberty, and distinguishes acceptable from unacceptable forms of social inequality.

What's New at SGI-USA Bookstores?

Also available via mail order: 1-800-626-1313 or via e-mail: sgiusamoc@aol.com



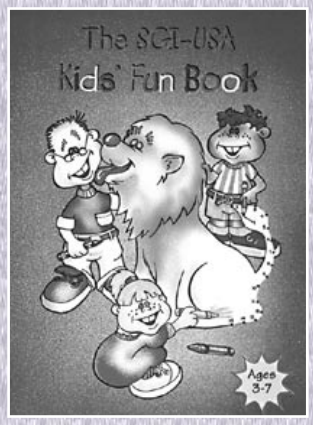
Writings of Nichiren Daishonin
All the English-translated works in one volume. $25.00 M/O #: 1100



Faith Into Action
Guidance by subject. A great reference.
$12.95 M/O #: 0135



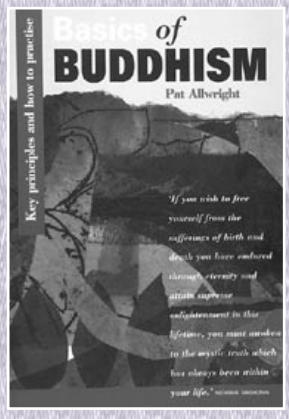
Dawn of the Century of Life
A weekly datebook with inspiration by Daisaku Ikeda. $12.95 M/O # 8608



SGI-USA Kids Funbook
For ages 3-7. Comes with crayons.
$4.95 M/O # 0149



Friends for Peace Funbook
For ages 7-12. Comes with crayons.
$4.95 M/O # 0151



Basics of Buddhism
A great new members handbook.
$12.00 M/O # 1055

TREASURE TOWER BOOKS

World Tribune Press

Please call for applicable tax, shipping & handling charges.

DIALOGUE ON THE *Lotus Sutra*

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

45 The Completion of the Ceremony of Transmission

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

Following Shakyamuni's transmission of the Mystic Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the preceding chapter, here, in the "Entrustment" (twenty-second) chapter, Shakyamuni completes his transmission of the Mystic Law by entrusting it to all the other countless bodhisattvas in the assembly. This chapter also concludes the Ceremony in the Air, with the venue of preaching reverting from mid-air to the summit of Eagle Peak. What does this shift of venue signify in terms of the bodhisattva way of life? Participants discuss what it means to dedicate oneself wholly to one's mission for kosen-rufu as a disciple.

At that time Shakyamuni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and, manifesting his great supernatural powers, with his right hand patted the heads of the immeasurable bodhisattvas and mahasattvas and spoke these words: "For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide.". . .

The multitude of bodhisattvas and mahasattvas repeated these words three times, raising their voices in unison and saying: "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. Therefore we beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!" (LS22, 277–78)[1]

FROM "THE RECORD OF THE ORALLY TRANSMITTED TEACHINGS"

This chapter describes how the Buddha patted the heads of the bodhisattvas and transmitted the teachings to them, insuring that this wonderful Law would remain in the world after he had passed into extinction.

And since this represents the transmission of the Mystic Law, all the living beings of the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms are bodhisattvas to whom this transmission is made.

Again, the fact that he patted the heads of the bodhisattvas three times indicates that he is using his hand, which is an implement of conversion symbolic of the threefold contemplation in a single mind and the three bodies of the Buddha, to bestow the bright jewel upon the heads of those who are converted.

Speaking in broad terms, this bright jewel bestowed on the heads of the bodhisattvas is enlightenment and understanding. More specifically, the bright jewel bestowed on the heads of the bodhisattvas is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 800)

SUDA: Today we will discuss the "Entrustment" (twenty-second) chapter.

IKEDA: The "Entrustment" chapter is a chapter of transmission. "Transmission" here indicates succession; and "succession" defines the relationship of mentor and disciple. The "Entrustment" chapter could therefore, also be termed the "Succession" chapter or the "Mentor and Disciple" chapter. It is the "Mentor and Disciple of Kosen-rufu" chapter for accomplishing widespread propagation of the Law in the Latter Day. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda also felt this was a highly significant chapter.

SAITO: The term "entrustment" in the chapter title is composed of two Chinese characters. The first means to commit or leave something to someone with confidence.

The second means something that is difficult or cumbersome. The Buddha is thus saying, in effect, "laborious though it may be, I leave the work of spreading the Law far and wide to you, my disciples."

ENDO: It really is a chapter of succession and of mentor and disciple.

IKEDA: From the standpoint of those who are entrusted, this is the chapter where disciples pledge to shoulder the hard work of propagating the Law. This defines the connection between mentor and disciple.

The mentor-disciple relationship is strict. Everything depends on how earnestly one can accept and act on even a single word of the mentor. A true disciple strives to actualize the mentor's vision — not by mimicking the mentor, but by putting into action what the mentor has taught.

This is something of a digression, but once, when we were staying at the Hanazono Inn in Osaka, President Toda abruptly remarked: "I was just thinking, 'What if I were to die today?' and 'What if I were to become prime minister today?'" He was quite serious. I remember it was early in the morning.

At that time of day, people are usually thinking, "Is it time for breakfast yet?" or "I'd like to sleep just a little longer." But Mr. Toda was engaged in earnest contemplation. From that time forward, I took everything President Toda said as food for serious thought.



Second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda encouraged people to develop and perfect themselves thoroughly in the realms of faith and their chosen field.



Entrusting youth with the future — President Ikeda states, "The 'Entrustment' chapter is a chapter of transmission. 'Transmission' here indicates succession and 'succession' defines the relationship of mentor and disciple."

SAITO: To think, "Today I am going to die," is to live with the spirit, "Now is the last moment of my life."

IKEDA: The point is to have such faith that we can declare with utmost conviction, "Even if I were to die right now, I would attain Buddhahood."

Of course, it is important that we live out our life wholeheartedly, working for kosen-rufu and fulfilling our mission. We should be confident that whenever we may die, even at this very moment, we will have no regrets in our faith, we will know that we have really given it our best, and that our enlightenment is certain. Though we should not be arrogant, such pride and conviction in faith is vital. This is how I took President Toda's guidance.

Apart from faith, there is no way to attain Buddhahood in our present life, there is no way to experience the "greatest of all joys" (GZ, 788). This is something that we can only savor when we really exert ourselves for kosen-rufu — regardless of who may or may not be watching. It is important that we constantly keep watch over our own faith.

It is said that a person experiences 804,000 states of mind in a single day (GZ, 471). The heart is in a constant state of flux; 804,000 in a day is a phenomenal rate of change! During that time, how much are we thinking about kosen-rufu? About the Gohonzon? About the SGI or our fellow members? How much action did we take or not take?

The net balance of these determines our state of life. Faith is not a matter of formality. As Nichiren Daishonin states, "The heart is most important."

ENDO: So our faith shouldn't be lukewarm or formalistic, but should be steadfast — informed by the awareness that "now is the last moment."

IKEDA: As for Mr. Toda's other comment about becoming prime minister, as his disciple I believe he was talking about the importance of becoming trusted "pillars" in our own fields of endeavor and freely displaying our true strength and ability.

Buddhism is not a religion that exists for the sake of religion. It exists for the sake of society and real life. Faith is the source of energy that enables us to guide society and our lives in the direction of hope.

It is for that reason, Mr. Toda was saying, that as leaders in all areas of society, we must take action and show proof of our practice, causing people to say, "No wonder! That person practices Buddhism!" As leaders in the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu as well, we should become people who are appreciated for always lifting the spirits of others. In our broad struggle for kosen-rufu, it is important that we ask ourselves if we are becoming someone who can say, "In this area, you can leave everything to me. Please rest assured."

In effect, President Toda was saying: "Develop and perfect yourself thoroughly in the realms of faith and your chosen field." He was truly an insightful and wonderful teacher.

SAITO: President Ikeda, I feel you have really lived these words of President Toda. The many meaningful dialogues with world leaders you have participated in as a private citizen are a source of inspiration to people of conscience everywhere.

SUDA: The fact that you have received nearly sixty honorary doctorates and professorships from universities around the world is also remarkable.

IKEDA: My spirit is to always accept these honors on behalf of the first two Soka Gakkai presidents, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. They were both educators—educators who died fighting for kosen-rufu. Their good fortune flows to me and continues on; it passed from the first president to the second president, and on to the third president. This is the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is humanity's ultimate principle.

And my good fortune flows to my disciples. It is my fervent desire to share that fortune with everyone. President Toda's spirit was the same.

The General Transmission to Bodhisattvas of Both the Essential and Theoretical Teachings

ENDO: To summarize the "Entrustment" chapter, after the "essential transmission" to Bodhisattva Superior Practices in the preceding "Supernatural Powers" chapter, Shakyamuni rises and exhibits his great supernatural powers. He stands up and pats the heads of the countless bodhisattvas present, saying: "For immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of asamkhya kalpas I have practiced this hard-to-attain Law of anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide" (LS22, 277). This is repeated three times.

SAITO: It's interesting that he touches their heads.

SUDA: As this chapter is about entrustment, it may be that in doing so he is urging them to do their best despite the difficulty of the task.

IKEDA: That may well be.

From his patting them on the head, we can also get a sense of someone encouraging a child saying, "You're a good child, so please do your best."

SUDA: Completely different from the transmission in the "Supernatural Powers" chapter, this is a gentle method of entrusting the teachings to the assembly, which now includes bodhisattvas of the theoretical teachings.

ENDO: This is, after all, a "general" transmission to bodhisattvas of both the essential and theoretical teachings.

SAITO: Shakyamuni must now accommodate the participants of even the lowest capacity.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni is most strict with the disciples whom he really trusts. He devotes himself wholeheartedly to their growth and leaves them everything.

President Toda said: "All those disciples with whom President Makiguchi was lenient gave up their faith and turned against him. Not once was I praised by Mr. Makiguchi. But I alone have remained and have carried on his teaching and succeeded him."

I, likewise, received training from President Toda more strictly than anyone else. Day in and day out he made demands on me that could only be described as unreasonable. There were those disciples who felt that they enjoyed President Toda's particular favor, or received special treatment from him. That is all well and good, but the important thing is actualizing the mentor's intent.

People who merely try to imitate their mentor in terms of appearance or manner tend somehow to go astray. This was true in President Toda's time, and it is true today. There is a unique path for each disciple, a path which lies solely in striving to actualize the mentor's vision.

Going a little deeper, in patting his disciples on the head three times, Shakyamuni is exhorting them to put his thoughts, words and deeds—the three categories of action—into practice.

SAITO: The "Ongi Kuden" (*Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*) says, "The entrustment of the three pats symbolizes that the Buddha is entrusting to them the three categories of action, namely, actions of the body, mouth, and mind; the three truths; and the three views or meditations made possible by the three truths" (GZ, 772).

IKEDA: The disciples perceive the three kinds of wisdom in their hearts by practicing the teaching of the mentor through their thoughts, words and deeds. In other words, they awaken to the infinite world of Buddhahood existing in their own lives.

SUDA: So it comes down to action.

IKEDA: It's a matter of propagation, of working for kosen-rufu. When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu in thought, word and deed, then everything turns into great benefit without fail. However, if we simply act like we are working for kosen-rufu, but harbor negativity in our hearts, we will, through our own attitude, erode our good fortune.

ENDO: In the Sanskrit text of the sutra, instead of patting the bodhisattvas on the head with his right hand, Shakyamuni holds their right hands in his. In other



Buddhism is not a religion that exists for the sake of religion. It exists for the sake of society. It is for this reason that we must show proof of our practice in our fields of endeavor.

words, he shakes their hands. This is said to symbolize the idea that Shakyamuni, the mentor, does not have a "closed fist;" in other words, that he reveals all he knows without hiding anything.

IKEDA: Teachers of the Brahman caste derived their authority from "secret transmissions" or "secret teachings." I suppose that's what is meant by having a "closed fist." But Shakyamuni was different. Declaring, "At the start I took a vow,/ hoping to make all persons/ equal to me, without any distinction between us" (LS2, 36), he taught his followers the highest secret teaching, the Mystic Law.

SAITO: Buddhism is the first missionary religion in human history. Before Buddhism, while religions might have communicated a secret teaching to a highly select group of people, there was never a teacher like Shakyamuni who sought to share his own enlightenment with all people.

IKEDA: Such teachings are indeed "closed-fisted."

SUDA: The Nikken sect, too, frequently refers to "secret transmissions" and "lineage." In that sense, they sound like the Brahmans!

Fundamentally, there is no "secret teaching" more exalted than the Three Great Secret Laws. The transmission of the high priest ought to center around nothing other than the correct faith, practice and study of the Three Great Secret Laws.

ENDO: To accomplish the widespread propagation of the Three Great Secret Laws is, after all, Nichiren Daishonin's will and testament. By rights, the high priest should take the lead in efforts for kosen-rufu, while bearing the brunt of attacks by the three powerful enemies. Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin, the second and third high priests, respectively, in fact did just that.

Just what kind of lineage is embodied by a high priest who not only fails to do this, but who actively seeks to destroy the movement for kosen-rufu? Such a high priest is transmitting not a "secret Law" but a "false Law."

SAITO: If he were to open his "clenched fist," we would find him empty-handed!

SUDA: Come to think of it, there's a saying in India, "You cannot shake someone's hand with a fist." What it means is that peace can only be achieved through dialogue, not brute force.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni did not conceal anything from his trusted disciples. The "Entrustment" chapter demonstrates this yet again, for it is here that he unbegrudgingly leaves them everything.

SAITO: That's true. It says:

> The Thus Come One has great pity and compassion. He is in no way stingy or begrudging, nor has he any fear. He is able to bestow on living beings the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Thus Come One, the wisdom that comes of itself. The Thus Come One is a great giver of gifts to all living beings. (LS22, 278)

IKEDA: He is a "great giver of gifts." And he is generous. After all there is no such thing as a stingy Buddha.

The Mystic Law is a horn of plenty. It is the "wish-granting jewel" of the Buddha. It is the treasure of all treasures. And since the Buddha hands over this wonderful gift in its entirety, there is no greater generosity. Even so, he is hated, vilified and persecuted.

SUDA: This is truly the evil age of the Latter Day.

ENDO: I am reminded of the experience of a member in Iwate Prefecture, Japan, by the name of Kiyomi Kumagai who lived in the town of Ichinoseki. From the time she joined the Soka Gakkai in 1955, until the day she died, she enabled nearly 140 families to take faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. What motivated her to carry out such earnest propagation activities is quite interesting.

She began practicing when she was told by a physician that she had only three years left to live because of stomach ulcers and heart disease. In just six months, she regained splendid health and left her sickbed for good. She then reportedly told a fellow member, "This faith is so wonderful, it's too good to share with anyone!"

The member then admonished her, saying, "What are you talking about? Do you mean to tell me that as long as you're okay, it doesn't matter what becomes of other people? Someone so lacking in compassion is no member of the Soka Gakkai!" Completely taken aback by these words, Ms. Kumagai at that moment determined to tell as many people about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism as possible.

Because of her absolute confidence in the Gohonzon and the care with which she looked after others, not one of the people she introduced to the practice abandoned faith, and many in fact became leaders. There was just one person of whom she lost track, but to the end of her life, Ms. Kumagai remained concerned about what had become of the person. What a remarkable achievement!

Her children all followed in her footsteps. Among them, they have helped a total of nearly fifty families begin practicing Buddhism.



CORBIS/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

Mahatma Gandhi among the people of Bombay. An American missionary is said to have once asked him: "What religion do you practice and what form do you think religion will take in India in the future?" How did Gandhi respond to this rather difficult religious discussion that had been thrust upon him? There happened to be two sick people in the room. Pointing in their direction, Gandhi replied simply: "My religion is serving and working for the people. I am not preoccupied with the future."

On one occasion, Ms. Kumagai was presented with a commendation in your presence, President Ikeda — an event which she regarded as her greatest honor. And she died peacefully surrounded by many friends and well-wishers.

IKEDA: Ms. Kumagai is quite well-known. She worked in earnest for kosen-rufu. There are many such uncrowned kings and queens in the SGI. There is no world more noble than this.

The Buddha Fully Reveals His "Secret"

SUDA: Nichiren Daishonin says that if Shakyamuni had not expounded the Lotus Sutra, then he would have been guilty of the offense of begrudging people access to his true teaching (GZ, 15). In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni reveals his "secret and his transcendental powers" (LS16, 225) in their entirety.

IKEDA: Nichiren Daishonin describes this passage of the "Life Span" chapter as the "ultimate principle of the essential teaching." Its substance is the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contained in the sutra's depths. He says:

> The ultimate principle of the Lotus Sutra is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. All beneficial doctrines, both Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained, the practices and effects of all Buddhas throughout time and space, the cumulative benefit of all the passages and phrases of the Lotus Sutra—all of this is contained in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In concluding this sutra, the Hokke Mongu [chapter ten] says, "Speaking of the sutra as a whole, there are just four principles [name, function, entity and quality]. One grasps the crux of the matter and hands it on to others." The ultimate principle of the Lotus Sutra is none other than the daimoku that is entrusted to Bodhisattva Superior Practices (GZ, 844).

We are spreading the "fundamental cause" that enables all beings in the universe over past, present and future to reveal their Buddha nature. This is exactly what is meant by "the secret of the Thus Come One."

SUDA: The Lotus Sutra is generosity at its finest; it is the quintessence of free access to information!

IKEDA: It is a teaching of the highest compassion. President Toda used to say that someone who just practices on his own without making any effort to advance kosen-rufu is like a person who stashes away some sweets so that he can eat them later when no one is around. President Makiguchi also emphasized the importance of doing shakubuku, saying, "Unless you carry out bodhisattva practice, you cannot become a Buddha." And he reprimanded the priesthood for having forgotten this spirit.



CORBIS

Guiding others to the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism means to show the same care and patience as a parent feeding a fussy baby, always warmly, sometimes strictly, sometimes soothingly.

SAITO: Distinguishing between "believers" and "practitioners," Mr. Makiguchi wrote:

> If you just believe and offer prayer, you will receive benefit without fail. But this alone does not amount to bodhisattva practice. There's no such thing as an egoistic Buddha who only seeks benefit for himself and does not endeavor to help others. Unless we carry out bodhisattva practice, we cannot become Buddhas. True faith, in other words, means spreading the teaching to others with the spirit of a parent toward his or her children. Those who do so are genuine practitioners.[2]

IKEDA: He says that we should spread the teaching with parental love. This makes it very easy to understand. To tell others about the Law with compassion like that of a parent toward a child—that is shakubuku. It's not a matter of self-aggrandizement or self-advertisement, nor is it simply engaging in theoretical debate.

We should guide the other person with the same care of a parent giving milk to a fussy baby—always warmly, sometimes strictly, sometimes soothingly. When sharing Buddhism with others, if we allow ourselves to be pulled by someone into an emotional confrontation, sinking to that person's level, then we are no longer behaving as an "emissary of the Buddha." We need to firmly gird ourselves in the "armor of perseverance" (LS13, 194). On the other hand, asking someone to "please just give it a try" as if begging, amounts to degrading the Law. We need to have the attitude of a parent.

It is not easy for people to exhibit compassion. Many people who claim to have compassion are actually hypocrites. That is why courage is a more apt word than compassion. To courageously speak about what is right is tantamount to compassion. Courage and compassion are like two sides of the same coin.

President Toda said, "Shakubuku means refuting the other person's 'evil mind' and enabling them to obey their 'good mind.'" A parent cannot look on in silence and watch his or her child enter a mistaken path that will lead to misery. There are times when a parent strictly scolds a child. Such strict compassion is shakubuku.

In a word, it is an act of the greatest justice and courage. It is not easy for people to exhibit compassion. Many people who claim to have compassion are actually hypocrites. That is why courage is a more apt word than compassion. To courageously speak about what is right is tantamount to compassion. Courage and compassion are like two sides of the same coin.

SAITO: This was expressed by the passage cited earlier from the "Entrustment" chapter that goes, "nor has he any fear" (LS22, 278).

Mr. Makiguchi's Notes

IKEDA: The spirit to oppose the evils of the world is the shakubuku spirit. Likewise, we must not sit back and allow injustice to exist within the world of Buddhahood. The spirit of shakubuku applies in each of these realms.

During the war, the authorities went so far as to send special police to monitor Soka Gakkai discussion meetings. If the talk turned to the Shinto talisman, they would immediately yell, "Stop!" President Makiguchi would then turn to other topics for a while, but as soon as he mentioned the talisman again, the police would quickly yell, "Stop!" Those present wondered why President Makiguchi would repeatedly bring up this topic, fully knowing that he would be censured. No one understood President Makiguchi's profound intent. His spirit remained dauntless; it was as if he was trying to practice shakubuku even on the authorities.

By comparison, now is a time of great freedom. Therefore, to fail to fight for kosen-rufu now is to be a coward.

While exhibiting the courage of a lion king, President Makiguchi showed great care and affection for each person. Love for others is the most important condition in a person who leads. This is crucial.

Mr. Makiguchi taught with utmost sincerity and kindness those who had just begun practicing and were unfamiliar with Buddhism. When talking with someone, he would often take out some paper and make notes as the person spoke. He did this in order to remember the person's situation. Constantly referring to those notes, he would continue to encourage the person until they had overcome their problem.

He would also write down appropriate passages from the Daishonin's writings or some words of encouragement on pieces of paper and give them to people. As this was before the publication of the Daishonin's collected writings or any Soka Gakkai publications, members would carry these notes with them as they engaged in propagation activities.

ENDO: In the "Entrustment" chapter, Shakyamuni entrusts all bodhisattvas, regardless of whether they are bodhisattvas of the theoretical or essential teaching, with the task of propagating the Law. Nichiren Daishonin describes this grand and solemn scene:

> The essence of the "Entrustment" chapter of the Lotus Sutra is as follows: [Rising from his seat in the treasure tower] the Buddha stood in open space and, in order to transfer the Lotus Sutra, patted no fewer than three times the heads of Bodhisattva Jogyo and his followers, Monjushri and his followers, the great Brahma Shakra, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings, the dragon kings, the ten demon daughters and others. They had clustered before the Buddha as thickly as dewdrops, crowding the four hundred ten thousand million nayutas of worlds, like the grasses of Musashino Plain or the trees covering Mount Fuji. They knelt close to one another, bent their bodies so that their heads touched the ground,

joined their palms together, and streamed sweat. Shakyamuni Buddha patted their heads just as a mother strokes the hair of her only child. Then, Superior Practices, the gods of the sun and moon, and the others received the Buddha's auspicious command and pledged to propagate the Lotus Sutra in the latter age. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 911)

IKEDA: The Daishonin describes this scene with allusions to the "grasses of Musashino" and the "trees covering Mount Fuji." He was a poet.

SUDA: The bodhisattvas in this enormous gathering vow, "We will respectfully carry out all these things just as the World-Honored One has commanded. Therefore we beg the World-Honored One to have no concern on this account!" (LS22, 278). They repeat this three times.

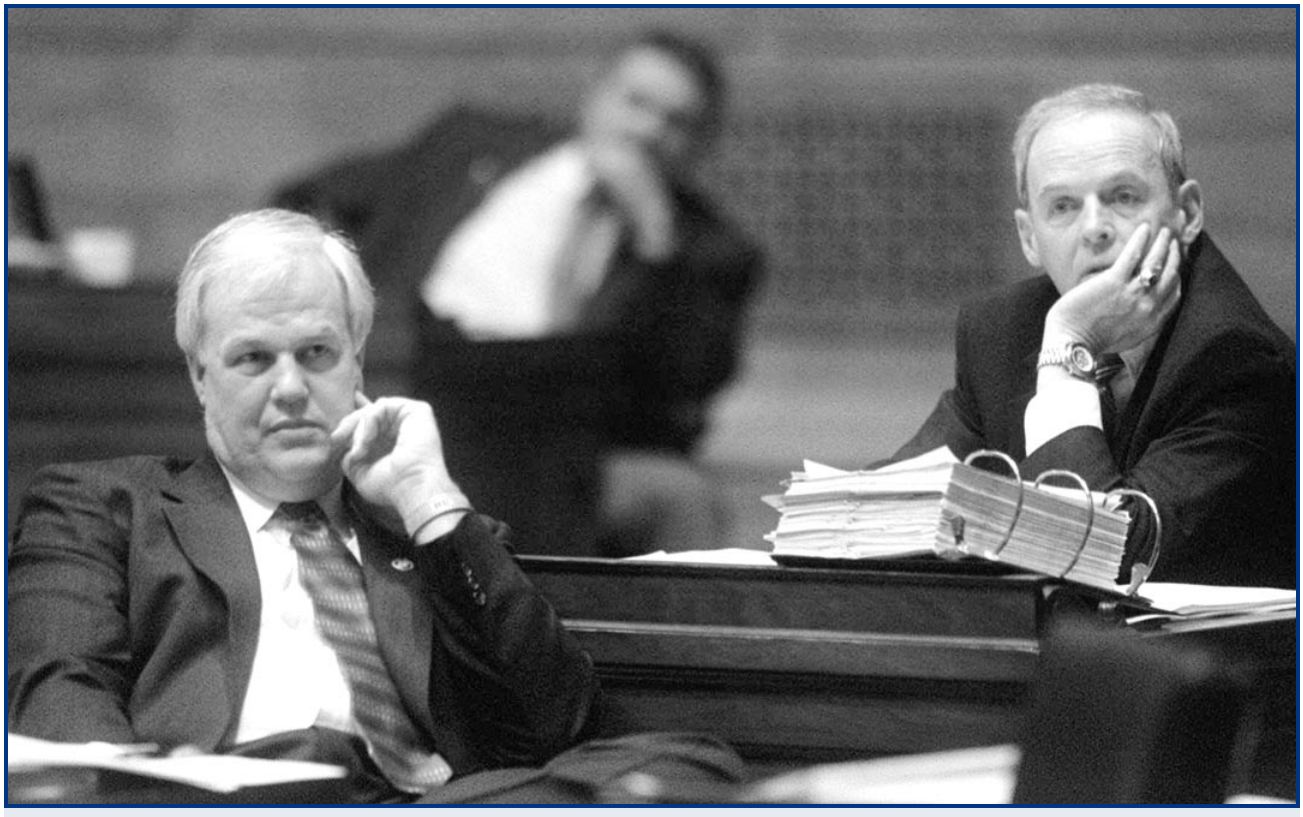
IKEDA: How bold! How refreshing! Their mentor must have been delighted. It's important not to cause the mentor to worry. The mentor already has concern for the disciples beyond their imagination.

The "Entrustment" chapter further says that those who spread the teaching "will have repaid the debt of gratitude that [they] owe to the Buddhas" (LS22, 278). The sole prayer of the Buddha and the mentor is for kosen-rufu. That is why exerting oneself in spreading the teaching is what it means to truly repay one's debt of gratitude to one's mentor.

To forget one's debt of gratitude is not Buddhism; in fact, it is not the true way of humanity. Buddhism teaches how to live as a human being. A Buddhist must, therefore, be someone who is aware of and endeavors to repay his or her debt of gratitude.

SAITO: I think it is vital that we never forget our debt of gratitude to the SGI, which has taught us about the Daishonin's Buddhism. Those who look down on the organization while themselves benefiting through their association with it are only bringing on their own downfall.

SUDA: We need to "respectfully carry out all these things" (LS 22, 278) exactly as instructed by the mentor. This means putting the mentor's teaching into practice



AP

"How we define our relationship with the mentor is the foundation of everything. Organizational structures or positions are nothing but expedient means. It would be terrible if bureaucracy and formalism replaced the world of mentor and disciple in Buddhism."

in its entirety, without injecting any personal bias. This is the path of a disciple.

ENDO: People nevertheless tend to make excuses, saying things like, "My mentor said such and such, but I'm in such and such a situation, so I can't do exactly as he says," or "My mentor says this, but the reality is this."

IKEDA: That's like cutting the power line between one's mentor and oneself. To do so is to stop the flow of electricity, thereby preventing the manifestation of true strength.

The bond of mentor and disciple comes down to the awareness of the disciple. It's not about formality. Meeting the mentor on numerous occasions, or spending time at the mentor's side, or being entrusted with a leadership position—these are all form [rather than essence]. Even if someone is physically far away from the mentor, or has never had the opportunity to speak directly with the mentor, if they are aware of their role as a disciple and strive to put the mentor's words into practice, then the mentor-disciple relationship is alive and intact.

How we define our relationship with the mentor is the foundation of everything. Organizational structures or positions are nothing but expedient means. Without this understanding, there will be grave consequences. It would be terrible if the world of mentor and disciple of Buddhism were destroyed, replaced by bureaucracy and formalism.

Even if one's efforts go unnoticed or if one is only working behind the scenes, if one is practicing just as the mentor instructs, a profound bond exists between oneself and the mentor. On the other hand, if one deviates from this path, then no matter how much one may be in the spotlight, one's efforts will amount to nothing. Apart from the path of mentor and disciple, there is no Buddhism.

According to the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China, one reason why the Lotus Sutra is superior to other sutras is that it reveals that the original relationship of mentor and disciple is "far more profound in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra than that in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra and all pre-Lotus Sutra teachings." This is an extremely important doctrine.

This is the third of the "three standards of comparison explained in the Hokke Gengi (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra). While the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the theoretical teaching (or first half) of the Lotus Sutra reveal only the mentor-disciple relationship with Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment during his present lifetime in India, the essential teaching (or second half) of the Lotus Sutra reveals the mentor-disciple relationship with Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past.

The Lotus Sutra Is a Grand "Ceremony of Mentor and Disciple"

ENDO: One gets the strong impression that the "Entrustment" chapter, in contrast to the "Supernatural Powers" chapter (where transmission is made to Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth), is a "transmission to the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching." But the transmission in "Entrustment" is in fact a general transmission to all bodhisattvas, of both the theoretical and essential teachings.

IKEDA: That's right. And Superior Practices is the leader of the assembly in this chapter, too. While in a general sense it appears to be a transmission to the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching, on closer examination we find that Bodhisattva Superior Practices is the central figure. The true meaning of Shakyamuni patting them on the head three times is that of placing the "gem" of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo on their heads.

SUDA: This brings to mind the parable of the priceless gem in the topknot of the king described in the "Peaceful Practices" (fourteenth) chapter.

> After a battle, the wheel-turning king rewards those who have fought with various treasures. But there is one object with which he will not part, a priceless gem that he wears hidden in his topknot. Finally he takes the gem from his hair and gives it to the soldier who has fought most valiantly. The priceless gem represents the Lotus Sutra, which is the priceless treasure that the Buddha imparts (LS14, 207).

ENDO: In short, the "priceless gem" is the Gohonzon.

SAITO: The true intent of the "Entrustment" chapter is to exhort people to spread the Gohonzon.

IKEDA: Yes. It predicts the appearance of Nichiren Daishonin.

SAITO: The transmission to Superior Practices is referred to as the "transmission of the object of devotion" or the "transmission of the entity of the Law."

There are two transmissions of the Lotus Sutra. One is the transmission of the scrolls of the sutra — the transmission of the twenty-eight-chapter sutra for the sake of the bodhisattvas of the provisional teaching. The other is the transmission of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of time without beginning for the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the entity of the Law that is the object of devotion of all Buddhas, the entity of the Law found in the depths of the "Life Span" chapter.

IKEDA: Through the ceremony of transmission, the sutra identifies and praises most highly the "person" who will uphold this Gohonzon in the Latter Day of the Law. The Lotus Sutra is Shakyamuni's testament; he expounded it to explain who would lead humankind to enlightenment after his passing, and how they would accomplish this.

Specifically, this process begins in the "Teacher of the Law" (tenth) chapter with Shakyamuni's appeals to the gathered bodhisattvas, and with the appearance of the huge Treasure Tower in the "Treasure Tower" (eleventh) chapter. Shakyamuni then raises the entire multitude into the air and calls out to them in a booming voice:

> Who is capable of broadly preaching the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law in this saha world? Now is the time to do so, for before long the Thus Come One will enter nirvana. The Buddha wishes to entrust this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law to someone so that it might be preserved. (LS11, 176)

SAITO: The Ceremony in the Air continues from that point until its conclusion here in the "Entrustment" chapter.

SUDA: Shakyamuni, having heard the reply of his disciples that he need not worry about the future, instructs all Buddhas who have gathered there from the worlds in the ten directions to return to the lands from which they came. He then brings the Ceremony in the Air to an end with the words, "The tower of Many Treasures Buddha may also return to its former position" (LS22, 278).

ENDO: Seen in this light, it is clear that the reason for the Ceremony in the Air is transmission.

IKEDA: The Lotus Sutra in its entirety is a grand "ceremony of mentor and disciple." To miss this point is to completely misunderstand the Lotus Sutra.

The Dynamism of "Three Assemblies in Two Places"

ENDO: Incidentally, in extant Sanskrit texts of the Lotus Sutra, the chapter corresponding to "Entrustment" appears at the very end of the sutra.

IKEDA: We see the same in the Sho-hokke-kyo of Dharmaraksha (231–308?), another Chinese-language translation of the sutra.

ENDO: Some suggest that this is the original format of the sutra.

SAITO: I can see how the "Entrustment" chapter could logically conclude the sutra.

IKEDA: This topic requires some research.

SAITO: People have debated the chapter order since ancient times.

IKEDA: While this is certainly a matter for further investigation, I think it is clear that the current position of the "Entrustment" chapter adds a dramatic touch to the sutra. This is because it establishes the dynamism of the "three assemblies in two places."

SUDA: That's true. Prior to the Ceremony in the Air, the preaching takes place at the summit of Eagle Peak. After the Ceremony in the Air, the scene of preaching returns to Eagle peak. Hence, we have three assemblies in two places. If the "Entrustment" chapter concluded the entire sutra, we would have the less interesting structure of "two assemblies in two places"!

IKEDA: As we discussed previously [in connection with the "Introduction" (first) chapter], profound significance attaches to the three assemblies in two places. Through the overall framework of the Lotus Sutra, the move from the real world to the realm of eternal life (i.e., from Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air), and then back to the real world (from the Ceremony in the Air to Eagle Peak) indicates the rhythm of human revolution.

SUDA: We have a rhythm that alternates between two actions: that of "seeking the Way" and that of "guiding living beings."

ENDO: This is analogous to the rhythm of our daily lives in which we go from the reality of life to the practice of gongyo, and then back to the reality of life and society with renewed vigor.



CORBIS/Brian Leng

Mr. Endo comments: "In the Sanskrit text of the sutra, instead of patting the bodhisattvas on the head with his right hand, Shakyamuni holds their right hands in his. In other words, he shakes their hands. This is said to symbolize the idea that Shakyamuni, the mentor, does not have a "closed fist;" in other words, that he reveals all he knows without hiding anything."

SAITO: The concept of dedicating one's life (as expressed by the Sanskrit term *namas*) to Myoho-renge-kyo includes the sense of both "returning to" and taking action "based on" the Mystic Law.

IKEDA: Both of these are indeed essential, for only when our practice incorporates these two aspects are we truly devoting ourselves to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. To "return to" means to practice for oneself, while basing one's action on the Mystic Law means to practice for others.

It is when we fully integrate both the practice for oneself and the practice for others that we get in sync with the rhythm of the universe. These two ways of practice are like the two planetary motions of rotation and revolution. The more we advance in the "practice for oneself," the more our "practice for others" develops. And as our "practice for others" advances, our "practice for oneself" deepens.

President Toda often said with regard to propagation: "The key is to earnestly pray to the Gohonzon. There is no other way to spread this Buddhism!" We need to pray that the other person will be able to sense our sincere desire for them to become happy. We have to pray: "Please enable me to fulfill my mission in this life as an emissary of the Buddha!"

Buddhism is a battle. President Toda was very strict when it came to winning or losing. During athletic events, Mr. Toda would go to the losing team and give them some words of advice. Somehow, that team would often end up winning.

But regarding shakubuku, he once said: "There may be some people who have a hard time doing shakubuku, perhaps because they are awkward with words or simply too good-natured. And that's just fine but practice joyfully nevertheless.

"There are those who will nevertheless tell them, 'You absolutely have to do shakubuku!' But if someone just can't do it, scolding them will not help in the least. If the person is appreciative to be able to practice to the Gohonzon, that is enough.

"The important thing is that the person be encouraged so that they can truly understand faith. When they really grasp the greatness of the Gohonzon, they will naturally tell others about the practice. And that itself is shakubuku."[3]

SUDA: That makes sense.

IKEDA: We need to enjoy our efforts to carry out propagation, keeping a generous spirit and an open mind. And we should do so smiling brightly with pride and appreciation, aware that there is no higher honor than telling others even a few words about the Mystic Law during this lifetime.

If people are instructed to introduce a specific number of people, on the other hand, they will only feel burdened. It will cause them suffering . Everyone will feel heavy, which will only hinder the kosen-rufu movement!

A leader's role is to enable everyone to enjoy their practice. But most leaders do just the opposite. We need to give people courage and hope. We need to applaud and encourage them with an open heart. It is of course important to set goals for ourselves. When we then pray for all members without exception to receive great benefit, our spirit will absolutely be conveyed.

To enable people to receive immense benefit, we must calmly discuss faith with them, saying, "Let's do our best together!" and "Let's enjoy vibrant health and live long lives!" and "Let's usher in a grand new century together!" When members encourage one another in this fashion, each person grows naturally, as does the entire organization.

Just praising the Mystic Law to others is itself splendid shakubuku. Whether or not the person decides to take faith is a separate issue. By simply talking to people about the Mystic Law, we receive benefit without fail.

It is the same with sports or playing the piano in that by making continuous effort, one's ability develops in time. Likewise, in doing shakubuku, if we tell people about this Buddhism whenever the opportunity arises, our good fortune from doing so will protect our family and our descendants.

Those who tenaciously carry out the practice of shakubuku develop a foundation of good fortune as solid and strong as concrete. No devil can destroy it.



CORBIS/MICHAEL POLE

President Ikeda states: "Just praising the Mystic Law to others is itself splendid *shakubuku*. By simply talking to people about the Mystic Law we receive benefit. It is the same with sports in that by making continuous efforts, one's ability develops."

Those who avoid the practice of propagation, however, no matter how high their organizational position, are as superficial as plated metal and at the crucial moment they will fall apart.

SUDA: So the rhythm of the Lotus Sutra consists of both practice for oneself and practice for others.

ENDO: I can really see now the significance of having the "Entrustment" chapter follow the "Supernatural Powers" chapter.

By Helping Others, We Help Ourselves

IKEDA: By helping other people become happy, we too become happy. This is also a tenet of psychology. How can those suffering in the depths of hell, who have lost the will to live, get back on their feet? Merely thinking about one's own problems more often than not causes one to fall even deeper into despair. However, by going to someone who is also suffering and offering them a hand, a person is able to regain the will to live. Taking action out of concern for others enables us to heal our own life.

SAITO: By helping others, we help ourselves. This indicates the inseparability of self and others. In that sense, when trying to introduce another person to Buddhism, it is important that we humbly appreciate them.

ENDO: It is impossible to know just how much a parent's will to live is influenced by their anticipation of their child's growth and development.

IKEDA: These days, people seem to think that working for the well-being of others is somehow a lost cause. We are living in a world where even the mention of charity and compassion sometimes elicits cool derision. It is hard to imagine just how much suffering such arrogance is causing society.

An American missionary is said to have once asked Mahatma Gandhi: "What religion do you practice and what form do you think religion will take in India in the future?" How did Gandhi respond to this rather difficult religious discussion that had been thrust upon him?

There happened to be two sick people in the room. Pointing in their direction, Gandhi replied simply: "My religion is serving and working for the people. I am not preoccupied with the future."[4]

For Gandhi, politics was also a matter of service, of helping the most destitute. It's all about action. Without bodhisattva practice, there is no religion. There is no Buddhism. Nor is there genuine politics or education.

SAITO: Several years ago, a scholar offered an explanation for the stagnation of Japanese society. He noted that until Japan's defeat in 1945, the emperor system had served the function of "religion," in that it provided social standards and a sense of national identity. After the war, in place of the emperor system, "Marxism and its intellectual progeny" fulfilled the role of religion. During the period of rapid economic growth of the 1960s, he argued, Japan's sole desire to catch up with and surpass the advanced countries of the West became the country's new religion. That religion came to an end with Japan's success in becoming an economic giant in the 1980s and 90s. He concluded that unless Japan finds another new religion, it will inevitably decline into a society devoid of all standards.[5]

ENDO: Japan is certainly lacking in standards. It feels



CORBIS/Yevgeny Khaldei

President Ikeda states: "I met the Russian novelist Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–84) when I visited Moscow (in 1974). He told me, 'The longer we live, the more difficult it becomes to remember the painful experiences. As time passes, the colors of the events in our life fade and everything from the happiest times to the saddest starts to disappear from memory.' "

as if our society is coming apart at the seams and that anything could happen at any moment.

IKEDA: This is the tragedy of Japan, a country where people don't pay serious attention to religion. It is for this reason that we have a tremendous mission.

The Daishonin says, "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all" (WND, 851). To focus only on the "treasures of the storehouse"—the economy—will not improve the economic situation. Things may improve for a while, but this will ultimately not contribute to the welfare of society.

It is people, it is the heart, that matters most. The heart determines everything. Shakyamuni was the "great giver of gifts," but propagation of the Mystic Law is to give people the ultimate "treasures of the heart." When we possess "treasures of the heart," when our lives overflow with good fortune and wisdom, we are naturally endowed with abundant "treasures of the body" and "treasures of the storehouse."

SAITO: I think this is the most important point to be aware of for the twenty-first century.

IKEDA: What is left when our lives end? It is the memories that we have engraved in our hearts and minds.

I met the Russian novelist Mikhail Sholokhov (1905–84) when I visited Moscow (in 1974). He told me, "The longer we live, the more difficult it becomes to remember the painful experiences. As time passes, the colors of the events in our life fade and everything from the happiest times to the saddest starts to disappear from memory."

After taking in a breath, with a big smile he continued: "When you turn seventy, Mr. Ikeda, you will know that what I am saying is the truth." His words conveyed a wealth of feeling. Everything passes. Both the soaring joys and crushing sorrows fade away like a dream.

I would like to state, however, that the memory of having lived one's life to the fullest never disappears. The memories of having worked wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu in particular are eternal.

"In my lifetime, how many people have I helped become happy? How many people can say that it is because of me that they know true happiness?" In the end, is this not all that remains?

The Daishonin says, "Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world" (WND, 64). I think this could be taken as the conclusion to President Toda's remark, "What if I were to die today?"

To be continued

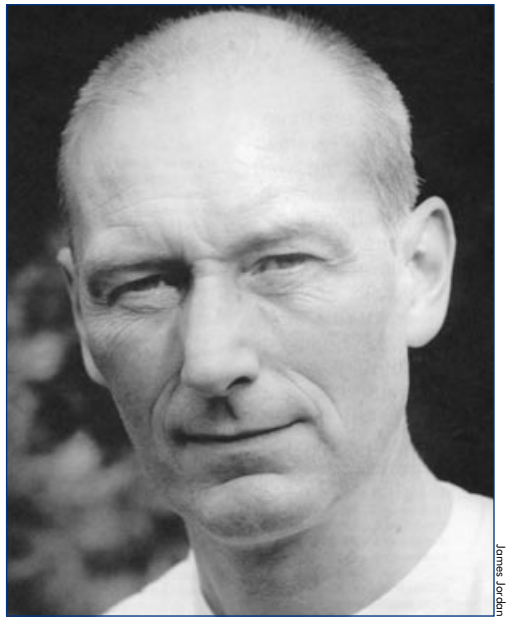
Footnotes

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. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1987), vol. 10, p. 151.
3. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, p. 429.
4. *Tatsuo Morimoto, Ganji to Tagoru* (Gandhi and Tagore) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1995), p. 116–17.
5. From an article by Takamitsu Sawa in the magazine *Sekai* (World), November 1995.

Exploring the Hidden Depths

By Phil Becque, United Kingdom

I was the third child born to an orphaned mother. Underlining just how pervasive karmic tendencies can be between close relatives, my mother too was to die, leaving behind a young family. She died from cancer at the age of 33. I was 3 years old, so I have no real recollection of her. She was reportedly very calm and level-headed. If it is true that qualities pass from parents to their offspring, then I probably inherited those qualities from her.



James Jordan

In any event, I seem to have accepted the loss of my natural mother so completely that I was only dimly l aware that I had an emptiness where other people had a fullness. Other children would express very deep emotions about their mothers. None of their feelings resonated in me; I didn't seem to have the emotional equipment to register them. I must have seemed somewhat cold and detached from others as I grew up.

My father remarried when I was 4. I can't say that I liked my stepmother at first, but as I got to around 14 years old, we would talk about our homespun philosophy, centering on the premature deaths of her first husband and my mother. As a result, we became much closer.

I left school at 16 to start work in the electronics industry. I had a handful of close friends at that time with whom I would go on holiday. Tragically, my best friend died when we were in our eighteenth year, a mere eight weeks after contracting a particularly virulent form of cancer. I had been unable to register real sorrow before; now I made up for lost time. I was thrown into the pit of hell. I was sharing a flat with two other young men and had to pay frequent visits to the toilet, where I would sob uncontrollably. I couldn't bear to express or share this emotion with anybody else. I was going to have to understand death later. It's difficult to say how or why I pulled out of this nose dive but when I did, I reasoned that I, too, could be dead within eight weeks, or even tomorrow, so there was no point in holding back. I became a rampant hedonist, getting into as much sex and drugs as possible. I can't say that I used women any more than they used me, but I can cetainly say that I didn't understand them. It was 1970, so this was very much in tune with the times. To further my hedonist leanings, I started working in the music business. Somewhat ironically, while I was trying to trash my life, my karma to encounter strange new life-enhancing philosophies was really taking off. The music studios where I was working attracted all sorts, so before long I had bumped into the *I Ching*, transcendental meditation and, finally, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I have to say that each one prepared me for the next, so they were all valuable at the time.

I knew I had unfinished business as far as my deceased friend was concerned, though for quite a while I couldn't put my finger on what it might be. Chanting about this, I revisited my feelings about my friend. I remembered going to his house to pay my last respects. I was shown upstairs to his bedroom where his body now lay; so motionless. I couldn't quite take in the stillness; it was as if his body was absorbing my sensations. I felt as if there was a gaping vacuum inside my chest.

An unknowable emptiness—is this what death is? I looked at his face—it was quite different from how I remembered. He was very much thinner of course, as a result of the cancer, but the difference was not related to that. Though still obviously recognizable, he looked



completely different — not like a sleeping person. I couldn't take it in at the time but now, as I chanted, something struck me very forcibly. All of the characteristics that had made him a person, all of his artistic nature, his sense of humour, his energy — all were gone. But where? Can everything that makes a person what they are vanish without trace? No, there had to be more.

As I continued to practice, many of the elements in my life that had so confounded me now seemed to be gaining some sort of order. Nichiren Daishonin says, "...hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1137). Likewise, some psychologists say that all the relationships we build are based on the ones we initially forge with our parents.

I came to realize that for me, the most significant of these was my relationship with my natural mother. It was not limited to, or restricted by, the physical dimension. Maybe I was carrying around inside me a sort of latent subconscious soup. If so, I could discover more about it at any time — not necessarily of my choosing but by some accidental confluence, on a deeper level, rising to the surface in the way that an aquifer gives rise to many fresh-water springs.

One night when I was chanting about my mother, I had the most fantastic realization. Simply, I deeply resented the fact that she had abandoned me! It didn't matter to me that at the time of her death it was beyond her power not to abandon me. This resentment, this "disregard," was what I had been carrying around for the best part of twenty-five years: a subterranean cavern of foul water and bitterness. It had affected many of my actions in the most unhelpful way. But if I was consumed with gnawing resentment, there was a very good reason.

For a long time, I had imagined that I had a lot of empty emotional space where others had the full set. To some extent this was acquired from my environment in the form of excuses that others would make on my behalf, or that I would adopt for myself: "Ah, his mother died when he was 3, so it's not surprising that he should see things this way."

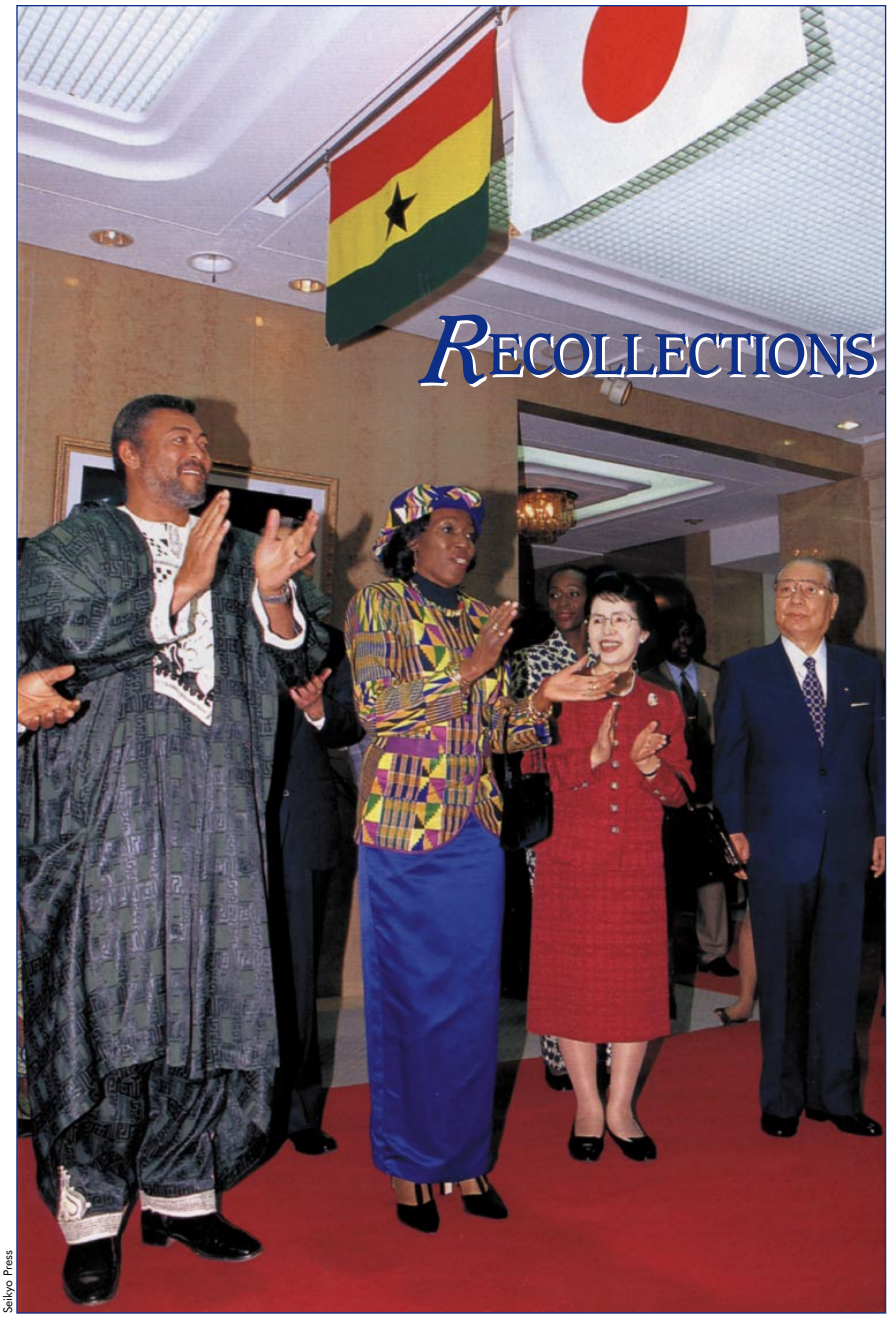
"The deeper the resentment I felt, the greater the value I ascribed to the ideal relationship of mother and child. Not only had I been deprived of this, I also felt unable to repay my debt of gratitude directly to my mother."

The deeper the resentment I felt, the greater the value I ascribed to the ideal relationship of mother and child. Not only had I been deprived of this, I also felt unable to repay my debt of gratitude directly to my mother. After all, she had given birth to me. Fortunately, as I realized while chanting, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the direct route — the life-link even beyond death — that allows us to say "thank you," or whatever we need to express, in order to resolve our disquiet and regain our equilibrium. In the same moment that I discovered that aquifer of foul water, I transformed and connected with a deeper self. I had changed poison into medicine. This was a natural process. If I could do it, so could anyone else.

I chanted very sincerely that evening. Even now, the memory of it is enough to propel me forward. Through chanting, I have re-established my relationship with my mother and have been able to express my gratitude to her. In the process of doing so, l have overcome the subconscious resentment that poisoned my life and relationships. And so I can say with certainty that we can change the effects of our karma, just as Nichiren Daishonin tells us.



Courtesy UK Express



Seikyo Press

Recollections of My Meetings with Leading World Figures

President Jerry John Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana

Jerry John Rawlings, president of the Republic of Ghana and First Lady Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings respond to a Ghanian folk song by Soka University's Pan-African Friendship Society, December, 1997, at the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Tokyo.

By SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

I have always said to those around me, "We must learn from Africa, take a lesson from the African people." Nothing is more obstructive to friendship than arrogance.

When I first met President Jerry John Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana, I greeted him by saying, "I welcome the 'Robin Hood' of Ghana to Japan!" He responded with a warm smile.

Our first meeting took place in Tokyo in October 1993. President Rawlings was only 46 at the time. Twelve years earlier, in 1981, he had assumed national leadership to put his country back on track to democracy. Over the years, he has taken stringent measures to stamp out corruption in the government, bureaucracy and armed forces. He frankly states that he has zero tolerance for corruption and graft, because he knows that the country

belongs to the people of Ghana. It belongs to the ordinary people, to those who labor under the hot sun, to the fishermen who brave the rough seas, to the women who keep its markets bustling with activity, to the truck drivers who deliver the necessities of daily life. He vowed to restore power to the people of Ghana.

President Rawlings knew that a small, corrupt, privileged class could rob the nation of its very future, and he was determined not to compromise in his struggle. This champion of truth and justice, who fought against corrupt and self-serving officials, came to be compared to the legendary hero of Old England, Robin Hood.

I heard that President Rawlings maintains a very simple lifestyle, and is so devoted to his job that he keeps an army cot in his office so that he can sleep there when his work continues into the early morning. Emphasizing the importance of improving his country's environment and sanitation, he pulls on high rubber boots and grabs a shovel and cleans out the gutters of city streets, making his staff do the same. This is not some grandstand play for popularity. He wants to show the people, through his own actions, what needs to be done.

He is so strongly opposed to any corruption or injustice, and has such personal integrity, that those who wish to exploit their power for personal gain cannot long remain in his company. I have heard that he has sternly disciplined several of his staff members for ethical lapses.

I have long said that the twenty-first century will be the "Century of Africa." For three centuries, various colonial powers plundered, pillaged, murdered and wrought abominable destruction in Africa. The scars are still fresh. How can we ring in a truly new century unless those who have undergone the most painful suffering attain supreme happiness? There can be no dawn of a new age of humanity until the people of Africa find that happiness.

I spoke of my bright expectations for Africa, noting how the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), cherished an ardent hope that Ghana's future heroes would cut through the suffocating mist of inhuman discrimination and lead the people of Ghana into an open valley of light. I said I am sure that this beautiful wish is now being realized in Ghana. My dream is to see the dawning of the African century with my own eyes.

President Rawlings thanked me for my goodwill toward Ghana, saying he keenly appreciated my concern for its future. He then went on to state that whereas President Nkrumah had fought against colonialism, the struggle today was against a new type of colonialism — in other words, while the chains had disappeared from people's arms and legs, they still shackled their hearts and minds. This simple statement revealed the profound humanism of the president's beliefs. These words could also just as easily be applied to contemporary Japan.

President Rawlings noted that there are two kinds of education — education that tames people and education that liberates them. Education forced on people from above, the cramming of information into students' minds, he asserted, only prepares them to be robots who meekly obey authority without questioning. Unless education causes the inner potential of the student to flower, unless it promotes development from the inside out, it will only produce machines, not fully realized human beings, he said.

I met President Rawlings again four years later, in December 1997. His wife, First Lady Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, accompanied him. After arriving at Narita Airport, they came directly to see us. They first stopped at the "Ghana at 40" exhibition at the Min-On Culture Center and then at the Seikyo Shimbun building, where the couple and their entourage were greeted with a choral presentation by members of the Soka University Pan-African Friendship Society and other youth representatives.

By then President Rawlings was serving his second term in office. His passion and humanism burned as bright as ever. On that occasion he stressed the importance of reenergizing the people. In the past, he said, the people of Ghana had been treated as machines and left empty and hollow. Far too often, he noted, nations tend to establish various social structures and then force their citizens to fit into them; they tend to enslave the people and take away their power. But that is wrong, he insisted, maintaining that the people, not the nation, should wield power. The people are the leading players of society and it is they who have the right to decide society's future. Yet, he observed, so many people are at a loss as to what to do or which way to turn. This is what he wants to change, he declared.

In his passion for these ideas, the words spilled forth with tremendous force. He was urging the people to rise and rid themselves in one clean sweep of the old, corrupt established order.

I offered my support and encouragement. "The Soka Gakkai was once scorned as a gathering of the poor and the sick," I said, "but I have always been proud of our



CORBIS/Thelma Sanders

Both President Rawlings and the first lady have devoted themselves wholeheartedly to drawing out the potential of the Ghanaian people. Mrs. Rawlings shares her husband's commitment to their nation. She declares that the people will only truly triumph when women rise up and take their rightful place in society.

organization. I have striven all these years in my endeavors absolutely confident in the belief that working with the people, for the people, is the right way to live."

President Rawlings was an air force pilot, and he led his comrades in 1979 in toppling the corrupt military dictatorship. After the uprising, he promptly handed over the reigns of power to a new popularly elected civilian president and government. Unfortunately, the new administration was plagued by the same old corruption and misgovernment. Several attempts were made on the life of Ghana's "Robin Hood." And fighting between rival groups seeking to seize control of the country continued to wrack Ghana.

Flight Lieutenant Rawlings knew that his country's future hung in the balance. He traveled all over Ghana in his old Datsun, talking to the people. "We must make the welfare of the people our central concern," he urged, as he traveled from village to village without rest. Then in 1981, he led an effort to bring down the corrupt government and set about rebuilding his nation. From that moment on, Ghana has astonished the world with its economic growth.

Both the president and the first lady have devoted themselves wholeheartedly to drawing out the potential of the Ghanaian people. President Rawlings declared that leaders who care only for the trappings of power accomplish nothing. He pointed out that while many people think that the job of Ghana's first lady is to travel around the country accepting bouquets, nothing in fact could be further from the truth.

Mrs. Rawlings shares her husband's commitment to their nation. She declares that the people will only truly triumph when women rise up and take their rightful place in society. Women, she says, are now awakening to the fact that they have taken a backseat for too long. Mrs. Rawlings launched a grass-roots movement based on the belief that women must take responsibility for society's future and that ordinary women working together have the power to change society. Her goals are to teach women to read and write, to equip them with skills to work in small businesses, to help them learn how to run their homes as efficiently as possible, and to provide day-care centers where they can leave their children while they study or work.



CORBIS/Arvind Garg

The Indian National Park in Ghana. The West African republic is situated on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Although one of the smallest countries on the continent, it is among the leading African nations as it was among the first to achieve independence from colonial rule in 1957.

President Rawlings is unstinting in his praise for his wife: "I couldn't have accomplished what I have without her. In my country, we say that behind every great man is a great woman. My wife is so busy that my daughter says, 'Behind every great man there is an exhausted woman!'" After we all laughed heartily, I added, "Why don't we just say that 'Behind every great man is an even greater woman'?" We all laughed again and reaffirmed the bright future of a society that respects women and their rights.

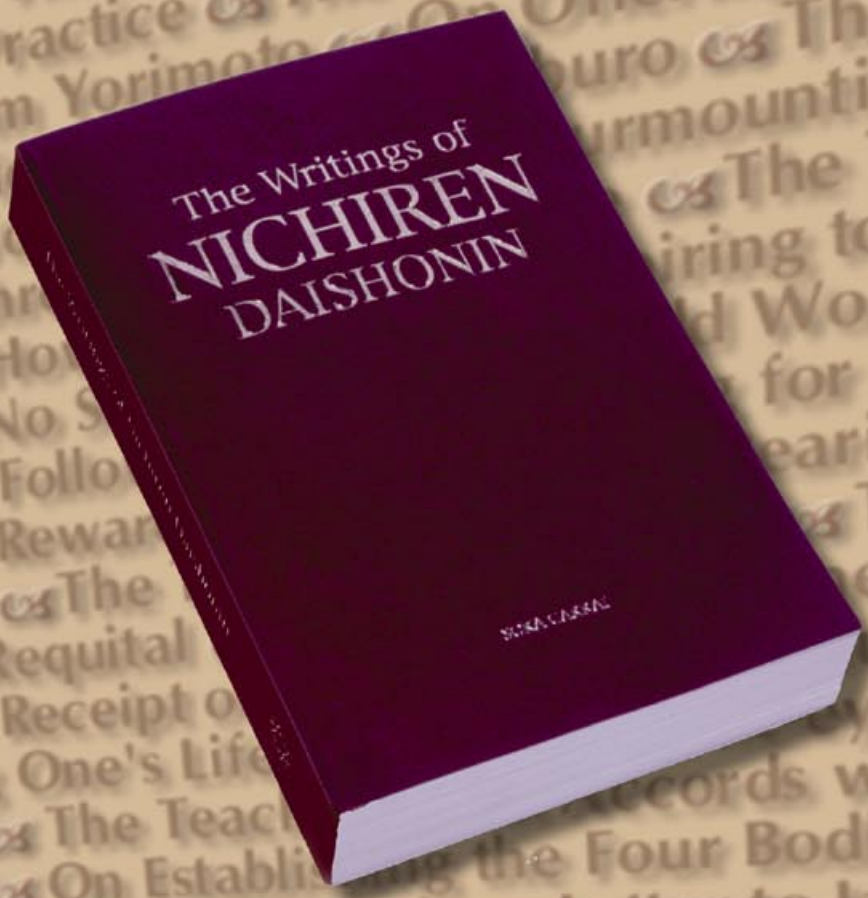
When President Rawlings visited Japan in 1993, he expressed a special wish to visit Kagoshima in Kyushu. There he wanted to pay his respects to the parents of a member of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) who had met an accidental death in Ghana the previous year. He told the parents what a valuable contribution their son had made to the African nation. Unfortunate as his death was, the young man had left behind a great deal in terms of the know-how and technical skills he had imparted. The people of Ghana would do their best to show that the young man's efforts and his death had not been in vain, the president said. Their son had contributed something that money could not buy; he had been a wonderful young man, and he had done a superb job. The president expressed his most profound gratitude, and the young man's parents appreciated his sincere gesture.

While President Rawlings can be so kind and considerate on the one hand, he firmly believes that one must also speak one's mind plainly. When he does speak, he gives voice to what is really on the people's minds. Unlike so-called professional politicians, he is straightforward and honest.

When speaking to a former president of a country that had in the past expelled all Ghanaians from its territory, he brought up the issue and confronted him directly, saying that he could never forget the cruel manner in which his compatriots had been treated. He does not "make deals." For the sake of his comrades, he speaks out, he fights, at the risk of his very life.

President Rawlings is a person of character and integrity—he has cast off the chains that restrain the heart and mind. ❑

One Volume Now Available



Updated translations of all 172 works found in the Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, combined into one elegant volume. Arranged chronologically, with a comprehensive glossary and appendices.

Now Available at SGI-USA Bookstores, or from the SGI-USA Mail Order Center:
8811 Aviation Blvd. / Inglewood, CA 90301 / Phone: (800) 626-1311 / Email: sgiusamoc@aol.com

Living Buddhism
Periodicals Postage Paid
at Santa Monica, CA 90401
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
Return to:
SGI-USA Subscription Section
606 Wilshire Boulevard
Santa Monica, CA 90401

living BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION JANUARY 2000

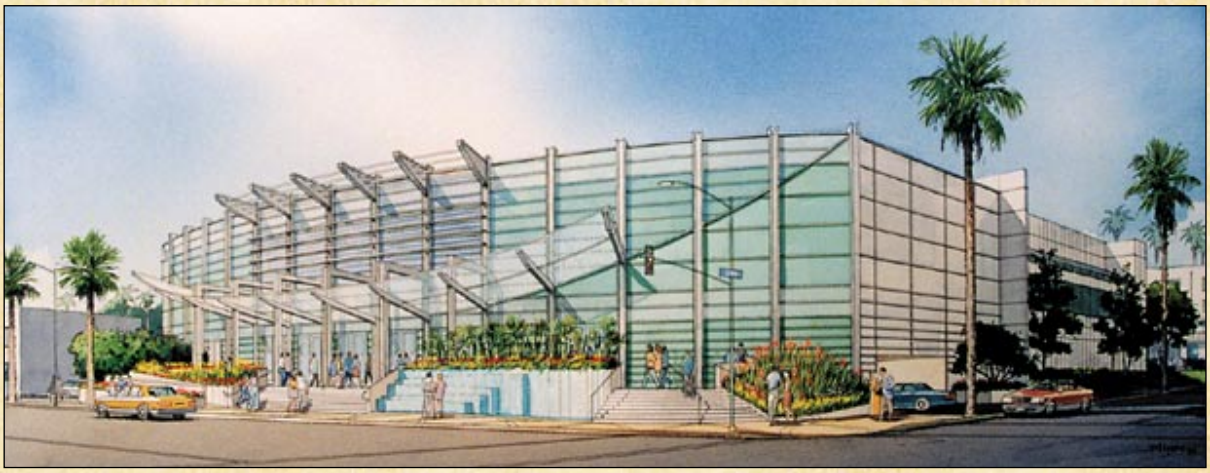


SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NEW YEAR'S POEM
Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Community and the World

BUDDHISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE
Buddha Nature, Karma & Dependent Origination

BUDDHIST CONCEPTS
The Three Realms

PRESIDENT JERRY JOHN RAWLINGS OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
A Leader for the Future of the African Continent



An architect's drawing of renovations to the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium scheduled to be opened May 3, 2001.

What is the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?

Living Buddhism is the study journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the inseparable link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life.

Through their Buddhist faith and practice, our members aim to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to create value, to live without fear, to take responsibility for their circumstances, to care for their families and to live with compassion for others.

What we believe...

Our core philosophy is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation.

The Buddhist tradition...

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlightenment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated in the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

In the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the truth hidden in the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren Buddhism, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. By putting their lives in rhythm with this Law, individuals can unlock their hidden potential — the Buddha nature — and achieve creative harmony with the environment. Nichiren Buddhism is a vehicle of individual empowerment — that is, individuals have within themselves, the power to transform the inevitable sufferings of life into happiness and to be a positive influence in the community.

The SGI Heritage...

The SGI organization has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Here he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings. The term soka gakkai (value-creation society) was first used by Makiguchi in 1930 when he founded the lay organization. During World War II, Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda were imprisoned for their opposition to the war. Makiguchi died in prison within eighteen months at the age of 73. After the war, Toda rebuilt the organization and it achieved remarkable growth until his death in 1958. On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to its present membership of 12 million in 128 countries.

Based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda has founded the Soka School System which includes universities in Japan and the United States. He is also the founder of the Toda Peace Institute, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Fuji Art Museum, and more. He is the author of numerous books that have been translated into many languages and has received world-wide recognition for his peace efforts.