

**BACK TO THE BASICS  
THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF WOMEN  
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As women, we have come a long way from the days of Shakyamuni's provisional teachings, which denied enlightenment to women. Imagine being told that you could not attain enlightenment because you were a woman!

Joyfully, this situation changed when Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra, his true intent, and discarded the provisional teachings. These earlier teachings were incomplete, lacking the principle that all beings inherently possess the potential for Buddhahood and the wisdom to realize it.

The teaching that women share the same potential as men for Buddhahood first appears in the "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra with the dragon king's daughter attaining enlightenment without changing her form. Moreover, in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter, there are further predictions of nuns attaining Buddhahood.

In fact, the Lotus Sutra is spilling over with the joy of opening the path of the Buddha Way to all living beings, including women.

SGI President Ikeda explains: "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging addresses everyone he encounters, men and women alike, with the promise: 'You are all practicing the bodhisattva way, and are certain to attain Buddhahood' (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 267). Viewed in its entirety, the Lotus Sutra takes it for granted that there is no distinction between men and women in attaining Buddhahood" (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 88).

Nichiren Daishonin even further elaborates the Lotus Sutra's teaching of non-discrimination, clarifying the profound enlightenment of many of his women believers. One such follower was Nichimyo Shonin, the mother of Oto Gozen. In "Letter to the Mother of Oto Gozen," the Daishonin praises the strong faith of Nichimyo Shonin, who traveled from Kamakura to Sado to visit the Daishonin carrying her infant daughter. The journey took about three weeks, traversing treacherous mountains where bandits lurked and crossing raging seas where pirates lied in wait.

He writes to her: "Since you revere the Lotus Sutra you are a woman who is certain to become a Buddha.... Above all, your having come here, even though you are a woman, is an expression of your profound spirit of faith" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1222). Elsewhere, he praises her as "the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra among the women of Japan" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 325).

As women in the SGI, we have left the days of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings far behind. We are living in an unprecedented age. Women can become astronauts, university chancellors, senators, congresswomen — we have a multitude of opportunities. Of course, our situation is not yet perfect, but we are on the way to creating true equality in society.

As far as the Buddhist teachings are concerned, equality is definitely ours. In "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," the Daishonin states: "There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (WND, 385).