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## **The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin — Nichiren Daishonin’s Life and Teachings**

### **1. The Life of Nichiren Daishonin**

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82) dedicated his life to propagating the Mystic Law—*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*—motivated by an unwavering commitment and compassion to eradicate suffering and enable all people to reveal their innate Buddhahood. Hardship and persecution dogged him throughout his life as he sought to address and put an end to the evils obstructing people’s happiness.

#### **Early Years**

The Daishonin was born on February 16, 1222, in the coastal hamlet of Kataumi in Tojo Village of Nagasa District in Awa Province (part of present-day Kamogawa City in Chiba Prefecture). He was the son of commoners, his family earning its livelihood from fishing.

At the age of 12, he began his schooling at a nearby temple called Seicho-ji. During this period, he made a vow to become the wisest person in Japan (see “The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei,” WND-1, 175). He sought to gain the wisdom of the Buddhist teachings for overcoming the fundamental sufferings of life and death, and thereby lead his parents and all people to genuine happiness.

At the age of 16, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings, he formally entered the priesthood at Seicho-ji, receiving instruction from Dozen-bo, a senior priest there. It was shortly thereafter, the Daishonin writes, that he attained “a jewel of wisdom as bright as the morning star” (“The Tripitaka Master

Shan-wu-wei,” WND-1, 176). This can be interpreted to mean wisdom regarding the Mystic Law that is the essence of Buddhism.

The Daishonin then travelled to Kamakura, Kyoto, Nara, and other centres of Buddhist learning, carefully studying the sutras and commentaries housed at leading temples such as Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school, and familiarizing himself with the core doctrines of each school. He confirmed that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost among all the Buddhist sutras and that the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to which he had awakened is the essence of the sutra and provides the means for freeing all people from suffering on the most fundamental level. He also awoke to his mission to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the teaching for people in the Latter Day of the Law to attain enlightenment.

*[Note: The Latter Day of the Law refers to the age when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha lose their power to lead people to enlightenment. It was generally regarded to mean the period two thousand years after the Buddha’s passing. In Japan, it was believed that this age began in the year 1052.]*

## **The Declaration of the Establishment of His Teaching**

Through his studies at leading Buddhist centres, the Daishonin confirmed his mission to spread the Mystic Law—Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—and the means by which to do so. He embarked on his struggle knowing that he would inevitably encounter great opposition and persecution.

On April 28, 1253, around noon at Seicho-ji temple, he refuted the Nembutsu and other Buddhist teachings of his day as erroneous and proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be the sole correct Buddhist teaching for leading all people in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. This is known as the declaration of the establishment of his teaching. He was 32 years old. From around this time, he adopted the name Nichiren (literally, Sun Lotus).

The Daishonin’s denunciation of the Nembutsu doctrines on the occasion of declaring his teaching enraged Tojo Kagenobu, who was the local steward (an official of the Kamakura government who had the powers of law enforcement and tax collection) and an ardent Nembutsu believer. The latter planned an armed attack on the Daishonin, but the Daishonin narrowly managed to escape beforehand.

The Daishonin then made his way to Kamakura, the seat of the military government. There, he took up residence in a small dwelling in Nagoe (at a site that later came to be known as Matsubagayatsu) and embarked in earnest on propagating his teaching. While refuting the error of the Nembutsu and Zen teachings, which had

gained wide influence among the people of Kamakura, the Daishonin spread the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

It was during this early period of propagation that such well-known disciples as Toki Jonin, Shijo Kingo (Shijo Yorimoto), and Ikegami Munenaka converted to his teaching.

## **Submitting the Treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” and Encountering Persecution**

In the period when the Daishonin began his propagation efforts in Kamakura, Japan had been experiencing a series of natural disasters and calamities, including extreme weather, severe earthquakes, famine, fires, and epidemics. In particular, the devastating earthquake of the Shoka era, which struck the Kamakura region in August 1257, destroyed many homes and important buildings in Kamakura.

This disaster prompted the Daishonin to write the treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” (see WND-1, 6–26) to clarify the fundamental cause of people’s suffering and set forth the means by which people could eradicate such suffering. On July 16, 1260, he submitted this treatise to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent of the Kamakura military government, who was still effectively the country’s most powerful leader. It was the first time that the Daishonin remonstrated with the authorities. (This is known as his first remonstrance with the government authorities.)

In this treatise, he declared that the cause of the successive calamities lay with people’s slander of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their reliance on erroneous doctrines. The most serious root cause, he asserted, was the Nembutsu teaching popularized in Japan by the priest Honen (1133–1212).

The Daishonin urged people to discontinue their reliance on such erroneous teachings and embrace faith in the correct teaching of Buddhism without delay, for this would ensure the realization of a peaceful and prosperous land. Continued reliance on erroneous teachings, he warned, would inevitably result in the country encountering internal strife and foreign invasion—the two calamities of the “three calamities and seven disasters” yet to occur.

*[Note: The “three calamities and seven disasters” are described in various sutras, and differ slightly depending on the source. The three calamities include high grain prices or inflation (especially that caused by famine), warfare, and pestilence. The seven disasters include natural disasters such as extraordinary changes of the stars and planets and unseasonable storms.]*

However, the ruling authorities ignored the Daishonin's sincere remonstrations and, with their tacit approval, Nembutsu followers began plotting to persecute the Daishonin.

One evening shortly after the Daishonin submitted his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," a group of Nembutsu believers stormed his dwelling in an attempt to take his life. (This is called the Matsubagayatsu Persecution.) However, the Daishonin escaped unharmed. After this incident, he left Kamakura for a short period.

On May 12, 1261, the following year, having returned to Kamakura sometime earlier, the Daishonin was arrested by the authorities and sentenced to exile in Ito of Izu Province. (This is called the Izu Exile.) After being pardoned from exile in February 1263, the Daishonin made his way back to Kamakura.

In 1264, he returned to his home province of Awa to visit his ailing mother. On November 11 of that year, the Daishonin and a group of his followers were on their way to the residence of another follower named Kudo in Amatsu (also in Awa Province). At a place called Matsubara in Tojo Village, they were ambushed by a band of armed men under the command of the local steward, Tojo Kagenobu. In the attack, the Daishonin sustained an injury to his forehead and a broken left hand. One of his followers was killed at the site. (This is called the Komatsubara Persecution.)

### **The Tatsunokuchi Persecution and "Casting Off the Transient and Revealing the True"**

In 1268, an official letter arrived in Kamakura from the Mongol empire demanding that Japan become one of its tributaries and threatening military attack should the demand be rejected. With this development, the danger of the calamity of foreign invasion befalling the nation became very real.

This spurred the Daishonin to write eleven letters of remonstrations to top government officials, including the regent Hojo Tokimune, and the heads of major Buddhist temples in Kamakura. In the letters, he stated that the impending danger of an invasion was just as he had predicted in his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," and he expressed the hope that the priests of the various Buddhist schools would meet with him in an official public debate.

Neither the government leaders nor the religious establishment heeded the Daishonin's appeal. Rather, viewing the Daishonin's community of believers as a threat to the existing power structure, the government began to take repressive measures against it.

Around this time, True Word priests were enjoying growing influence, the government having charged them with the mission of conducting prayers for the defeat of Mongol forces. Ryokan (Ninsho) of Gokuraku-ji temple in Kamakura, a priest of the True Word Precepts school, was also becoming more influential through his connections with powerful government figures.

The Daishonin fearlessly began to refute the errors of the established Buddhist schools that were exerting a negative influence on the people and society as a whole.

In the summer of 1271, in response to a prolonged drought, the government ordered Ryokan to pray for rain. Learning of this, the Daishonin made a proposal to Ryokan: If Ryokan should succeed in producing rain within seven days, the Daishonin would become his disciple; but if he failed to do so, then Ryokan should place his faith in the Lotus Sutra.

When his prayers failed to produce any rain after seven days had passed, Ryokan asked for a seven-day extension. Again no rain fell, but fierce gales arose instead. Ryokan had clearly lost the challenge.

Rather than honestly acknowledge defeat, however, Ryokan grew even more hostile toward the Daishonin. He contrived to bring accusations against the Daishonin by filing a complaint with the government in the name of a Nembutsu priest who had close ties with him. He also used his influence with top government officials as well as their wives to have the Daishonin persecuted by the authorities.

Although Ryokan was widely respected among the populace as a devout and virtuous priest, he enjoyed the trappings of power and privilege and colluded with government officials toward self-serving ends.

On September 10 of the same year (1271), the Daishonin was summoned by the government and interrogated by Hei no Saemon-no-jo Yoritsuna (also known as Taira no Yoritsuna), the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself). The Daishonin admonished him and emphasized the proper attitude for the nation's rulers based on the correct teaching of Buddhism.

Two days later, on September 12, Hei no Saemon-no-jo, leading a group of armed soldiers, conducted a raid on the Daishonin's dwelling and arrested him, treating him as if he were a traitor. On that occasion, the Daishonin strongly remonstrated with Hei no Saemon-no-jo, warning that if he toppled him, "the pillar of Japan," the calamities of internal strife and foreign invasion would descend on the land. (The events on September 10 and 12 marked his second remonstrance with the government authorities.)

Late that night, the Daishonin was suddenly taken by armed soldiers to the beach at Tatsunokuchi, on the outskirts of Kamakura. This was at the directive of Hei



no Saemon-no-jo and others who conspired to have the Daishonin secretly beheaded there. Just as the executioner raised his sword to strike, however, a brilliant orb of light burst forth from the direction of the nearby island of Enoshima, shooting northwest across the sky. The soldiers were terrified, and the attempt to kill the Daishonin had to be abandoned. (This is called the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.)

This persecution had extremely important significance for the Daishonin. In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he cast off his transient status as an ordinary, unenlightened person burdened with karma and suffering and, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original, true identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion (the Buddha of beginningless time or eternal Buddha). This is called “casting off the transient and revealing the true.” (A more detailed explanation of this concept appears in chapter 4.)

Thereafter, the Daishonin’s behaviour was that of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, and he went on to inscribe the Gohonzon for all people to revere and embrace as the fundamental object of devotion.

## **The Sado Exile**

While the government was deliberating on his fate following the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the Daishonin was detained for about a month at the residence of Homma Shigetsura (the deputy constable of Sado) in Echi, Sagami Province (part of present-day Atsugi City, Kanagawa Prefecture). During this period, the Daishonin’s followers in Kamakura were subjected to many forms of persecution, including being unjustly accused of arson, murder, and other crimes.

Eventually, the Daishonin was sentenced to exile on Sado Island (part of present-day Niigata Prefecture). He departed from Echi on October 10, arriving at the graveyard of Tsukahara on Sado on November 1. The dwelling he was assigned there was a small, dilapidated shrine called the Sammai-do, which had been used for funerary rites. The conditions the Daishonin faced were truly harsh. It was bitterly cold on Sado, and he lacked sufficient food and warm clothing. In addition, he was surrounded by hostile Nembutsu followers who sought to take his life.

The Daishonin’s followers in Kamakura also continued to suffer persecution. Some were even imprisoned, banished, or had their lands confiscated. The majority of his remaining followers began to have doubts and discarded their faith out of fear and a desire for self-preservation.

On January 16 and 17 the following year, 1272, several hundred Buddhist priests from Sado and nearby provinces on the mainland gathered at Tsukahara with the intent to kill the Daishonin. They were stopped by Homma Shigetsura, who

proposed that they engage the Daishonin in a religious debate instead. In the debate that ensued, the Daishonin thoroughly refuted the erroneous teachings of the various Buddhist schools of his day. (This is known as the Tsukahara Debate.)

In February, a faction of the ruling Hojo clan rose up in rebellion, and fighting broke out in Kamakura and Kyoto, the seat of the military government and imperial capital, respectively. (This is known as the February Disturbance or the Hojo Tokisuke Rebellion.) The Daishonin's prediction of internal strife had come true just 150 days after declaring it in his remonstrations with Hei no Saemon-no-jo at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

In early summer of that year, the Daishonin was transferred from Tsukahara to Ichinosawa, also on Sado, but his life continued to be threatened by angry Nembutsu followers.

Nikko Shonin, who later became the Daishonin's successor, remained at his side throughout his Sado exile, faithfully following and serving him and sharing his sufferings. The Daishonin also steadily gained followers while on Sado Island, including Abutsu-bo and his wife, the lay nun Sennichi.

The Daishonin composed many important works during his exile on Sado. Of special significance are "The Opening of the Eyes" and "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind."

"The Opening of the Eyes," written in February 1272, explains that the Daishonin is the votary of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law, who is practicing in exact accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Ultimately, it reveals his identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law endowed with the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent to lead all people in the latter age to enlightenment. ("The Opening of the Eyes" is referred to as "the writing clarifying the object of devotion in terms of the Person.")

"The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," written in April 1273, presents the object of devotion of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to be embraced by all people in the Latter Day of the Law in order to attain Buddhahood. (It is referred to as "the writing clarifying the object of devotion in terms of the Law.")

In February 1274, the Daishonin was pardoned, and in March, he departed from Sado and returned to Kamakura.

Meeting Hei no Saemon-no-jo in April, the Daishonin strongly remonstrated with him, denouncing the government's actions in ordering priests to pray for the defeat of the Mongols based on the True Word and other erroneous Buddhist teachings. Further, responding to a direct question from Hei no Saemon-no-jo, he



predicted that the Mongol invasion would most certainly take place before the year's end. (This marked his third remonstrations with the government authorities.)

Just as the Daishonin predicted, a large Mongol fleet attacked Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, in October 1274. (This is referred to as the first Mongol invasion.)

With this event, the two predictions he had made in "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land"—those of internal strife and foreign invasion—had come true.

This was the third time that the Daishonin had directly remonstrated with the government authorities and predicted that disasters would befall the country. Affirming that his predictions had been fulfilled, the Daishonin wrote: "Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge" ("The Selection of the Time," WND-1, 579).

### **Taking Up Residence at Mount Minobu**

When the government rejected his final remonstrations, the Daishonin decided to leave Kamakura and take up residence in Hakii Village on the slopes of Mount Minobu in Kai Province (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). The local steward was Hakii Sanenaga, who had become a follower of the Daishonin through the propagation efforts of Nikko Shonin.

The Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu in May 1274. His change of residence, however, was by no means a retreat from the world.

He composed many of his major works there, including "The Selection of the Time" and "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude." In these writings, he elucidated numerous important teachings—in particular, the Three Great Secret Laws (the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the sanctuary of the essential teaching, and the daimoku of the essential teaching).

Through lectures on the Lotus Sutra, he devoted himself to fostering disciples who would carry out kosen-rufu in the future.

During this period, he also wrote many letters to his lay followers throughout the country, patiently instructing and encouraging them so they could persevere with strong faith, win in life, and attain the state of Buddhahood.

## **The Atsuhara Persecution and the Purpose of the Daishonin's Appearance in This World**

After the Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu, Nikko Shonin actively led propagation efforts in the Fuji District of Suruga Province (present-day central Shizuoka Prefecture), successfully convincing many Tendai priests and followers to abandon their old religious affiliations and begin practicing the Daishonin's teaching.

This prompted harassment and persecution by local Tendai temples, and threats were directed at those who had embraced the Daishonin's teaching.

On September 21, 1279, twenty farmers who were followers of the Daishonin in Atsuhara, a village in Suruga Province, were arrested on trumped-up charges and taken to Kamakura. At the residence of Hei no Saemon-no-jo, they were subjected to harsh interrogation equivalent to torture. Though they were pressed to abandon their faith in the Lotus Sutra, they all remained true to their beliefs.

Three of the twenty followers arrested—the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro—were ultimately executed, while the remaining seventeen were banished from their places of residence. (This series of events is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.)

The example of these farmer followers persevering in faith without begrudging their lives convinced the Daishonin that humble, ordinary people without any position in society had developed sufficiently strong faith to withstand great persecutions. In "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage," dated October 1, 1279, in the twenty-seventh year after proclaiming his teaching, he refers to the purpose of his appearance in this world (see WND-1, 996).

While still little more than a child, the Daishonin had vowed to become a person of wisdom who understood the essence of Buddhism and to free all people from suffering at the most fundamental level. The fulfillment of that vow was his life's guiding purpose. Expounding the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the fundamental Law for the enlightenment of all people, and revealing the Three Great Secret Laws—that is, the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the sanctuary of the essential teaching, and the daimoku of the essential teaching—he established the foundation for kosen-rufu that would endure for all time.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, ordinary people who embraced faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that encompasses the Three Great Secret Laws, dedicated themselves to kosen-rufu without begrudging their lives. Their appearance demonstrated that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin was a teaching that would be championed by ordinary people, a teaching for the enlightenment of all humanity.

The Daishonin thus fulfilled the purpose of his appearance in this world. What came to be called the Gohonzon of the second year of the Koan era (1279) was also inscribed during this period.

At the time of the Atsuhara Persecution, the Daishonin's followers strove in faith with the united spirit of "many in body, one in mind." His youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu, steward of a village neighboring Atsuhara, worked tirelessly to protect his fellow believers.

### **The Daishonin's Death and Nikko Shonin's Succession**

On September 8, 1282, the Daishonin, who was in declining health, left Minobu, where he had resided for nine years. He departed with the stated intent of visiting the therapeutic hot springs in Hitachi Province (part of present-day Ibaraki and Fukushima prefectures) at the recommendation of his disciples. When he arrived at the residence of his follower Ikegami Munenaka (the elder of the Ikegami brothers) in Ikegami in Musashi Province (present-day Ota Ward, Tokyo), he began to make arrangements for after his death.

On September 25, in spite of being gravely ill, he is said to have given a lecture to his followers on his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

The Daishonin passed away at Ikegami Munenaka's residence on October 13, 1282, at the age of 61, bringing to a close his noble life as the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

After the Daishonin's death, only Nikko Shonin carried on his mentor's fearless spirit and actions for kosen-rufu. Based on his awareness as the Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin continued to speak out against slander of the Law and to remonstrate with the government authorities. He treasured every one of the Daishonin's writings, referring to them by the honorific name Goshō (honorable writings), and encouraged all disciples to read and study them as the sacred scripture for the Latter Day of the Law. He also fostered many outstanding disciples who exerted themselves in Buddhist practice and study.

## A Timeline of Nichiren Daishonin's Life

1222	<p><b>February 16:</b> Born in Kataumi, Tojo Village, Nagasa District, Awa Province (today, part of Chiba Prefecture)</p> <p><b>(Age 1)</b>—at that time in Japan, as soon as a child was born, he or she was considered to be 1 year old)</p>
1253	<p><b>(Age 32)</b></p> <p><b>April 28:</b> Declares the establishment of his teaching at Seicho-ji, a temple in Awa Province</p>
1260	<p><b>(Age 39)</b></p> <p><b>July 16:</b> Submits “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” to retired regent Hojo Tokiyori—his first official remonstrance with the sovereign. Soon after, attacked by Nembutsu believers who tried to take his life (known as Matsubagayatsu Persecution).</p>
1261	<p><b>(Age 40)</b></p> <p><b>May 12:</b> Exiled to Izu Peninsula</p>
1264	<p><b>(Age 43)</b></p> <p><b>November 11:</b> Komatsubara Persecution</p>
1268	<p><b>(Age 47)</b></p> <p><b>May 12:</b> Sends eleven letters of remonstrance to key figures in Kamakura</p>
1271	<p><b>(Age 50)</b></p> <p><b>September 12:</b> Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Thereafter begins inscribing the Gohonzon for his disciples</p> <p><b>October 10:</b> Sado Exile begins</p>
1272	<p><b>(Age 51)</b></p> <p><b>January 16–17:</b> Tsukahara Debate</p> <p><b>February:</b> Revolt breaks out in Kyoto and Kamakura; writes “The Opening of the Eyes”</p>
1273	<p><b>(Age 52)</b></p> <p><b>April 25:</b> Writes “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”</p>
1274	<p><b>(Age 53)</b></p> <p><b>March 26:</b> Returns to Kamakura from Sado</p> <p><b>April 8:</b> Meets Hei no Saemon; predicts Mongols will attack Japan within the year</p> <p><b>May 17:</b> Takes up residence at Mount Minobu</p> <p><b>October:</b> Mongol forces invade the southern island of Kyushu</p>
1279	<p><b>(Age 58)</b></p> <p><b>September 21:</b> Twenty farmers arrested for their beliefs</p>
1281	<p><b>(Age 60)</b></p> <p><b>May:</b> Mongols invade Kyushu a second time</p>
1282	<p><b>(Age 61)</b></p> <p><b>October 13:</b> Dies at the residence of Ikegami Munenaka at Ikegami in Musashi Province</p>

## **2. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo**

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of Buddhism and the fundamental Law perceived by Nichiren Daishonin for resolving the suffering of all humanity. Here, we will examine a few of the important aspects of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

### **The Fundamental Law That Pervades the Universe and Life**

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life.

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, viewed the sufferings of all people as his own and searched for a way to resolve those sufferings. In the process, he awakened to the truth that the eternal, all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realization led to his being known as the Buddha, or “Awakened One.” Then, with wisdom and compassion, he expounded numerous teachings, which later were compiled as Buddhist sutras. Among them, the Lotus Sutra teaches the true essence of the Buddha’s enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin identified this Law to which Shakyamuni awakened—the Law that can resolve human suffering on a fundamental level and open the way to genuine happiness—as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

### **The Essential Law for Attaining Buddhahood**

Buddhas are those who have embodied the Law in their own lives, overcome all suffering, and established an unshakable inner state of absolute happiness.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential principle, or means, for attaining Buddhahood.

### **The Eternal Law Inherent in All People’s Lives**

Buddhas are awakened to the truth that the Law exists not only within their own lives, but also within the lives of all people. They realize that this all-pervasive Law transcends the bounds of life and death and can never be lost or destroyed.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is universal, inherent in all people; it is also eternal, persisting throughout the three existences of past, present, and future.

## The Profound Meaning Reflected in the Name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

The profound meaning of the fundamental Law is reflected in its name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Myoho-renge-kyo is the full title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and literally translates as “The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful (Mystic) Law.”

Because the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra is difficult to fathom and comprehend, it is called the Mystic Law (*myoho*).

The lotus (*renge*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law.

Though it grows in muddy water, the lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms. This conjures images of those who have faith in and practice the Mystic Law. Though they live in the real world that is rife with suffering, they remain pure in thought and action, teaching others and guiding them to enlightenment.

In addition, the lotus, unlike other plants, contains a seed pod (the lotus fruit) within its buds, and the flower and fruit grow and appear at the same time. The flower (the cause) and the fruit (the effect) exist together, simultaneously. This is also used to illustrate that the state of Buddhahood, though indiscernible, exists even in the lives of ordinary people who have not yet manifested that state of life, and further that even after one becomes a Buddha, one does not lose the life states that characterize an ordinary person.

*Kyo*, meaning “sutra,” indicates that the Lotus Sutra (*Myoho-renge-kyo*) contains the eternal truth—the Mystic Law—and that people should venerate and place their faith in it.

*Nam*, or *namu*, is the phonetic rendering in Chinese characters of the Sanskrit word *namas*, meaning “bow” or “reverence.” This term was also translated using the Chinese characters meaning “to dedicate one’s life” (*kimyo*). To dedicate one’s life, in this sense, means to devote oneself body and mind to the Law and strive to practice and embody it with one’s entire being.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the very heart and essence of the Buddha, which is expressed in wise and compassionate action to lead all people to enlightenment.



## **Nichiren Daishonin's Enlightened State of Life**

Although the Lotus Sutra teaches the fundamental Law of the universe and life, it does not reveal the exact nature or name of the Law.

Nichiren Daishonin awakened to the truth that the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra existed in his own life, and he revealed that Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

In other words, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not simply “Myoho-renge-kyo,” the title of the Lotus Sutra, prefaced by the word “*nam*,” but the name of the Law itself.

By revealing the Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin opened the way in real terms for fundamentally freeing people from suffering and delusion, which arise from ignorance of the true nature of their lives, and helping them build unshakable happiness.

That is why we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, an age filled with confusion and suffering.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the enlightened life state of Buddhahood, or true identity, of Nichiren Daishonin, who embodied in his being the Law that pervades the universe and all existence.

## **Ordinary People Are Themselves the Mystic Law**

The life state of Buddhahood is also inherent in the lives of unenlightened ordinary people—in every person. All people are inherently and originally Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself.

However, while ignorant of this truth, ordinary people are unable to demonstrate the power and functions of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that exist within them. To be awakened to this truth is the life state of a Buddha; to doubt or be unaware of this truth is the life state of one who is unenlightened. When we have faith in and actually practice Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the power and functions of the Mystic Law are activated and expressed in our lives, and in this way we manifest the life state of Buddhahood.

## The Object of Devotion for Practice, Revealed in the Form of a Mandala

Nichiren Daishonin depicted his own Buddhahood, or enlightened life state, in the form of a mandala. He made this the object of devotion (Gohonzon) for our Buddhist practice, so that we ordinary people can manifest Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in our lives and attain Buddhahood, just as he did.

The Daishonin wrote: “Never seek this Gohonzon [object of devotion] outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832).

It is important that we revere Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the fundamental Law and the life state of Buddhahood embodied in the Gohonzon—believing and accepting that it is inherent in our own lives. By doing so, we can tap the Mystic Law that resides within us and manifest our inherent Buddhahood.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one’s mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys” (OTT, 211–12).

When we realize that we are inherently Buddhas and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself, we can bring forth in our lives wonderful benefit and good fortune without measure. There is no greater joy in life.

When we triumph over hardships through our practice of the Mystic Law, we will lead lives of unsurpassed joy while developing a state of eternally indestructible happiness.



### **3. Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime and Kosen-rufu**

#### **Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime**

The fundamental purpose of our Buddhist faith and practice is to attain the life state of Buddhahood.

By embracing faith in the Gohonzon and striving sincerely in Buddhist practice for oneself and others, anyone can realize the state of Buddhahood in this existence. This is the principle of “attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.”

“Practice for oneself” means to carry out Buddhist practice for one’s own benefit. “Practice for others” means to teach and guide others to Buddhist practice so that they, too, can attain benefit. Specifically, “practice for oneself and others” indicates doing gongyo and chanting daimoku, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, while also reaching out to talk with others about Buddhism, teaching and guiding them, and thereby propagating the Mystic Law. (A more detailed explanation appears in chapter 3.)

Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “If votaries of the Lotus Sutra carry out religious practice as the sutra directs, then every one of them without exception will surely attain Buddhahood within his or her present lifetime. To cite an analogy, if one plants the fields in spring and summer, then, whether it be early or late, one is certain to reap a harvest within the year” (“The Doctrines of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life,” WND-2, 88).

Attaining Buddhahood, or becoming a Buddha, does not mean becoming some kind of special human being, completely different from who we are now, nor does it mean being reborn in a pure land far removed from this world in our next lifetime.

The Daishonin explains the “attain” of attaining Buddhahood as follows: “‘Attain’ means to open or reveal” (OTT, 126). Attaining Buddhahood, therefore, simply means revealing our innate Buddhahood.

As ordinary people, we can reveal this enlightened state of life, just as we are. This is expressed in the Buddhist concepts of “the attainment of Buddhahood by ordinary people” and “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.”

Attaining Buddhahood does not mean going to some other world. Rather, it means establishing a state of absolute and indestructible happiness here in the real world.

The Daishonin says that “one comes to realize and see that each thing—the cherry, the plum, the peach, the damson—in its own entity, without undergoing any change, possesses the eternally endowed three bodies [of the Buddha]”<sup>1</sup> (OTT, 200). As this passage suggests, attaining Buddhahood means living in a way in which we make the most of our unique inherent qualities and develop our potential to the fullest.

In other words, in attaining Buddhahood, our lives are purified, allowing us to give full expression to their inherent workings; we gain a strong inner state that is not swayed by any hardship.

Attaining Buddhahood is not the achievement of a final goal. The state of Buddhahood is characterized by an unremitting struggle based on faith in the Mystic Law to eliminate evil and generate good. Those who strive tirelessly for kosen-rufu are Buddhas.

### **“The Attainment of Buddhahood by Ordinary People” and “Attaining Buddhahood in One’s Present Form”**

The terms “ordinary person” or “common mortal” appear frequently in Buddhist sutras and texts, indicating an unenlightened person. The Lotus Sutra teaches that ordinary people inherently possess the life state of Buddhahood and that they can reveal that state of life. That is, it is possible for us to manifest within us that noble life state as ordinary people. This is expressed in such Buddhist terms as “ordinary people are identical with the highest level of being” (OTT, 22) and “an ordinary person is a Buddha” (“The Izu Exile,” WND-1, 36).

Attaining Buddhahood is a process of manifesting the life state of a Buddha, which is originally present within all people (the inherent world of Buddhahood). A Buddha, therefore, is not a special being separate from or superior to human beings. The Daishonin taught that attaining Buddhahood is revealing the highest humanity—that is, Buddhahood—in our lives as ordinary people.

This is called “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.” This means that people can realize the life state of a Buddha just as they are, without having to be reborn and changing their present form as an ordinary person.

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<sup>1</sup> The three bodies of the Buddha refer to the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharma body is the fundamental truth, or Law, to which a Buddha is enlightened. The reward body is the wisdom to perceive the Law. And the manifested body is the compassionate actions the Buddha carries out to lead people to happiness.

Though Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra teach the attainment of Buddhahood, they all require at least two conditions.

The first is that one not belong to any of the following groups, which were deemed incapable of attaining Buddhahood: practitioners of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones), evil people, and women.

Practitioners of the two vehicles believed that it was impossible for them to attain the elevated life state of the Buddha, and so contented themselves with seeking to gain the stage of arhat—the highest stage of awakening in the teachings for the voice-hearers. These practitioners aimed for the annihilation of body and mind in arriving at this stage, in which all earthly desires were completely extinguished, ending the cycle of rebirth into this world. Many Mahayana sutras harshly condemned such practitioners as being unable to attain Buddhahood.

These sutras also taught that evil people had to first be reborn as good people, and women be reborn as men, before they could attain Buddhahood. Neither evil people nor women were considered able to attain Buddhahood as they were. Though these sutras taught the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, only a limited number of people could meet the requirements to actually do so.

The second condition for attaining Buddhahood in Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra was that one had to engage in Buddhist practice over repeated cycles of birth and death (known as “countless kalpas of practice”) in order to free oneself from the life state of an unenlightened, ordinary person and achieve the life state of a Buddha.

### **Attaining Buddhahood as an Ordinary Person in This Lifetime**

In contrast, the Lotus Sutra teaches that attaining Buddhahood is not a matter of becoming some sort of exceptional or extraordinary being, but that each person can reveal the life state of Buddhahood within them, just as they are.

Nichiren Daishonin further clarified that the fundamental Law by which all Buddhas attain enlightenment is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He also manifested his enlightened state of life that is one with that Law in the form of the Gohonzon—the object of devotion of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

By embracing faith in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, anyone can reveal the Buddhahood inherent in his or her life.

Nichikan wrote: “If we accept and believe in this object of devotion and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it, then our lives are themselves the object of devotion of

three thousand realms in a single moment of life; we are the founder, Nichiren Daishonin” (“The Commentaries of Nichikan”).

By believing in the Gohonzon and continuing to exert ourselves in faith and practice for the sake of kosen-rufu, we can manifest in our lives as ordinary people the same life state of Buddhahood as Nichiren Daishonin.

This is also expressed as the principles of “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” and “attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.”

*[Note: Nichikan (1665–1726) was a scholar priest who lived during the Edo period (1603–1868) of Japan. He systematized and placed fresh emphasis on the Buddhist principles of Nichiren Daishonin as inherited and transmitted by his direct disciple and successor, Nikko Shonin.]*

### **“Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment” and “The Sufferings of Birth and Death Are Nirvana”**

The idea of “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” can be expressed from another distinct perspective as the principles that “earthly desires are enlightenment” and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana.”

The various sutras and scriptures traditionally categorized as Hinayana teachings in the Daishonin’s day taught that the cause of suffering lies in one’s earthly desires or deluded impulses, and that there is no way to eliminate suffering other than to extinguish such desires or impulses. The aim of these teachings was emancipation (awakening that brings about release from suffering) through upholding numerous precepts (rules of discipline) and accumulating the results of prolonged and intensive practice and training.

However, trying to achieve a state utterly devoid of earthly desires led people to seek to annihilate both the physical and spiritual self and thereby escape the cycle of birth and death, never to be reborn in this world again. This ultimately amounts to a complete denial or rejection of life.

In the Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, persons of the two vehicles who practice the Hinayana teachings, evil people, and women are denied the possibility of attaining Buddhahood.

This represents a way of thinking that is essentially quite similar to the Hinayana doctrines, creating a gap or divide between ordinary people and the Buddha that is difficult to bridge.



These sutras also present fictitious Buddhas—as in the case of Amida Buddha or Mahavairochana Buddha—who far transcend human beings in their attributes and dwell in separate realms far removed from the real world.

These sutras teach that for ordinary people to become Buddhas, they must learn, practice, and acquire aspects of the Buddha's enlightenment a little at a time over the course of many successive lifetimes.

Also, the belief that one could not through one's own efforts or power alone become a Buddha gave rise to an emphasis on seeking salvation through the absolute power of a Buddha.

In contrast, the Lotus Sutra reveals that all human beings inherently possess the world of Buddhahood, a life state of compassion and wisdom, and that it is possible to tap and bring forth this inner Buddhahood.

Even ordinary people whose lives are dominated by earthly desires, burdened by negative karma, and afflicted by suffering, can, by awakening to the reality that Buddhahood exists within their own lives, manifest the wisdom of the Buddha's enlightenment, liberate themselves from suffering, and realize a state of complete freedom.

A life tormented by earthly desires and suffering can become a life of limitless freedom that shines with enlightened wisdom, just as it is. This is the meaning of the principle that "earthly desires are enlightenment."

Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the world of Buddhahood within us is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, chant daimoku, and awaken to our true, noble selves, the wisdom to live out our lives, the courage and confidence to face the challenges of adversity and overcome them, and the compassion to care for the welfare of others will well forth in our lives.

"The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana" means that, though we may be in a state of suffering caused by the painful realities of birth and death, when we believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can manifest in our lives the tranquil life state of the Buddha's enlightenment (nirvana).

The principles of "earthly desires are enlightenment" and "the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana" teach us that when we base ourselves on faith in the Mystic Law, we can lead positive, proactive lives, transforming every problem and suffering we have into a cause for growth and happiness.

## **Relative Happiness and Absolute Happiness**

Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda (1900–58) taught that there are two kinds of happiness: relative happiness and absolute happiness. Relative happiness describes a condition in which our material needs are fulfilled and our personal desires satisfied. But desires know no limits; even if we may enjoy a sense of those desires being fulfilled for a time, it is not lasting. Since this kind of happiness is dependent on external circumstances, if those circumstances should change or disappear, then so will our happiness. Such happiness is called relative because it exists only in relation to external factors.

In contrast, absolute happiness is a state of life in which being alive itself is a source of happiness and joy, no matter where we are or what our circumstances. It describes a life condition in which happiness wells forth from within us. Because it is not influenced by external conditions, it is called absolute happiness. Attaining Buddhahood means establishing this state of absolute happiness.

Living amid the realities of this world, it is inevitable that we will meet with various problems and difficulties. But in the same way that someone who is strong and physically fit can easily climb a mountain, even when carrying a heavy load, those who have established an inner state of absolute happiness can use any challenge they encounter as an impetus for bringing forth powerful life force and calmly overcome adversity. For strong mountain climbers, the steeper and more demanding the ascent, the greater enjoyment they feel in overcoming each challenge on the path to the summit. Similarly, for those who, through Buddhist practice, have acquired the life force and wisdom to overcome hardships, the real world with all its troubles and challenges is a place for creating value, rich in satisfaction and fulfillment.

In addition, while relative happiness, which depends on external factors, disappears with death, the absolute happiness of the life state of Buddhahood persists eternally. As the Daishonin writes: “Passing through the round of births and deaths, one makes one’s way on the land of the Dharma nature, or enlightenment, that is inherent within oneself” (OTT, 52).

## **“Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” and Kosen-rufu**

The purpose of practicing Nichiren Buddhism, in addition to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime on an individual level, is to secure happiness for both oneself and others. As guidelines for practice in order to secure happiness for oneself and others amid the realities of society, Nichiren Daishonin stressed the importance of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” and kosen-rufu.

### **“Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land”**

Nichiren Buddhism is a teaching that enables people to transform their life condition and develop a state of absolute happiness in the course of this lifetime. In addition, through such a profound inner transformation in each individual, it aims to achieve peace for society as a whole.

Nichiren Daishonin sets forth the principle for realizing peace in his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”

“Establishing the correct teaching” means promoting faith in and acceptance of the correct teaching of Buddhism as the foundation for people’s lives and making the Buddhist teaching of respect for the dignity of life the fundamental motivating principle of society. “For the peace of the land” means realizing peace and prosperity in society as well as safety and security for all individuals in their daily lives.

In addition to indicating the nation as a political institution centering on the ruling authorities, the “land” in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” refers, on a deeper level, to the basis of people’s daily lives and sustenance. In that sense, it refers not only to the social structure formed by human beings, but also the land itself—the natural environment.

Nichiren Daishonin’s belief that the people are the central presence in the land may perhaps also be discerned in his frequent usage, in the original manuscript of “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” of the Chinese character for “land” (also, “country” or “nation”) written with the element for “people” inside a rectangular enclosure, rather than the characters using the element for “king,” or that suggesting a military domain, inside a rectangular enclosure, which were more commonly used.

The Daishonin also wrote, “A king sees his people as his parents” (“Offerings in the Snow,” WND-2, 809), asserting that those in power should make the people their foundation. He further warned that rulers who “fail to heed or understand the

afflictions of the populace” will fall into the evil paths (see “On the Protection of the Nation,” WND-2, 92).

While “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” was written to realize peace in Japan at that time, its underlying spirit is to achieve peace and security for the people and, further, to actualize peace for the entire world and happiness for all humanity into the distant future.

The Daishonin wrote this treatise and remonstrated with the ruling authorities out of his wish to put an end to the sufferings of the people of his day. He was showing, through his own example, that practitioners of Buddhism must not content themselves with a Buddhist practice that consists solely of praying for their own enlightenment. Rather, basing themselves on the principles and spirit of Buddhism, they must actively engage in seeking solutions to the problems and issues facing society.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?” (WND-1, 24).

The self-centered attitude exemplified by averting one’s gaze from society’s problems and withdrawing into a realm of religious faith alone is sternly repudiated in Mahayana Buddhism.

The Soka Gakkai today is engaged in efforts to resolve global issues in the areas of peace, culture, education, and human rights, based on the principles and ideals of Nichiren Buddhism. These efforts, too, directly accord with the principle and spirit of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” articulated by the Daishonin.

## **Kosen-rufu**

The aim of Buddhism is to share and spread the correct teaching that embodies the Buddha’s enlightenment, and guide all people toward attaining the life state of Buddhahood and realize peace and prosperity for all humanity.

For that reason, Shakyamuni Buddha states in the Lotus Sutra: “After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [this teaching] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world] and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow [negative forces such as] evil devils, the devils’ people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, kumbhanda demons, or others to seize

the advantage!” (“Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King,” chap. 23, LSOC, 330).

This passage states that in the “last five-hundred-year period”—meaning this present period of the Latter Day of the Law—the Mystic Law should be “spread abroad widely” throughout the entire world. (“Spread abroad widely” here is a translation of the Chinese characters pronounced *kosen-rufu* in Japanese.)

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha also entrusts the mission of widespread propagation, or *kosen-rufu*, in the Latter Day of the Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who, as his disciples from the unimaginably remote past, are the bodhisattvas who have thoroughly forged themselves.

During the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, countless multitudes of such bodhisattvas emerge from the earth. Led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices, they vow to propagate the Mystic Law, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, after Shakyamuni’s passing.

Shakyamuni in turn predicts that after his death these Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear in this suffering-filled world and, like the sun and the moon, illuminate the darkness of people’s lives and lead them to enlightenment.

### **Kosen-rufu is the Fundamental Spirit of Nichiren Daishonin**

In exact accord with the aforementioned passage of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin strove to spread the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the evil age of the Latter Day, while enduring numerous life-threatening persecutions.

The Daishonin refers to the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, or *kosen-rufu*, as follows:

The “great vow” refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. (OTT, 82)

If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. (“On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” WND-1, 736)

When I, Nichiren, first took faith in the Lotus Sutra, I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust in all the country of Japan. But later, when

two people, three people, ten people, and eventually a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, and a million people come to recite the Lotus Sutra [chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] and transmit it to others, then they will form a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment, an ocean of great nirvana. Seek no other path by which to attain Buddhahood! (“The Selection of the Time,” WND-1, 580)

From these passages, we can clearly see that achieving kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, is the fundamental spirit of Nichiren Daishonin.

The Daishonin also repeatedly urged his followers to dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu, attain Buddhahood, and actualize the principle of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.”

### **The Soka Gakkai—Making Kosen-rufu a Reality**

The Soka Gakkai is a harmonious gathering of Buddhist practitioners who have inherited and carry on the Daishonin’s spirit, spreading the Mystic Law just as he taught in his writings.

The Daishonin wrote: “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 385). The Soka Gakkai, which has spread the Mystic Law in the same spirit as the Daishonin, is the organization of Bodhisattvas of the Earth fulfilling the mission of kosen-rufu.

Until the appearance of the Soka Gakkai seven hundred years after the Daishonin’s death, no one had been able to widely spread the Mystic Law. It is the Soka Gakkai that has made the predictions of Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin a reality. This is proof that the Soka Gakkai is the organization that has emerged to carry out the mission of kosen-rufu, acting in accord with the Buddha’s intent.

The Soka Gakkai is making kosen-rufu a reality, spreading the Mystic Law throughout the entire world, just as the Lotus Sutra teaches.







## **The Buddhist Philosophy of Life**

This chapter will discuss the principle known as the Ten Worlds, and clarify that the fundamental aim of faith in Nichiren Buddhism is to reveal in our lives the state of Buddhahood that is inherent within us.

### **4. The Ten Worlds**

The Ten Worlds is a classification of ten distinct states of life, and forms the foundation for the Buddhist view of life. Through examining the Ten Worlds, we can come to understand the nature of our own state of life and gain insights into how we can transform it.

The Ten Worlds are: (1) the world of hell, (2) the world of hungry spirits, (3) the world of animals, (4) the world of asuras, (5) the world of human beings, (6) the world of heavenly beings, (7) the world of voice-hearers, (8) the world of cause-awakened ones, (9) the world of bodhisattvas, and (10) the world of Buddhas.

The first six worlds—those of hell, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings—are known as the six paths. The remaining four—those of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas—are known as the four noble worlds.

According to the ancient Indian worldview, the six paths refer to the six realms of existence among which life transmigrates in the unending cycle of birth and death. Buddhism adopted this concept. The four noble worlds are life states that are attained through Buddhist practice.

In Buddhist sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, the Ten Worlds are regarded as ten separate, fixed realms of existence. The Lotus Sutra, however, fundamentally rejects that point of view, teaching that the Ten Worlds are ten states of life inherent

within each living being. It reveals that living beings of the nine worlds from hell through the world of bodhisattvas possess within them the world of Buddhas, and that Buddhas also possess all the other nine worlds.

Therefore, a being presently manifesting one of the Ten Worlds in fact possesses within itself all of the Ten Worlds and can subsequently manifest any other of the Ten Worlds in response to external influences. This teaching that all of the Ten Worlds are inherent within one another is called the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. (A more detailed explanation of this concept appears in chapter 5.)

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called an ordinary person” (WND-1, 456).

A single life possesses all the Ten Worlds. This means that, even if right now we may be experiencing the painful life state of hell, we can transform it into the supremely joyous life state of Buddhahood. The principle of the Ten Worlds based on the Lotus Sutra opens the way for such dynamic inner transformation.

Let us now examine the nature of each of the Ten Worlds. First of all, with regard to the lowest six worlds, or the six paths, the Daishonin writes in “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”:

When we look from time to time at a person’s face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times greed appears in the person’s face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asuras, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings. (WND-1, 358)

Based on this passage, let us look at each of the six paths in turn.

## **[1]The World of Hell**

The Japanese word for hell, jigoku (Skt. naraka), literally means “underground prison.” Buddhist scriptures describe many hells, such as the eight hot hells, the eight cold hells, and numerous others.

The world of hell is the lowest state of life, a state in which one is imprisoned by suffering and completely lacking in freedom.

The Daishonin writes: “Hell is a dreadful dwelling of fire” (WND-1, 1026). Hell is a life state in which we experience the world around us as a place that inflicts suffering upon us as intense as if we were being burned by flames.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin says: “Rage is the world of hell” (WND-1, 358). This rage arises from bitter frustration and discontent with ourselves for not being or achieving what we desire, or toward the world around us that inflicts such suffering on us. It is the tormented expression of a life hopelessly trapped in a realm of suffering.

Hell is the state of being in which living is itself extremely painful and everything we see is colored by our unhappiness and misery.

## **[2]The World of Hungry Spirits**

The world of hungry spirits, or the life state of hunger, is characterized by relentless craving and the suffering arising from such craving going unsatisfied.

In ancient Indian mythology, “hungry spirits” (Skt. *preta*) originally referred to the deceased or spirits of the dead, who were believed to be constantly starving. As a result, a life state where one is spiritually and physically tormented by intense, unremitting craving came to be known as the world of hungry spirits.

The Daishonin writes: “Greed is [the world] of hungry spirits” (WND-1, 358); and “The realm of hungry spirits is a pitiful place where, driven by starvation, they devour their own children” (WND-1, 1026). Hunger so strong that it drives those in its grip to devour their own children describes a life state of suffering in which one’s heart and mind are ruled by insatiable desires.

Of course, wants and desires have both good and bad aspects. Human beings could not survive without the urge to eat. Desires can also be the motivating force for human progress and self-improvement. But the life state of hunger is one of suffering in which one is enslaved by desires and unable to use them for constructive, creative purposes.

## **[3]The World of Animals**

The world of animals, or the life state of animality, is characterized by foolishness in the sense of being moved by impulse rather than reason and being concerned only with immediate benefit and gratification.

The Daishonin writes: “Foolishness is [the world] of animals” (WND-1, 358). This describes a life state of acting impulsively for short-term benefit, with no understanding of the law of cause and effect and no ability to judge between right and wrong, good and evil.

The Daishonin also writes of the world of animals: “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong” (WND-1, 302); and “[The realm of] animals is to kill or be killed” (WND-1, 1026). He describes the life state of animality as one ruled by the law of the jungle, a struggle for survival in which one is willing to harm others to stay alive, with no sense of reason or conscience. Because it is a condition of foolishness, in which one is fixated on immediate reward and cannot give thought to future consequences, those dominated by this life state are the engineers of their own suffering and self-destruction.

[Note: The use of the term “animals” is based on ancient Indian beliefs. Naturally, there are examples of animals, such as service dogs, that devotedly assist others, and it is also true that some of the behavior of human beings—for example, wars and genocide—is often much more cruel and brutal than that of non-human animals.]

Because the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, and animals all represent conditions of suffering, they are collectively known as the three evil paths.

#### **[4]The World of Asuras**

Asuras are contentious demons found in ancient Indian mythology.

A characteristic of the world of asuras, or the life state of anger, is an obsession with personal superiority or self-importance, a tendency to always compare oneself with others and want to be better than them.

When those in this life state encounter people they consider inferior to themselves, they become arrogant and look down on them. Even when they recognize that others are superior to them in some way, they are unable to respect them. And when they meet someone who is truly more powerful than they are, they become cowardly and fawning.

Those in the world of asuras often put on an appearance of being people of virtue and fine character, even pretending to be humble in order to impress others. Inside, however, they are filled with jealousy and resentment toward those they perceive to be better than them. This gap between outward appearance and inner reality leads to hypocrisy and self-deception, which are also characteristics of this life state.

This is why the Daishonin writes: “Perversity is [the world] of asuras” (WND-1, 358). Here, “perversity” means concealing one’s true feelings in order to ingratiate

oneself with others. There are two aspects to this perversity—to fawn and deceive, and to distort reason.

Unlike those in the three evil paths—the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, and animals—who are dominated by the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness<sup>2</sup>, those in the world of asuras act of their own volition. In this sense, the world of asuras can be considered a higher state than the three evil paths. Nevertheless, because it is essentially a realm filled with suffering, it is grouped together with the three evil paths to form “the four evil paths.”

## **[5]The World of Human Beings**

The world of human beings, or the life state of humanity, is a calm, composed state in which people maintain their characteristic human qualities. The Daishonin says: “Calmness is [the world] of human beings” (WND-1, 358).

Those in the life state of humanity understand the principle of cause and effect and are rational enough to know the difference between good and evil.

The Daishonin writes: “The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals” (WND-1, 852). Those in the life state of humanity have the capacity to distinguish right from wrong and to exercise self-control.

The life state of humanity cannot be sustained without effort. In the reality of society, which is filled with many negative influences, it is indeed difficult for people to live in a humane way. It is impossible without a constant effort at self-improvement and personal development. The world of humanity is the first step toward a life state of winning over oneself.

Those in the world of humanity are also seen as “the correct vessel for attaining the noble paths.”<sup>3</sup> While they are vulnerable to falling into the evil paths through negative influences, they also have the potential to advance to the four noble worlds, or enlightened states of life, through Buddhist practice.

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<sup>2</sup> Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In the renowned Mahayana scholar Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the three poisons are regarded as the source of all illusions and earthly desires. The three poisons are so called because they pollute people’s lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.

<sup>3</sup>Correct vessel for attaining the noble paths: A passage found in *The Treatise on the Rise of the World* stating that human beings represent the most appropriate vessel, or form of life, for attaining the Buddha way.

## **[6]The World of Heavenly Beings**

In ancient Indian cosmology, heaven referred both to gods possessing supernatural powers and to the realm where they lived. In ancient India, it was believed that those who performed good acts in their present life would be reborn as deities in the heavenly realm.

In Buddhism, the world of heavenly beings, or the life state of heaven, is regarded as a condition of joy experienced when we fulfill our desires through effort. The Daishonin writes: “Joy is [the world] of heaven” (WND-1, 358).

There are all kinds of desires—instinctive desires such as for food and sleep, material desires for things like a new car or house, social desires such as the wish for status and honors, and intellectual and spiritual desires such as the aspiration to know about yet-to-be-discovered worlds or create new works of art. The state of blissful joy one experiences upon fulfilling these various kinds of desires is the world of heavenly beings.

But the joy of the world of heavenly beings is not lasting. It fades and disappears with the passage of time. In that sense, the world of heavenly beings is not the state of genuine happiness that should be our ultimate aim.

## **From the Six Paths to the Four Noble Worlds**

The worlds from hell to heavenly beings discussed above, together referred to as the six paths, are easily influenced by external circumstances.

When one’s desires are fulfilled, one experiences the bliss of the world of heavenly beings, and when one’s external environment is calm and stable, one enjoys the tranquillity of the world of human beings. But should those external conditions change, one can quickly tumble into states of intense suffering, such as the worlds of hell and hungry spirits.

In the sense that they are governed by external circumstances, the life states of the six paths are not truly free or autonomous.

The aim of Buddhist practice is to transcend the six paths and develop a self-determined state of happiness that is not controlled by external circumstances. The awakened states of life a person can develop through Buddhist practice are known as the four noble worlds—the worlds of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.



## **[7 & 8]The Worlds of Voice-Hearers and Cause-Awakened Ones**

Traditionally, the worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones were life states attained through practicing the so-called Hinayana teachings.

Persons in these two worlds, which are also known as the life states of learning and realization, are together referred to as the “persons of the two vehicles.”

The world of voice-hearers is the life state attained by those who gain a partial awakening through hearing the Buddha’s teaching.

The world of cause-awakened ones refers to the life state attained by those who gain a partial awakening through their own observations and effort. It is also called the realm of self-awakened ones.

The partial awakening of the persons of the two vehicles is an awakening to the impermanence of all phenomena—the reality that all things are constantly changing, coming into and going out of existence. Those in the worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones, by objectively observing themselves and the world around them, perceive the truth that all things arise in response to causes and conditions, change with the passage of time, and eventually cease to exist. And they strive to overcome their attachment to transient things and phenomena.

There are times in our daily lives when we have a strong perception of the impermanence of all things, including ourselves. The Daishonin notes: “The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world?” (WND-1, 358). He is saying that the world of human beings also possesses these perceptive worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones.

Those who sought to attain the life states of the two vehicles identified the cause of suffering as attachment to impermanent, transient things and phenomena, and they endeavoured to eradicate such attachment and other earthly desires. Because of that, however, they strayed into the mistaken path of seeking to extinguish their own bodies and minds entirely (the teaching of “reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness”).<sup>4</sup>

From the perspective of the enlightenment of the Buddha, the awakening gained by those in the worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones is imperfect and partial. But those in these worlds content themselves with this lesser

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<sup>4</sup> Reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness: A reference to the Hinayana doctrine asserting that one can attain nirvana, escaping from the sufferings of endless cycle of birth and death, only upon extinguishing one’s body and mind, which are deemed to be the sources of earthly desires, illusions, and sufferings.

degree of enlightenment and do not seek the full enlightenment of the Buddha. Though they acknowledge the superior enlightenment of the Buddha, their teacher, they do not think themselves able to attain it and remain at a lower level of enlightenment.

Additionally, those in the worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones are inclined to self-absorption, seeking only their own enlightenment and making no effort to help others do the same. This self-centeredness is the limitation of these two worlds.

## **[9]The World of Bodhisattvas**

Bodhisattva means a living being (sattva) who strives continuously to attain the enlightenment (bodhi) of the Buddha. Although the persons of the two vehicles accept the Buddha as their teacher, they do not believe themselves capable of attaining the same life state as the Buddha. In contrast, bodhisattvas not only regard the Buddha as their teacher, but strive to obtain the same enlightened state. In addition, they also try to lead others to enlightenment by communicating and spreading the Buddha's teachings.

What distinguishes those of the world of bodhisattvas, or the life state of bodhisattva, is their seeking spirit to attain the highest life state of Buddhahood and their altruistic efforts to share the benefits they have obtained through Buddhist practice.

The bodhisattva spirit is to empathize with the pain and sorrow of others and work to relieve that suffering and impart joy out of a wish for the happiness of oneself and others.

Whereas the persons of the two vehicles, focused solely on their own welfare, content themselves with a lesser awakening, those in the world of bodhisattvas act with a sense of mission for the sake of people and the Law.

The essence of the world of bodhisattvas is compassion. The Sanskrit term for compassion, *karuna* (Jpn. *jishi*), is sometimes translated as "lovingkindness" or "mercy." In "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," the Daishonin writes: "Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him" (WND-1, 358). Just as even the most heartless villain still cares for his own wife and children, a spirit of compassion for others is inherent in all life. Those in the life state of bodhisattva direct this spirit of compassion to all people and make it the foundation for their lives.

## **[10]The World of Buddhas**

The world of Buddhas, or the life state of Buddhahood, is the supremely noble life state manifested by a Buddha.

Buddha means “awakened one”—one who has awakened to the Mystic Law, the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life. Specifically, it refers to Shakyamuni, who lived in India. The Buddhist sutras describe various other Buddhas such as Amida Buddha, but these are all fictitious beings symbolizing an aspect of the greatness of the enlightened life state of Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law who, as an ordinary human being, revealed the infinitely respectable life state of Buddhahood in his own life and established the path by which all people can attain enlightenment.

Buddhahood is an expansive life state overflowing with good fortune and benefit, attained through awakening to the fact that the Mystic Law is the foundation of one’s being. Having attained this state of life, the Buddha is able to manifest unsurpassed wisdom and compassion, employing them unceasingly to enable all people to attain the same life state of enlightenment that he enjoys.

The life state of Buddhahood is originally inherent in our own beings. It is difficult to manifest it, however, in our daily lives, which are filled with unending problems and challenges. For this reason, the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon, or object of devotion, as a means for all people to bring forth from within them the life state of Buddhahood.

The Gohonzon embodies the enlightened life state of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the essence of which is Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo for the happiness of ourselves and others, we can tap the life state of Buddhahood within us.

In the “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin identifies the profound connection between the life state of Buddhahood and faith in the Mystic Law, saying: “That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the human world” (WND-1, 358).

The Lotus Sutra reveals that all people are inherently Buddhas; we human beings can believe in that teaching precisely because our lives fundamentally possess the state of Buddhahood.

Nichikan, an 18th-century scholar of the Daishonin’s teachings, wrote: “Strong faith in the Lotus Sutra is called the world of Buddhahood.”<sup>5</sup> “Lotus Sutra” here means the Gohonzon that embodies Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law. Therefore, having “strong faith” to base our lives on the Gohonzon is nothing other than the life state of Buddhahood.

This life state of Buddhahood attained through faith in the Mystic Law can be described in contemporary terms as a state of absolute happiness that nothing can destroy. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda described it as a state of life in which being alive is itself happiness.

The life state of Buddhahood is also often likened to the spirit of a lion king—a state of complete ease and confidence in which, like the lion king, one fears nothing.



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<sup>5</sup> Nichikan, “The Threefold Secret Teaching.”

## 5. Three Proofs

The three proofs are three criteria for determining the correct teaching for leading people to absolute happiness. They demonstrate that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is the teaching that makes it possible for all people in the Latter Day of the Law to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

The three proofs are documentary proof, theoretical proof, and actual proof.

**Documentary proof** means that a religion's doctrines are based upon or in accord with its foundational scriptures.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "One should accept what is clearly stated in the text of the sutras, but discard anything that cannot be supported by the text" (WND-1, 109). Doctrines not supported by documentary proof amount to no more than arbitrary interpretations or opinions. In the case of Buddhism, all doctrines must be supported by the sutras, or the teachings expounded by Shakyamuni. In the Soka Gakkai, the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, who practiced and embodied the essence of the Lotus Sutra, serve as documentary proof.

**Theoretical proof**, or proof of reason, means that a religion's doctrines and assertions are compatible with reason and logic. The Daishonin writes: "Buddhism is reason" (WND-1, 839). Buddhism respects and values reason. One should not, therefore, accept irrational arguments or interpretations.

**Actual proof** means that belief and practice of a religion's doctrines produce positive results in one's life and daily affairs and in society.

Religion is not just an abstraction; it exerts a powerful influence on people's lives. We can judge the merits of a religion by examining this actual impact.

The Daishonin writes: "In judging the relative merit of Buddhist doctrines, I, Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact" (WND-1, 599). As is clear from this statement, the Daishonin valued actual proof above all other forms of proof. This is because the original aim of Buddhism is to help people become happy.

A religion is not truly credible if it lacks any of these three forms of proof. To use an analogy, to be deemed safe and effective, any medicine must have a list of ingredients and their effects (documentary proof), a sound theoretical basis for being effective (theoretical proof), and, when taken, show real results in relieving the ailment it is intended to treat (actual proof).

Nichiren Buddhism has a basis that is objective and universally acceptable in terms of both theory and practical results.

## 6. Faith, Practice, and Study

The purpose of Nichiren Buddhism is to enable us to transform our lives. There are three basic elements in applying its teachings: faith, practice, and study.

**Faith** means belief in the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin—the correct teaching of the Latter Day of the Law—and in the Gohonzon, its ultimate expression. The central ingredient of Buddhist practice is faith.

**Practice** refers to concrete efforts to transform and develop our lives.

**Study** means learning and inquiring into the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. It provides us with guiding principles for proper faith and practice helping us strengthen our practice and deepen our faith.

Correct practice of Nichiren Buddhism must include all three of these elements.

In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” the Daishonin says:

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvīpa [the entire world]. Be sure to strengthen your faith, and receive the protection of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase. (WND-1, 386)

### Faith

Faith is belief and acceptance—believing in and accepting the Buddha’s teaching. Such faith is the foundation for attaining the life state of Buddhahood.

In the Lotus Sutra, it is taught that even Shariputra, who was known as foremost in wisdom among Shakyamuni’s disciples, could only grasp the essence of the sutra’s teaching through faith. In the “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find the passage: “Even you, Shariputra, in the case of this sutra were able to gain entrance through faith alone” (LSOC3, 109–10). This is the principle of “gaining entrance through faith alone.”

Only through faith can we attain the same great wisdom and life state as the Buddha. When we believe in and accept the Buddha's teaching, we can understand for the first time the correctness of the Buddhist philosophy of life.

Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, inscribed Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the fundamental law of the universe to which he had awakened, in the form of the Gohonzon. In other words, in the Gohonzon, he revealed his enlightened life state of Buddhahood for the sake of all people in the Latter Day of the Law.

Therefore, the most important thing in practicing Nichiren Buddhism is having deep faith in the Gohonzon as the object of devotion for attaining the life state of Buddhahood. When we have faith in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we can tap the power of the Mystic Law in our lives and firmly establish the life state of Buddhahood within us.

## **Practice**

Practice is the concrete actions we engage in based on faith in the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that Buddhahood, a life state of boundless wisdom and compassion, is inherent within our own lives.

The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to manifest our innate Buddhahood and attain a state of absolute happiness. To tap this latent potential and bring it to function in our lives, concrete efforts to transform and develop ourselves are essential. If we are to reveal our Buddhahood, we need to continue making efforts that accord with reason and correct Buddhist principles. This is what is referred to as practice.

Practice has two aspects—practice for ourselves and practice for others. These are compared to the two wheels of a cart: our practice must have both of these aspects to advance properly.

Practice for ourselves means striving to gain personal benefit from practicing Nichiren Buddhism. Practice for others is teaching others about Buddhism so that they may also receive benefit.

The Daishonin states: "Now, however, we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and the daimoku that I, Nichiren, chant is different from that of earlier ages. This Nam-myoho-enge-kyo encompasses both practice for oneself and the teaching of others" (WND-2, 986).



In the Latter Day of the Law, both our practice for ourselves—seeking personal enlightenment—and our practice for others—sharing Buddhism with others so that they may also attain enlightenment—are based on practicing the fundamental teaching for attaining Buddhahood, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Therefore, correct practice in Nichiren Buddhism encompasses both these forms of practice. It consists of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, while also teaching others about the benefit of faith in the Gohonzon and encouraging them to practice as well.

Specifically, practice for ourselves means doing gongyo (reciting excerpts of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), and practice for others means sharing and spreading the teachings of Buddhism. In addition, the various activities we carry out as SGI members for the sake of kosen-rufu also constitute practice for others.

## **The Daily Practice of Gongyo and Efforts to Spread the Teachings**

Gongyo refers to reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo before the Gohonzon. This is the first of the two aspects of the practice for transforming our lives.

Comparing the practice of gongyo to polishing a mirror, the Daishonin writes:

This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (WND-1, 4)

As this metaphor indicates, the mirror itself doesn't change, but when it is polished, the way that it functions changes. Similarly, through our continuous daily practice of gongyo, we can polish and strengthen our lives and positively transform the way they function.

Referring to the importance of spreading the correct teaching of Buddhism, the Daishonin states in "The True Aspect of All Phenomena": "You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. . . . Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase" (WND-1, 386). And in "Letter to Jakunichi-bo," he says: "Those who become Nichiren's disciples and lay believers should realize the profound karmic relationship they share with him and spread the Lotus Sutra as he does" (WND-1, 994).

It is important that we not only seek to transform our own state of life through our daily practice of gongyo, but to share the teachings of Buddhism with others, even if only a single word, aiming for the happiness of both ourselves and others.

Such efforts help deepen our own faith and practice as well as activate the altruistic life states of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood within us—motivating us to work for the happiness and well-being of others. They enable us to become genuine disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. Along with doing gongyo, efforts to spread the teachings of Buddhism are also a powerful force for transforming our lives.

The Lotus Sutra states:

If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One [the Buddha]. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work. (LSOC10, 200–201)

Based on this passage, the Daishonin declares: “One who recites even one word or phrase of the Lotus Sutra and who speaks about it to another person is the emissary of Shakyamuni Buddha, lord of the teachings” (WND-1, 331).

In other words, the efforts we make in our practice for others' happiness are truly noble: they constitute the behaviour and practice of the Buddha, which we carry out as the Buddha's emissaries.

## **Primary Practice and Supporting Practice**

Our morning and evening practice of gongyo is a central pillar of our efforts to transform our lives.

In gongyo, we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon and recite excerpts from the “Expedient Means” (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra and the verse section of the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon is fundamental; it is therefore called the “primary practice.”

Reciting the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters helps bring forth the benefit of the primary practice; it is therefore called the “supporting practice.”

The reason we recite the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters is that these are the two most important chapters of the Lotus Sutra, which opens the way to enlightenment for all people. The “Expedient Means” (2nd) chapter explains the

true aspect of all phenomena, the central doctrine of the theoretical teaching (first 14 chapters) of the Lotus Sutra. The “Life Span” (16th) chapter reveals the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment in the remote past, the central doctrine of the essential teaching (latter 14 chapters) of the sutra. The Daishonin writes: “If you recite the ‘Life Span’ and ‘Expedient Means’ chapters, then the remaining chapters will naturally be included even though you do not recite them” (WND-1, 71).

Explaining the relationship between the primary practice and supporting practice, Nichikan, an 18th-century scholar of the Daishonin’s teachings, compared them to food and seasoning, respectively. He compared it to how, when eating rice or noodles, the “primary” source of nourishment, seasonings such as salt or vinegar are used to enhance, or “supplement,” the flavour. In similar fashion, reciting the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters, he said, helps bring forth the profound benefit of the primary practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is why it is called the supporting practice.<sup>6</sup>

In reciting the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” chapters, then, we praise and enhance the beneficial power of the Gohonzon, the embodiment of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

## **Study**

Study is the study of the Buddhist teachings, primarily reading the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and studying the correct principles and doctrines of Nichiren Buddhism. Through such study, we can develop a deeper, more solid faith, and also ensure that we practice correctly.

Without Buddhist study, we are at risk of lapsing into our own personal interpretations of Buddhism, and may easily be deceived by those presenting erroneous teachings.

As the Daishonin affirms when he writes, “Both practice and study arise from faith” (WND-1, 386), faith is the foundation of study.

President Toda said: “Faith seeks understanding, and understanding deepens faith.”<sup>7</sup>The purpose of studying and deepening our understanding of Buddhism, as he notes, is to deepen our faith.

The Daishonin urges his disciples to study his writings over and over. He writes, for instance: “Have him read this letter again and again, and listen

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<sup>6</sup> Nichikan, “The Practices of This School,” *The Six-Volume Writings*.

<sup>7</sup> Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda), (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1989), vol. 4, p. 18.

attentively” (WND-1, 1031). In addition, he praises the seeking spirit of disciples who asked him questions about the Buddhist teachings.

Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin’s direct disciple and successor, stated: “Followers of this school should engrave the writings of the Daishonin in their lives” (GZ, 1618)<sup>8</sup>; and “Those of insufficient Buddhist learning who are bent on obtaining fame and fortune are not qualified to call themselves my followers” (GZ, 1618).<sup>9</sup> In this way, he encourages us to study the Daishonin’s writings.



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<sup>8</sup> Article 11 of “The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko.”

<sup>9</sup> Article 8 of “The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko.”

## 7. Faith for Overcoming Obstacles

Life is invariably accompanied by difficulties. And in our struggles for kosen-rufu, we are sure to encounter hardships and obstacles. In this section, we explore the various kinds of obstacles and hindrances that will arise in the process of carrying out our Buddhist practice, and affirm the significance of “faith for overcoming obstacles.”

Because our aim is to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime, it is important that we maintain our Buddhist faith and practice throughout our lives. However, Buddhism teaches that as we continue to persevere in our practice, obstacles and difficulties will arise without fail to obstruct us. It is crucial, then, that we be prepared for these, and strive to establish faith that cannot be compromised by any problem or adversity.

Why is it, then, that a person who upholds the correct teaching encounters obstacles?

First, it is because to believe in and practice the correct teaching with the aim of developing the life state of Buddhahood means transforming one’s life at the deepest level. And while any change or reformation will be met with some resistance, Buddhist practice in particular arouses strong opposition to change from within our own lives or our relationships with others. This may be compared to the way the resistance of the water on the hull of a moving boat produces waves.

The hindrances that arise as we practice Buddhism for the purpose of attaining enlightenment are often categorized as the “three obstacles and four devils.” In addition to these, the Lotus Sutra teaches that a “votary of the Lotus Sutra,” a person who correctly practices and endeavors to spread its teaching in the evil and impure age of the Latter Day of the Law, will encounter opposition by forces known as the “three powerful enemies.”

These represent the persecutions that occur wherever there are those who, in the evil age after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha, actively practice the Lotus Sutra and work to spread it widely with the wish of enabling all people to attain Buddhahood. Persecution by the three powerful enemies can be proof that one is a genuine votary or practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

## 1) The Three Obstacles and Four Devils

In his work "Letter to the Brothers," Nichiren Daishonin writes:

One passage from the same volume [the fifth volume of T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight*] reads: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere . . . One should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If one falls under their influence, one will be led into the paths of evil. If one is frightened by them, one will be prevented from practicing the correct teaching." This statement not only applies to me, but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations. (WND-1, 501)

As this passage teaches, when we believe in and practice the correct Buddhist teaching, and advance in our Buddhist practice while deepening our faith, functions will arise to obstruct our progress. These are known as the three obstacles and four devils.

In the same work, the Daishonin explains the elements of the three obstacles and four devils in some detail as follows:

The three obstacles in this passage are the obstacle of earthly desires, the obstacle of karma, and the obstacle of retribution. The obstacle of earthly desires is the impediments to one's practice that arise from greed, anger, foolishness, and the like; the obstacle of karma is the hindrances presented by one's wife or children; and the obstacle of retribution is the hindrances caused by one's sovereign or parents. Of the four devils, the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven are of this last kind. (WND-1, 501)

## The Three Obstacles

First, in the “three obstacles,” the word *obstacles* indicates functions that hinder us in our faith and practice. These are categorized as the obstacle of earthly desires, the obstacle of karma, and the obstacle of retribution.

The obstacle of earthly desires indicates when earthly desires, or impulses and afflictions, such as greed, anger, and foolishness (called the “three poisons”), prevent us from progressing in Buddhist faith and practice.

The obstacle of karma refers to hindrances to our faith and practice that result from our evil acts in this life. In this passage from “Letter to the Brothers,” opposition from those close to one, such as one’s spouse or children, is cited as a specific example.

The obstacle of retribution describes impediments to our Buddhist practice that are due to the difficult circumstances into which we are born or have come to live. These are considered adverse rewards or reckoning that stem from bad karma formed in past lifetimes. In “Letter to the Brothers,” the Daishonin associates these with opposition coming from people whose wishes one is bound to follow, such as the sovereign of one’s nation and one’s parents.

## The Four Devils

Next, the word *devil* of the “four devils” refers to workings within the hearts and minds of those who believe in and practice Buddhism. These workings hinder or take away the brilliance of their lives, which are in themselves embodiments of the Mystic Law. The four devils are (1) the hindrance of the five components,<sup>10</sup> (2) the hindrance of earthly desires, (3) the hindrance of death, and (4) the hindrance of the devil king.

The hindrance of the five components arises from disharmony among the workings of the body and mind, or the five components, of those who carry out faith and practice.

The hindrance of earthly desires means the emergence within one’s life of afflictions such as greed, anger, and foolishness that function to destroy one’s faith.

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<sup>10</sup> The five components: The constituent elements of form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness that unite temporarily to form an individual living being.



The hindrance of death comes when a person's Buddhist practice is cut short due to his or her death. Also, it can be said that one has been defeated by the hindrance or devil of death when the death of another practitioner, or of anyone close, causes one to doubt one's Buddhist faith.

Finally, there is the hindrance of the devil king. "Devil king" is an abbreviation of the Devil King of the Heaven of Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others—the king who makes free use of the fruits of others' efforts for his own pleasure. Also known as the devil king of the sixth heaven, this is the most fundamental kind of devilish function described in Buddhism.

Nichiren Daishonin says that "the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven" (WND-1, 1113). He means that this devilish function is something that emerges from the fundamental delusion innate in life itself. It reveals itself in different forms and utilizes various means to persecute and oppress those who are practicing Buddhism correctly. Most typically, it appears in the lives of those in power or who have strong influence over practitioners.

### **The Wise Will Rejoice While the Foolish Will Retreat**

It is clear, then, that as we endeavour to carry out our Buddhist practice, obstacles and hardships will emerge to hinder our progress. However, it is important to be aware that earthly desires such as greed, anger, and foolishness, spouses and partners, children, parents, our own body and mind, or even death do not in themselves constitute obstacles and devils. Rather, what causes them to function as the three obstacles and four devils is the weakness of our own life force that allows us to be influenced negatively by them.

Even Shakyamuni Buddha was able to attain enlightenment through clearly recognizing that the various illusions arising within his own mind were devilish functions trying to prevent him from achieving his goal. For us, the key to defeating devilish functions is to develop faith that is strong enough to remain unshaken by anything.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin states:

There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer, autumn, winter, and spring give way to each other. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat. (WND-1, 637)

When the three obstacles and four devils appear, it is crucial to have the conviction that this is the very time for us to make great progress toward attaining Buddhahood and, as wise people who rejoice at such challenges, persevere in our faith and overcome them.

## **2) The Three Powerful Enemies**

The “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes in its twenty-line verse section the three kinds of powerful opponents who will persecute those who strive to spread the sutra’s teachings in the Latter Day of the Law. Known as the “three powerful enemies,” they are defined as (1) arrogant lay people, (2) arrogant monks, and (3) arrogant false sages.

All are described as arrogant because they display various kinds of haughtiness and conceit, believing themselves superior to or greater than other people.

(1) “Arrogant lay people” are those ignorant of Buddhism who persecute practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra explains that they will subject the sutra’s practitioners to slander, cursing and speaking ill of them, or even attacking them with weapons such as swords and staves.

(2) “Arrogant monks” are Buddhist clergy who slander the Lotus Sutra’s practitioners. Because their understanding is flawed and their hearts crooked, they fail to understand the truth of the Buddhist teachings. And yet, attached to their own ways of thinking and believing themselves superior to others, they harass and persecute those who uphold the correct teaching.

(3) “Arrogant false sages” are seemingly respect worthy monks or priests whom people regard as sages. Typically, they reside in places removed from society. Consumed with greed and the desire for profit, they harbour ill will and contrive to

undermine or deceive practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. Their usual tactic is to approach the ruler, senior officials, or others in authority and make false claims about the practitioners, such as declaring them to be persons of mistaken views, in an attempt to motivate those in power to oppress them.

The Lotus Sutra describes the condition in which a person’s heart or mind falls under the influence of such evil with the statement “Evil demons will take possession of others” (LSOC13, 233). It teaches that, in the Latter Day of the Law, those who practice the sutra will be repeatedly assailed and driven off by those who have succumbed to evil impulses.

Of these three powerful enemies, it is said that, though one may be able to endure the first and the second, the third is the most formidable and pernicious. The reason is that it is quite difficult to perceive and recognize the true nature of such esteemed religious figures of high status—arrogant false sages.

In the Latter Day of the Law, whenever there are those who spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, these three powerful enemies will appear and attempt to interfere and obstruct such efforts. Because of his efforts to spread the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin faced persecutions brought about by these three powerful enemies just as the sutra predicts, thus proving that he was the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day.



## 8. Changing Karma into Mission

No one can avoid difficulties or problems. Buddhism encourages us to build happiness in the midst of this reality, to grow, improve and become stronger while facing life's challenges. Nichiren Buddhism enables us to change every aspect of our lives for the better, permanently. The process called "changing karma" entails securing unwavering happiness by revolutionizing our lives at the very core. And seen from the Buddhist perspective of life and death, this happiness persists eternally, countless lifetimes into the future. Here we examine the principle of changing karma and the Buddhist practice for changing karma into mission.

### What Is Karma?

Some of our problems and sufferings are caused by actions and decisions we have made in this life. But for some we can find no apparent cause. These may make us think, *I've done nothing wrong, so why is this happening to me?*

Buddhism teaches the principle of karma—that many events and conditions we experience in this lifetime result from actions we have made in previous lives. Karma is a Sanskrit word that means "action." It explains the workings of cause and effect that span the boundaries of life and death. Our actions of thought, speech and behaviour are like seeds that become implanted in our lives. These causes can remain dormant as "latent effects" in the current and future lifetimes. At certain times under certain conditions, however, these reveal themselves as "manifest effects"—results, or karmic rewards, we experience in a tangible way. Karma, then, is the accumulation of actions from previous existences that remain dormant within us until they appear as effects in this lifetime. This karma can be either good or bad, though people tend to view "karma" as bad results stemming from bad actions in the past.

Buddhism teaches that life is not just a matter of the present, but a continuum of past, present and future lives—the "three existences" of life. Our actions at any moment become part of the continuum of cause and effect that spans these three existences. Bad causes in past lives or the present, such as disparaging or hurting others, stealing or lying and so on, express themselves in present or future lives as bad effects, bringing us suffering and problems. This is the principle of cause and effect that Buddhism and most Eastern philosophies generally teach. Nichiren Daishonin calls this the "general law of cause and effect." And while this principle is important to understand, being aware of it alone is not enough to change our lives.

Adopting this view would require that, in order to rid ourselves of bad karma, we negate every bad cause we have ever made by making a good cause in its place,

one at a time, over countless lifetimes. Of course we would have to refrain from making any more bad causes as well. There would be no way to transform our sufferings arising from karma directly or quickly in this lifetime. Bound by this belief, many Buddhist sutras taught prior to the Lotus Sutra hold that changing one's karma requires countless eons of austere practices. This heavy view of karma ultimately inspires no hope.

Fortunately, Nichiren does not emphasize this general view of karma or cause and effect. Instead he focuses on the principle and practice of changing karma

In "Letter from Sado," he makes a revolutionary pronouncement in stating: "My sufferings, however, are not ascribable to this causal law" (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 305). Here, he expresses that the great persecutions he is facing cannot be explained by the general view of causality. Rather, he continues, these sufferings arise from his slander of the Lotus Sutra in the present and past existences. By "Lotus Sutra" he does not simply mean a Buddhist scripture, but the deepest Law or principle the sutra embodies. This constitutes the correct teaching that all people can reveal their Buddhahood, the principle of respect for the value and dignity of the human being and the standard of striving for one's own happiness as well as the happiness of others. To slander the Lotus Sutra means to fail to recognize or to belittle these values intrinsic to life itself; it means to deny that one's life and the lives of all others are precious embodiments of the Mystic Law, which is the source of these ideals. This adverse relationship to the Mystic Law constitutes a deep-seated negative cause that gives rise to various forms of bad karma.

To change karma arising from rejecting or slandering this fundamental Law, we need to make the most fundamental good cause, which is to protect and spread that Law for the sake of people's happiness. This means to believe in the correct teaching of the Mystic Law, to practice it correctly, uphold and protect and teach it to many people. In this way, we can immediately change the direction of our lives, from one bound for suffering to one of increasing power and joy deriving from the law of life. This is the process of changing karma in Nichiren Buddhism.

The source of this transformation is the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. When we do so, "then the host of sins, like frost or dew, can be wiped out by the sun of wisdom" (The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p.390). Referring to this passage from the Universal Worthy Sutra, Nichiren compares our past negative karma to frost or dew that has built up in one's life. When we believe in the Gohonzon and apply ourselves to chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo both for ourselves and for others, the world of Buddhahood emerges within our lives like the

sun, dispelling our karmic impediments just as the warm morning sunlight evaporates frost or dew.<sup>11</sup>

## **Lessening Karmic Retribution**

In the course of practicing Buddhism and working for kosen-rufu, we will inevitably face obstacles, negative influences and functions that attempt to block our way or interfere with our efforts.

Nichiren Daishonin taught that to encounter such opposition is in fact a benefit. That is because by meeting and winning over difficulties, we naturally carry out the process of “lessening our karmic retribution.” The characters for the Japanese phrase *ten jukyoju*, often translated as “lessening one’s karmic retribution,” can literally be read “transforming the heavy and receiving it lightly.” Left alone, the bad causes we have accumulated over many lifetimes reveal themselves as miserable results in this and future lifetimes. But through the benefit of devoting ourselves and leading others to the Mystic Law, the heavy consequences of our karma can quickly be lightened. That is, we can effectively rid ourselves of all our negative karma in this lifetime by experiencing its results in much lightened form as obstacles and troubles we challenge for the sake of kosen-rufu. For this reason, Nichiren Daishonin says that through the benefit of lessening karmic retribution, “The sufferings of hell will vanish instantly” (“Lessening One’s Karmic Retribution,” WND-1, 199). Difficulties, then, are important opportunities for ridding ourselves of bad karma and developing and strengthening ourselves.

Nichiren also says: “Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword. Worthies and sages are tested by abuse. My present exile is not because of any secular crime. It is solely so that I may expiate in this lifetime my past grave offenses and be freed in the next from the three evil paths” (“Letter from Sado,” WND-1, 303).

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<sup>11</sup>For example, in “Letter to Niike,” Nichiren writes: “Our worldly misdeeds and evil karma may have piled up as high as Mount Sumeru, but when we take faith in this sutra, they will vanish like frost or dew under the sun of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 1026).

## Voluntarily Assuming the Appropriate Karma

By persevering in faith despite hardships and thereby changing our karma, we find deeper meaning in living. In its “Teacher of the Law” chapter, the Lotus Sutra introduces the idea of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma.”<sup>12</sup> It explains that bodhisattvas voluntarily give up the good karmic rewards due them as a result of their pure actions in past lives. Out of compassion, they choose instead to be born in an evil age so that they can teach people the principles of the Lotus Sutra and save them from suffering.

Such bodhisattvas experience suffering just as those who do so because of bad karma they formed in the past. Viewing ourselves as having made this choice—of voluntarily meeting and overcoming difficulties through faith out of compassion for others—gives us a new perspective on problems and suffering. We can see facing problems as something we do to fulfil our vow as a bodhisattva to save suffering people.

Only by dealing with hardships in life can we come to understand and empathize with people’s suffering. With every problem we overcome through Buddhist faith and practice, we create a model for winning in life, a genuine experience through which we can encourage many others.

SGI President Ikeda expresses this process as “changing karma into mission,” and explains: “We all have our own karma or destiny, but when we look it square in the face and grasp its true significance, then any hardship can serve to help us lead richer and more profound lives. Our actions in challenging our destiny become examples and inspirations for countless others.

“In other words, when we change our karma into mission, we transform our destiny from playing a negative role to a positive one. Those who change their karma into their mission have ‘voluntarily assumed the appropriate karma.’ Therefore, those who keep advancing, while regarding everything as part of their mission, proceed toward the goal of transforming their destiny” (August 2003 Living Buddhism, p. 50).



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<sup>12</sup>“Teacher of the Law,” the 10th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, states, “Medicine King, you should understand that these people voluntarily relinquish the reward due them for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra” (LSOC, 200).





## **The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism<sup>13</sup>**

The Soka Gakkai is a religious organization that practices Buddhist teachings originating from Shakyamuni Buddha in India and carried on and developed by the Indian Buddhist scholars Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, who were revered as bodhisattvas; the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai (Chih-i) and Miao-lo (Chan-jan) of China; the Great Teacher Dengyo (Saicho) of Japan; and Nichiren Daishonin. It maintains the orthodox lineage and tradition of Buddhist humanism that began with Shakyamuni, which affirms respect for life and for all human beings.

The Soka Gakkai bases itself on the Lotus Sutra, a central scripture of Mahayana Buddhism, and engages in Buddhist practice and activities adapted to modern times. It carries on the fundamental spirit of the Lotus Sutra as taught and exemplified by Nichiren Daishonin through his life and actions.

### **9. Shakyamuni**

Shakyamuni was born a prince in ancient India. (His birthplace, Lumbini, is located in what is today Nepal.)

In his youth, Shakyamuni witnessed the unavoidable sufferings of existence—birth, aging, sickness, and death. Though still young and in good health, he realized that he, too, would someday experience them. He decided to leave his home and embark on a spiritual quest to find a solution to these fundamental sufferings.

As a prince, Shakyamuni led a life of great comfort and ease such that most people would envy. But when he became aware that the riches and luxuries people sought in life were ultimately fleeting and empty, he could find in them no real

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<sup>13</sup>This entire section (9 to 13) is for additional study / reference purposes only will not necessarily appear in the exam.

pleasure. This led him to search for a philosophy or teaching that would clarify the true meaning of human existence.

## **Buddha—The Awakened One**

Shakyamuni was not satisfied with either the traditional spiritual teachings of India or the new schools of thought and belief that had become prevalent at that time. He sought instead, through the practice of meditation, to discover the fundamental causes and solutions to life's sufferings. In this way, he awakened to the eternal and universal Dharma, or Law, that pervades all life and the universe.

The name Shakyamuni is an honorific title meaning "sage of the Shakyas"—Shakya is the name of the clan to which he belonged and muni means "sage." The title Buddha, by which he came to be universally known, means "awakened one."

The Law to which Shakyamuni awakened became the core of the Buddhist teachings.

## **The Wisdom to Realize the Inherent Dignity of Life**

Shakyamuni declared that people's ignorance of the inherent dignity of their own lives results in their being ruled by egoism. This causes them to be consumed by immediate, selfish desires and driven to seek their own happiness at the expense of others. He taught, therefore, that the noblest and most admirable way for people to live with true dignity is to awaken to the eternal and universal Law within them and return to their original pure state of life that is free of fundamental ignorance or darkness.

The Buddha's teaching in this regard amounted to what might be called a "restoration of the value of the human being." It stressed how important it is for people to regain the supreme dignity of their lives and realize their infinite potential by bringing forth their inherent wisdom.

## **The Compassion to Respect All People**

By awakening people to the value and dignity of their own lives, Shakyamuni taught them to understand and respect the value and dignity of others' lives as well. This is the basic spirit of Buddhist compassion.

Shakyamuni once explained to a certain king that all individuals hold themselves most dear, and that, therefore, those who love themselves should not harm others.

Compassion as taught in Buddhism means to understand that others are as important and precious as we are and, as such, we should treasure them as we would treasure ourselves. It is a teaching of mutual understanding and respect.

## **The Lotus Sutra—The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism**

Shakyamuni expounded his teachings for some 50 years, and after his death, his disciples compiled records of his words and actions. Those containing the Buddha's main doctrinal teachings came to be known as "sutras." Among all his teachings, those pertaining to compassion and wisdom are the focus of the Mahayana sutras. And preeminent among these is the Lotus Sutra, which has been extolled as "the king of sutras."

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says that, by expounding it, he has fulfilled the wish he has held since the remote past to elevate all people to the same life state as his own. Further, he repeatedly calls upon countless disciples to inherit and share that eternal wish, or vow, and carry out the practice of compassion in order to fulfil it.



## 10. Nichiren Daishonin—The Votary of the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren Daishonin regarded the suffering of all people as his own and, in a time of great social turmoil, sought to find a way to relieve that suffering. He vowed to identify and carry on the Buddhist teachings capable of realizing genuine happiness and dignity for all people. He studied the commentaries and writings of earlier Buddhist scholars, while also carefully reading and examining on his own the many Buddhist sutras. As a result of his studies, he found the answer he had been searching for in the Lotus Sutra, which teaches the way for all people to give expression to their unlimited potential and bring it to life in human society.

Based on these principles of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin strongly resolved to help all people realize true happiness and dignity, and to actualize peace and security in society. He encountered life-threatening persecution by the authorities and fierce opposition from among the populace, owing to their lack of understanding of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their mistaken attachment to old ways of thinking. However, none of this deterred him in the least. He continued to take action in exact accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, encouraging and revitalizing the people, even at the risk of his life.

Nichiren Daishonin established the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and he inscribed the Gohonzon as the object of faith, or devotion. By identifying, revealing, and establishing the teaching that is the essence of the Lotus Sutra, he opened the way for all people to attain Buddhahood.

In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin asserts that peace and social prosperity are indispensable to building individual happiness. He writes:

If the nation is destroyed and people’s homes are wiped out, then where can one flee for safety? If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not? (WND-1, 24)

The focus of the Daishonin’s lifelong efforts was establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land—that is, establishing the philosophy of respect for the dignity of life as society’s guiding principle and building a world where people can live in peace and security.

This accords with efforts that practitioners of Buddhism have made since the time of Shakyamuni, to overcome the destructive nature of egoism that inflicts so much harm and suffering on people and society. It marked a new humanistic

approach based on the fundamental spirit of Buddhism to enable people to realize happiness for themselves and for others—one that sought to foster trust, value creation, and harmony.

The key to this process was dialogue grounded in reason and humanity.

## **11. The Soka Gakkai—Bringing Nichiren Buddhism to Life in Modern Times**

Through their selfless efforts, the Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents—Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda—revived the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin in modern times.

Soka Gakkai members engage in a variety of activities based on the guidance of the three founding presidents.

On a personal level, while challenging themselves in all areas of life, they use the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to reflect deeply on their lives and bring forth the hope and courage to deal with problems they encounter. In addition, they strive to develop rich character based on a solid commitment to humanistic values. This is the practice of human revolution.

Through everyday conversations with fellow members and attending Soka Gakkai meetings, members also deepen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's writings and SGI President Ikeda's guidance, share experiences in faith, and encourage and support one another.

In addition, they talk with friends and acquaintances about the principles and ideals of Buddhism and how their Buddhist practice has enriched their lives. In this way, they spread understanding and support for the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism and the humanistic activities of the Soka Gakkai, while expanding the network of those who embrace faith in the Mystic Law.

## **12. The Westward Transmission of Buddhism and Worldwide Kosen-rufu**

The practice of Nichiren Buddhism aims to enable people to realize happiness both for themselves and for others. It also places importance on individuals contributing to their communities as good citizens and becoming indispensable people whom others can trust and count on by fulfilling their roles at home, at work, and in society.

The Soka Gakkai is also actively engaged in addressing the global issues facing humanity today. Through its international antinuclear weapons exhibitions and initiatives in support of refugees, it highlights the importance of peace, respect for the dignity of life, and human rights. Also, through exhibitions on environmental themes, it aims to promote awareness of the need for efforts to protect the global environment.

The Soka Gakkai rediscovered the tradition of humanistic philosophy and practice originating with Shakyamuni and inherited by Nichiren Daishonin, recognizing and treasuring it as the very quintessence of Buddhism. In addition, the Soka Gakkai is carrying on this tradition and spirit in today's society and, through its activities and initiatives, working to pass them on to future generations.

Through dialogue aimed at deepening understanding and providing inspiration, we of the Soka Gakkai strive continually to cultivate and empower many able individuals who can, in their respective roles and fields, exemplify Buddhist humanism. This movement, which aims to realize the happiness of humanity as well as world peace, is called kosen-rufu.

Buddhism, which began in India, travelled eastward to Japan. Now, it is being transmitted back westward, spreading not only to the countries of Asia and India but throughout the entire world. This is referred to as the "westward transmission" or "westward return" of Buddhism. Today, our humanistic Buddhist movement has spread to 192 countries and territories around the globe.

### 13. The Three Treasures

The Soka Gakkai is the organization that, in modern times, has inherited the true spirit and lineage of Buddhism passed on from Shakyamuni.

It is a basic premise for all Buddhists to respect and treasure the Buddha, the Law (the Buddha's teachings), and the practitioners of the Law. Therefore, these three are regarded respectively as the treasure of the Buddha, the treasure of the Law, and the treasure of the Buddhist Order (community of believers). Together, they are known as the three treasures. The treasure of the Buddha is the Buddha who expounds the teaching, while the treasure of the Law is the teaching the Buddha expounds, and the treasure of the Buddhist Order is the gathering of people who believe in and practice that teaching.

In Sanskrit, the three treasures (triratna) are called Buddha, Dharma, and Samgha. The word samgha originally meant "a collective body" or "an assembly." Referring to the Buddhist Order, it was rendered phonetically into Chinese and then into Japanese with two characters, pronounced in Japanese as sogya. This was subsequently contracted to only the first character, so, which also came to be used to refer to Buddhist priests. Later, the term samgha was also rendered into Chinese and Japanese using two or three characters literally meaning "a harmonious gathering," pronounced in Japanese as wago or wago-so.

Over the long history of Buddhism, various teachings emerged to guide people according to their needs and capacities, the times, and changes that took place in society.

The specific description of the three treasures differs somewhat within each teaching. In East Asia, the treasure of the Buddhist Order, or Samgha, came to refer exclusively to male Buddhist priests, not the community of believers as a whole.

In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of sowing (that is, sowing the seeds of enlightenment, namely, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo), we revere the three treasures from the perspective of time without beginning, the fundamental dimension of existence. "Time without beginning" here is used to describe that which has always been present since the remotest past and will remain present into the eternal future. In terms of Buddhist practice, it refers to the original moment of attaining Buddhahood, when ordinary people reveal and manifest the eternal Mystic Law that has always been present within. Members of the Soka Gakkai eternally revere these three treasures in order to attain Buddhahood.

The treasure of the Buddha from the perspective of time without beginning is Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of beginningless time, or eternal Buddha, who



revealed in his own life as an ordinary person the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood.

The treasure of the Law from the perspective of time without beginning is the Gohonzon, or object of devotion, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which Nichiren Daishonin revealed as the Law for universal enlightenment.

The treasure of the Buddhist Order from the perspective of time without beginning is Nikko Shonin (Nichiren Daishonin's direct disciple and successor), who protected and correctly transmitted the treasure of the Buddha and the treasure of the Law.

These are the three treasures to be revered in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of sowing.

When we revere (nam) these three treasures, we receive the benefit of sowing the seeds of enlightenment [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] and are thereby able to attain Buddhahood.

The word nam derives from the Sanskrit word namas (meaning "bow" or "reverence"), and was translated into Chinese as "to devote one's life," meaning to base oneself on something and follow it in body and mind, to believe in it and make it one's foundation.

Moreover, the treasure of the Buddhist Order in a broad sense refers to the gathering of people who correctly protect, transmit, and spread the three treasures as objects of respect and reverence. Today, the Soka Gakkai is the treasure of the Buddhist Order, for it is the organization that is carrying on the spirit and conduct of Nichiren Daishonin and advancing worldwide kosen-rufu.





## **The History of the Soka Gakkai**

### **14. The History and Development of the Soka Gakkai**

#### **The Founders of the Soka Gakkai**

The Soka Gakkai has its origins in the mentor–disciple relationship that existed between the organization’s first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and its second president, Josei Toda.

Makiguchi was born on June 6, 1871, in a small port community on Japan’s northwest coast, in what is today Kashiwagi City, Niigata Prefecture. He spent much of his youth studying and working in Hokkaido, Japan’s northernmost major island. At 18, he entered a teachers’ training facility and, after graduating, became an elementary school teacher.

While a student, Makiguchi had developed a deep interest in geography. As a teacher, he continued to refine his ideas on the subject and on how best to teach it. In 1901, he left Hokkaido for Tokyo, and two years later published his first major work, *The Geography of Human Life*. In it, he rejects the traditional method of studying geography through rote memorization. He instead offers a systematic approach to education based on the relationship human life shares with nature and society.

Before becoming principal of Tosei Elementary School in 1913, Makiguchi worked a variety of jobs editing educational periodicals, teaching foreign students, developing textbooks and establishing correspondence courses for young women unable to receive a formal education.

On February 11, 1900, Josei Toda was born on Japan’s central west coast in what today is Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture. Two years later, his family moved to the west coast of Hokkaido to Atsuta Village. After graduating from Atsuta Higher

Elementary School (equivalent to middle school), he studied independently while working, eventually obtaining a provisional teaching license. In June 1918, Toda became an associate elementary school teacher.

### **Josei Toda Encounters His Mentor**

Between 1913 and 1932, Makiguchi refined his educational theories and their practical applications while continuing his career as a principal. He advocated community studies in which students learn about and appreciate their communities. And he pursued ways to assure that disadvantaged children received equal opportunities in education, going beyond the classroom to care for his students. He bought lunches, for example, for students who couldn't afford their own and, on cold days, welcomed them with hot water to warm their hands.

In 1920, Toda visited Tokyo, where he was introduced to Makiguchi. The two discussed at length Japan's future as well as educational practice and research. A short while later, Toda moved to Tokyo and taught at Nishimachi Elementary, where Makiguchi was principal. Toda worked with and supported Makiguchi for the next 23 years.

### **The Value-Creating Education Society**

Toda followed his mentor to Mikasa Elementary School. Then in 1923, when Makiguchi was transferred to his next school, Toda established Jishu Gakkan, a private preparatory school for students taking the competitive middle school examinations. Here, Makiguchi freely pursued his research and developed his educational theories.

When Makiguchi encountered Nichiren Buddhism, he saw that the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin resonated deeply with his ideals. In 1928, at 57, Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Buddhism. Toda followed suit.

Fully supporting Makiguchi's goal of publishing his educational theory, Toda edited and organized his mentor's years of notes on his educational research, practices and experience. Toda even invested his own funds to publish Makiguchi's work.

On November 18, 1930, with Toda's dedicated assistance, Makiguchi published the first of four volumes of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* (Soka kyoikugaku taikei). Tsunesaburo Makiguchi is listed as the author, Josei Toda, the publisher, and the publishing entity as "Soka Kyoiku Gakkai" (Value-Creating

Education Society)—the predecessor of the Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society). This publication date is also considered the day of the Soka Gakkai's founding.

Makiguchi in this work uses the word *soka*, which means *value creation*—a term derived from discussions between Toda and Makiguchi. *Soka* encompasses Makiguchi's long-developed theory that the purpose of education and of life is to create happiness, and in order to do that one must know how to create value. He writes: "We begin with there cognition that humans cannot create matter. We can, however, create value. Creating value is, in fact, our very humanity. When we praise persons for their 'strength of character,' we are really acknowledging their superior ability to create value."<sup>14</sup>

## **Practicing Nichiren Buddhism**

In 1937, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai began meeting regularly as an organization of educators who supported the theory of Soka education. But it quickly extended membership to non-educators and developed into an organization of people of diverse backgrounds and occupations. Their common interest lies in applying the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism to transforming their lives and Japanese society.

Eventually, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai became a society of lay practitioners of the Nichiren Shoshu school. However, instead of depending on priests as other lay Buddhist organizations did, Makiguchi and Toda were fully responsible for running all meetings and giving guidance in faith. The Soka Gakkai was, from its inception, an organization of lay believers not restricted by the priesthood's formalities. Since its establishment, the practice of Soka Gakkai members has been based on the original intent of Nichiren Daishonin and of Buddhism itself: helping people realize genuine happiness through practice and faith, and striving for the peace and prosperity of society. In the 1930s and early 1940s, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai grew steadily. Through propagation efforts, discussion meetings in members' homes and occasional larger gatherings, it reached a membership of about 3,000 households.

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<sup>14</sup>Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Education for Creative Living*, edited by Dayle M. Bethel and translated by Alfred Birnbaum (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1994), pp. 5–6.

## **A Battle Against Militarism**

By mid-1930, the Japanese government had begun placing restrictions on its citizens as a way to enforce support of its war effort. It aimed to strengthen public solidarity and nationalism by requiring citizens to uphold the state religion, Shinto, and its belief in the divinity of the Emperor and the nation. Makiguchi and Toda attracted official scrutiny by refusing to compromise the humane principles of Nichiren Buddhism and by pointing out the erroneous thinking, rooted in Shintoism, that was leading the country into war. The repressive Special Higher Police began to keep Soka Kyoiku Gakkai discussion meetings under surveillance.

By early 1940, religious organizations faced increasing pressure to uphold Shinto and incorporate it into their beliefs. In June 1943, Nichiren Shoshu priests, fearing government sanctions, accepted a Shinto talisman and instructed the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai leaders to direct its members to do the same.

The priests' actions directly contradicted the intent of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. Instead of courageously protecting the Buddhist Law, they compromised it in deference to the Shinto belief system invoked to promote war. In fact, the priesthood publicly praised Japan's declaration of war on the United States and Great Britain.

In contrast, despite mounting pressures, Makiguchi and Toda refused to accept the Shinto talisman and resolutely upheld Nichiren's spirit to protect the correct Buddhist teaching.

On July 6, 1943, Makiguchi was arrested while attending a discussion meeting in Izu. On the same day, Toda was arrested in Tokyo, along with 21 other Soka Kyoiku Gakkai leaders. They were charged with treason and violating the Peace Preservation Law, which targeted dissent against the government. Among those arrested, only Makiguchi and Toda refused to compromise their beliefs throughout the intense interrogations.

## **President Toda's Profound Awakening**

In prison, Makiguchi continued to share Nichiren Buddhism even with his interrogators, pointing out the error of Japan's religious and war policies. Never submitting to their demands, he upheld his conviction in Nichiren Buddhism with his entire being.

Toda's greatest concern was for his elderly mentor. He prayed fervently: "I'm still young. My mentor is seventy-three. Please, if they'll release him even one day sooner, let me take the blame for both of us."<sup>15</sup>

From early 1944, Toda earnestly chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in his jail cell, repeatedly reading the Lotus Sutra. He pondered the meaning of a passage that perplexed him in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra—the prologue to the Lotus Sutra—that describes the essence of the Buddha with 34 negations. After deep prayer and contemplation, he came to the realization that the Buddha is essentially life itself; this life of the Buddha exists within himself and all people, as well as in the vast universe.

Then, in November, after chanting more determinedly than ever, he awakened to the truth that he himself was among the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In the Lotus Sutra, these are the bodhisattvas entrusted with the mission to spread the sutra's teaching in the Latter Day of the Law, the impure age after Shakyamuni Buddha's passing that corresponds with the present.

On November 18, 1944, Makiguchi died of malnutrition in the Tokyo Detention House at age 73. His death coincides with the anniversary of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai's founding. Undeterred until the end, he lived in accord with Nichiren's teachings, dedicated to restoring the Daishonin's spirit to save all people from suffering by spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

His disciple, Toda, through the enlightenment he experienced in prison, awakened to his mission as a leader of kosen-rufu. This profound awakening became the starting point for the Soka Gakkai's development in the post-war era.

After the war, at Makiguchi's memorial in 1946, Toda expressed his gratitude to his mentor:

In your vast and boundless compassion, you let me accompany you even to prison. As a result, I could read with my entire being the passage from the Lotus Sutra "those persons who had heard the Law / dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, / constantly reborn in company with their teachers."<sup>16</sup> The benefit of this was coming to know the essential purpose of a Bodhisattva of the Earth, and to absorb with my very life even a small degree of the sutra's meaning. Could there be any greater happiness than this?<sup>17</sup>

The passage "those persons . . . reborn in company with their teachers" signifies the deep bond between mentor and disciple who always strive together for the

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<sup>15</sup>*The Human Revolution*, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup>*The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, p. 178.

<sup>17</sup>*The Human Revolution*, p. 1967.

happiness of humanity. Josei Toda's words express his deep sense of gratitude toward his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOKA GAKKAI IN POSTWAR JAPAN

Josei Toda was released from prison on July 3, 1945. Though physically frail, he burned with a fierce resolve to rebuild the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, which had virtually dissolved during World War II. From early 1946, Toda began lecturing on the Lotus Sutra and resumed discussion meetings and propagation efforts. He renamed the organization the Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society), dropping the word *kyoiku*, meaning education or pedagogy, reflecting a broader commitment to the peace, happiness and prosperity of society.

### Daisaku Ikeda's Early Years

Daisaku Ikeda was born on January 2, 1928 in Ota Ward, Tokyo. Beginning in 1937, his four older brothers were drafted into Japan's military, which was waging a war of aggression in China. He was 13 when the Pacific War broke out in 1941. Though struggling with tuberculosis, he supported his family by working at a munitions factory. Ikeda was painfully aware of the tragedies of war. His family lost two homes in air raids. His eldest brother, Kiichi, on leave from the warfront, shared accounts of cruelty perpetrated by Japan's military that deeply saddened and angered Ikeda. When Kiichi died in battle, the pain deepened, compounded by his parents' grief.

When the war ended, Ikeda, in his late teens, sought meaning amid the pain and chaos of a devastated Japan. The values esteemed during wartime had proven to be fraudulent; like many youth his age, he was tormented by a spiritual void.

Ikeda attended his first Soka Gakkai discussion meeting on August 14, 1947. When introduced to Toda, Ikeda posed questions about life, patriotism, the emperor and the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Toda's answers were to the point, logical and without pretence, expressing a powerful conviction. How succinctly he answers! Ikeda thought. *There is no confusion in him. I think I can believe and follow this man.*<sup>18</sup>

Ikeda respected the fact that Toda had been imprisoned for his refusal to compromise his convictions in the face of pressure from Japan's militarist government. As their dialogue concluded, Ikeda asked if he could study under Toda.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>See *The Human Revolution*, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 224–32.



Ten days later, on August 24, he joined the Soka Gakkai, vowing to regard Toda as his mentor. In January 1949, two years after beginning his Buddhist practice, he was hired at Toda's publishing company as the editor of a youth magazine.

### **Daisaku Ikeda Fully Supports His Mentor**

In July 1949, the Soka Gakkai launched its Buddhist study magazine, *The Daibyakurenge*.

Later that year, the post war economy worsened and the publishing company founded. The youth magazine Ikeda had been editing was suspended. He quickly switched gears to devote himself fully to building up Toda's new credit association, which soon faced severe setbacks. He gave everything to support his mentor in business and in private matters, as well as in his responsibility to lead the Soka Gakkai.

In 1950, economic disorder intensified, seriously impairing Toda's entrepreneurial efforts. Though Toda's businesses had financed the initial growth of the Soka Gakkai, as his enterprises faltered and his debt grew, some members—especially those connected to his unsuccessful credit association—lost confidence in him and the Soka Gakkai. On August 23, the credit association was suspended. To avoid burdening the organization with his financial struggles, Toda resigned as general director of the Soka Gakkai on August 24.

One by one, Toda's employees left, but he remained steadfast, devoting his entire being to repaying the company's massive debt. Ikeda fervently supported him, determined to help Toda become financially solvent and to see him become president of the Soka Gakkai. Toda began privately tutoring his young disciple, who a year earlier had quit night school to fully support his mentor, in a variety of academic subjects and in Buddhism as well. Toda shared his vision for the future with Ikeda. His goals ranged from starting a newspaper for the Soka Gakkai to founding a university. In time, both the newspaper *Seiko Shimbun* (1951) and Soka University (1971) emerged as the fruit of their joint efforts.

## Josei Toda Becomes Second President of the Soka Gakkai

Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda struggled intensely between 1950 and 1951 to turn Toda's financial situation around. Toda resolved: "Whatever hardship may befall me, I must put it aside. This I will not do for my own sake but for the cause of fulfilling my mission. I must not by any means leave even a single teaching of Nichiren Daishonin's unfulfilled."<sup>20</sup>

During this tumultuous time, Ikeda strove to fulfil his deepest wish—that his mentor be freed from his constricting financial situation and become president of the Soka Gakkai.

Within a year, Toda's financial difficulties were behind him, though he and Ikeda suffered from ongoing health troubles. Ikeda describes the struggles of that period as "the deciding factors of the Soka Gakkai's development and existence today."<sup>21</sup>

On May 3, 1951, Josei Toda became the second Soka Gakkai president. In his inaugural address, he vowed to accomplish a membership of 750,000 households. At the time, active Soka Gakkai families numbered approximately 3,000. Many in attendance could not comprehend how his goal would be achieved. Toda, however, had already begun preparations for a widespread propagation movement and was so confident that he told the members, "If my goal should not be attained by the end of my life, you need not hold a funeral for me, but just throw my remains into the sea off Shinagawa, all right?"<sup>22</sup>

Just prior to becoming president, on April 20, Toda launched the Soka Gakkai's Newspaper, *Seiko Shimbun*. He formed the women's division on June 10, the young men's division on July 11 and the young women's division on July 19.

In January 1952, Toda assigned Ikeda responsibility for the organization's Kamata Chapter. Ikeda devoted himself to meeting personally with and encouraging many members, and the following month, the chapter's membership increased by an unprecedented 201 households.

Toda firmly believed that diligent and correct study of Nichiren's writings was indispensable for the progress of kosen-rufu. He commissioned former high priest and Nichiren Buddhist scholar Nichiko Hori to help compile all of Nichiren's existing writings. *Gosho Zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin) was published in April 1952, marking the 700th anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren's teachings. This made it possible for Soka Gakkai members to make the writings and

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>21</sup>See Ibid., pp. 539–40.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 563.

teachings of Nichiren Daishonin a solid foundation for their Buddhist practice. In September, the Japanese government formally recognized the Soka Gakkai as a religious organization.

Ikeda, in the meantime, took on various organizational responsibilities. In January 1953, he became leader of the young men's division First Corps, and in April, he was appointed acting Bunkyo Chapter leader. The following March, he became the Soka Gakkai youth division leader.

## **Struggles with Authority**

Nichiren Daishonin's determination to establish "the correct teaching for the peace of the land" defined his lifelong battle for the happiness of all people and realizing peace in society. Based on that same spirit, and to confront corruption in politics that caused people suffering and had led to religious repression, the Soka Gakkai for the first time endorsed candidates for the national parliament in April 1955.

Daisaku Ikeda led propagation efforts in the Kansai region, which resulted in Osaka Chapter growing by an unprecedented 11,111 member-households in the single month of May 1956. In July, Ikeda was put in charge of the Soka Gakkai election effort in Osaka.

Three candidates sponsored by the organization in Osaka won seats in the national elections. With this victory, the Soka Gakkai came to be regarded as an influential popular movement. At the same time, it faced heightened opposition from various groups that felt threatened by its success. For example, in June 1957, Ikeda went to Hokkaido, where the Yubari branch of the Japan Coal Miners Union, which had strong links to the country's Communist Party, had attempted to oppress and intimidate local coal miners who belonged to the Soka Gakkai. He protested such treatment, taking action through debate and dialogue to resolve the problem.

Immediately after this, on July 3, 1957, the Osaka police arrested and detained Ikeda, falsely charging him with election fraud, though other Soka Gakkai members had naively committed the infractions.

Ikeda was interrogated for 15 days. Prosecutors threatened to arrest Toda if Ikeda did not confess to the charges. Toda's health was failing, and Ikeda could not bear the thought of his mentor returning to jail. To protect his mentor, Ikeda conceded. On July 17, he was indicted and released from the Osaka Detention Centre. After a trial that continued for four years, he was found innocent of all charges on January 15, 1962.

## **Entrusting the Future of Kosen-rufu to the Youth**

On September 8, 1957, Josei Toda passionately and publicly condemned all use of nuclear weapons, calling for their immediate abolition. Because of the mass death and devastation brought about by nuclear weapons, Toda denounced those who would use them as “devils” and “evil incarnate.” He vowed to defeat the dark tendency in human life that would justify their use. This declaration set the tone for the Soka Gakkai’s future peace movement.<sup>23</sup>

In December, the organization’s membership reached 750,000 households—Toda’s ultimate goal. In March 1958, the Grand Lecture Hall, donated by the Soka Gakkai, was completed at the head temple Taisei-ji, near Mount Fuji.

On March 16, 6,000 youth assembled from throughout Japan at Taiseikiji. At this gathering, though weakened by illness, Toda boldly passed the responsibility for accomplishing kosen-rufu to the youth, declaring, “The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world.”<sup>24</sup> March 16 is celebrated today as Kosen-rufu Day.

On April 2, Toda died at age 58. Having drawn upon his enlightenment in prison as a source of strength, he had succeeded in rebuilding the Soka Gakkai and creating a solid foundation for kosen-rufu. His legacy includes the numerous successors he raised, among them the future third president of the Soka Gakkai, his closest disciple, Daisaku Ikeda.

## **ESTABLISHING A WORLDWIDE NETWORK OF BUDDHIST HUMANISM**

On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda was inaugurated third president of the Soka Gakkai. He declared, “Though I am young, from this day I will take leadership as a representative of President Toda’s disciples and advance with you another step toward the substantive realization of kosen-rufu.”<sup>25</sup>

Determined to fulfil second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda’s wish to spread Nichiren Buddhism worldwide, on October 2, 1960, five months after becoming president, he visited nine cities in North and South America. In each country he visited, President Ikeda encouraged the Soka Gakkai members living there, most of whom were Japanese immigrants.

In New York, President Ikeda and his party visited the United Nations headquarters. There, he contemplated the role and potential of that international body in creating peace in the world. He has continued since then to support the

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<sup>23</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 485–87.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1895.

<sup>25</sup>*The Human Revolution*, p. 1971.

United Nations and offer, through proposals and dialogues, a vision of the vital role that body can play as an agent representing the will of ordinary people around the world for peace and working toward that common aim. In 1983, President Ikeda wrote his first peace proposal to the United Nations, offering a perspective and detailed suggestions on issues such as nuclear abolition, the environment and strengthening the United Nations. He has submitted a peace proposal each year since.

In January 1961, his travels included a visit to India. During the trip, and particularly at Bodh Gaya—the place where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment—he pondered creating an institution dedicated to researching Asian philosophy and culture as a means to promote dialogue and peace. The following year, he established the Institute of Oriental Philosophy.

In 1963, he founded the Min-On Concert Association, dedicated to fostering peace through cultural and artistic exchange. He writes: “Cultured people value peace and lead others to a world of beauty, hope and bright tomorrows. Tyrannical authority, on the other hand, only leads people to darkness—the opposite of art.

“For that reason, nurturing and spreading an appreciation for art and culture are crucial in creating peace.”<sup>26</sup>

President Ikeda travelled extensively throughout Japan to encourage Soka Gakkai members. He focused on raising the next generation of leaders, conducting lectures on Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings for student division representatives. In June 1964, he created the high school division and in 1965, the junior high school and elementary school divisions.

In 1965, he began writing his serialized novel *The Human Revolution*, which details President Toda’s struggle to reconstruct the Soka Gakkai after being released from prison at the end of World War II. This and its ongoing sequel, *The New Human Revolution*, chronicle the history of the Soka Gakkai spanning 80 years.

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<sup>26</sup>*Discussions on Youth*, second edition, p. 169.

## Forging Peace Through Dialogue

To create pathways to peace, President Ikeda often exchanges views with cultural, political, educational and artistic leaders from around the world—an estimated 1600 such encounters thus far. President Ikeda’s best known dialogue, with eminent British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, took place over two-and-a-half years in the early 1970s. Their discussion opened many doors for him to meet and exchange views with notable thinkers over the ensuing years, including former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, Nobel Peace laureates Linus Pauling and Betty Williams, futurist Hazel Henderson and many others.

In 1974, when he visited China, President Ikeda saw people living in fear of Soviet attack. He soon after visited the Soviet Union to confirm with its leaders that it would not attack China. He returned to China to convey this assurance. In one year, President Ikeda engaged in intensive dialogues with political figures of these two countries to nurture bonds of trust and plant seeds of peace.

Leon Strijak of Moscow University interpreted for President Ikeda’s 1974 meeting with Soviet Premier Aleksey Kosygin. Here calls: “The subject matter of the Ikeda-Kosygin meeting was quite different from that normally discussed by Japanese delegations visiting Moscow. They spoke about war and peace, about war and its victims and how to prevent war.”<sup>27</sup>

The following January, he flew to the United States, where he spoke with leaders who could move the world toward peace. That same month, he travelled to Guam, and there participated in events culminating in the founding of the Soka Gakkai International on January 26. He writes: “The SGI was established in the midst of my efforts to bring the United States, China and the Soviet Union closer together through dialogue in a world shrouded by the dark clouds of the Cold War.”

“History teaches us the bitter lesson that coercive balances of power and attempts to resolve conflicts through military force only create greater division. Choosing dialogue is the key to building peace and achieving a victory of our inner humanity.”

“Since the founding of the SGI, this truth has continued to ring out vibrantly across the globe as the cry of world citizens.”<sup>28</sup>

Former chair of the China-Japan Friendship Association, Sun Pinghua, said of President Ikeda’s diplomatic efforts: “The ‘golden bridge [of trust]’ erected by

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<sup>27</sup>Keiko Kimura, *Daisaku President Ikeda Up Close* documentary (Owners Promotion, Inc.: Tokyo, 2001).

<sup>28</sup>January 1, 2009, *World Tribune*, p. 4

President Ikeda has a peculiar construction. The more people cross it, the more solid it becomes.”<sup>29</sup>

## **Separation from Nichiren Shoshu**

The Soka Gakkai, from its inception in 1930, was the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood’s primary benefactor. The Soka Gakkai’s growth after World War II transformed Nichiren Shoshu from a poverty-stricken and obscure Buddhist school into one of the largest religious bodies in Japan.

As Soka Gakkai membership grew during the 1970s, President Ikeda began to point out in speeches and lectures that, from the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, lay believers should in no way be considered inferior to priests. Increasing reports of priests acting in an authoritarian, condescending and even abusive manner toward the laity prompted his actions. Lay members complained of mounting pressure to offer large financial donations to the priests while, at the same time, being treated disrespectfully. President Ikeda tried to engage the priests in dialogue about these concerns.

Many priests felt threatened by his public assertions and his considerable influence. A lawyer for the Soka Gakkai attempted to undermine President Ikeda by exploiting these fears, feeding the priests false reports about the Soka Gakkai’s supposed ill intentions. Tensions grew in a climate of accusation and counteraccusation.

In an essay about that intense period, President Ikeda writes: “I agonized over the situation. I knew I had to prevent further suffering from being inflicted on our members and to protect them from the persecution of the priests. Mr. Toda had said that the Soka Gakkai was more precious to him than his own life. The Gakkai is an organization that follows the Buddha’s intent and decree to the letter; it is dedicated to the happiness of the people, the propagation of Buddhism and world peace.

“My resolve to take all the blame upon myself and to resign the presidency gradually grew firm within me.”<sup>30</sup>

President Ikeda stepped down as president on April 24, 1979. The priesthood set harsh restrictions, forbidding him from addressing Soka Gakkai members at the organization’s gatherings and from contributing articles to the organ publications.

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<sup>29</sup>Sun, Pinghua, “*Meiyo kaicho, chunichi yuko kyokai no Sonheika kaicho to kandan*” (President Ikeda’s Dialogue with Sun Pinghua, Chair of the China–Japan Friendship Association), July 20, 1990, *Seikyo Shimbun*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>May 14, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 7.



these restrictions, he found ways to encourage members. He penned short poems and calligraphy for individuals. He travelled throughout the country, visiting members in their homes. And he took what had seemed a debilitating setback as an opportunity to fulfil an even grander vision—to fortify the SGI and its mission to establish a solid network for building peace throughout the world.

The conflict between the Soka Gakkai and the priesthood eventually seemed to be settled for a time, and President Ikeda, as honorary president of the Soka Gakkai and SGI President, again fulfilled a more public role as a Buddhist leader. In the ensuing years, however, Nikken, the 67th high priest, conspired to disband the Soka Gakkai or bring it under direct control of the priesthood.

After making public a list of groundless complaints against the lay organization as a pretext, the priesthood refused repeated requests from the Soka Gakkai for dialogue. Unable to win Soka Gakkai members to its side as Nikken had planned, the priesthood excommunicated the entire organization in November 1991.

Nikken had hoped that excommunication would cause large numbers of members to abandon the SGI and follow the priesthood, but only a very small percentage did so. The vast majority remained with the SGI, viewing the excommunication as liberation from an archaic and oppressive institution. The SGI now had the freedom to pursue a more modern and humanistic approach to applying Nichiren Buddhism to the conditions of global society and creating bonds of trust and friendship throughout the world.

## **Building an Everlasting Foundation for Peace**

Daisaku Ikeda, now 89, has continued to pursue dialogue with philosophers, scientists and world leaders, as well as submitting annual peace proposals to the United Nations. Numerous institutions, governments and organizations have acknowledged him as a genuine builder of peace.

He continuously encourages members to develop and strengthen themselves through Buddhist practice so that they may establish happiness and peace in their lives and their communities. And he continues writing daily instalments of *The New Human Revolution*, as well as messages, essays and ongoing study series such as “Learning from the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: The Teachings for Victory.” He constantly encourages youth around the world to share the same sense of responsibility he has, to build an everlasting foundation for world peace grounded in the most humane Buddhist principles.

For more than six decades, President Ikeda has kept the vision of his mentor, Josei Toda, close to his heart. He says: “Mr. Toda was focused on the world. He was

thinking about humanity as a whole. He once said earnestly: 'Nichiren Buddhism is like the light of the sun. By embracing faith in the Mystic Law, countless Soka Gakkai members have risen up from the depths of despair and vibrantly revitalized their lives.' The Mystic Law makes it possible for humankind to transform its karma. It is here that we find the mission of the Soka Gakkai, an organization dedicated to building peace."<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>31</sup>March 20, 2009, *World Tribune*, p. 4.

## 15. Soka Spirit

### Three Key Errors of the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first two presidents of the Soka Gakkai, began their Buddhist practice as lay members of Nichiren Shoshu. That was the 20th-century name of the Buddhist order founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Nikko Shonin, Nichiren Daishonin's closest disciple and immediate successor.

Originally known as the Fuji school, Nichiren Shoshu had unfortunately dwindled to become one of Japan's smaller and impoverished Buddhist schools, having long since lost its founding spirit to accomplish kosen-rufu— to widely propagate the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that Nichiren taught. Nevertheless, Makiguchi, an educator devoted to scholastic reform, deeply studied Nichiren's writings, and thereby awoke to the profound power of Nichiren's teachings to revitalize the lives of ordinary people and society. He awakened in himself a personal vow to accomplish kosen-rufu as a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, a vow that Makiguchi's disciple, Josei Toda, shared.

Based on the staunch faith and sense of mission of the founding presidents, the Soka Gakkai quickly grew into a dynamic, progressive and socially engaged lay Buddhist movement. For decades, the Soka Gakkai gave wholehearted support to the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, building hundreds of new temples and completely restoring its head temple, Taiseki-ji. At the same time, the Soka Gakkai struggled to maintain a harmonious relationship with the priesthood, which had become overwhelmingly authoritarian and ritualistic.

From the beginning, the two had conflicting priorities. The priests of Nichiren Shoshu were focused on maintaining their order and its traditions. The Soka Gakkai was focused on realizing Nichiren's vow to accomplish kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of his teachings for the peace and happiness of humankind.

Prior to the Soka Gakkai, as with most Buddhist denominations in Japan, most lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu did not carry out a daily Buddhist practice. Priests were expected to recite the sutra and conduct rites such as funerals and memorials on the laity's behalf.

President Makiguchi was the first to propose a format for chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo together with reciting the Lotus Sutra as part of the daily practice of lay believers. The appearance of a proactive laity that embraced the mission to accomplish kosen-rufu was a major departure from the passive approach Nichiren Shoshu believers had long taken.

By the 1970s and 1980s, Nichiren Shoshu had become wealthy through the generous donations and support of the Soka Gakkai members. The Soka Gakkai and its international movement, the SGI, continued to grow. But the open, engaged and dynamic movement triggered growing resentment among certain priests of Nichiren Shoshu. Their worldview was rooted in centuries of Japanese Buddhist history in which lay believers were seen as passive participants, whose role it was simply to venerate and make donations to the priests. Of course, this was not the view of Nichiren Daishonin, who treasured and fully empowered his lay followers. But to the priesthood, the dynamic SGI, in which laity took the initiative in an atmosphere of mutual encouragement, represented a threat.

A few of the senior priests, including a priest called Nikken, who would become the 67th high priest, became intensely jealous and vindictive toward the Soka Gakkai and its president, Daisaku Ikeda, who had consistently been dedicated to supporting the priesthood and enhancing its prosperity. This jealousy became what Buddhism describes as a devilish function, turning priests who should have been celebrating and supporting the great progress of kosen-rufu into those bent on destroying it.

In early 1991, under the direction of its high priest, Nikken, the priesthood launched a series of measures to disband the Soka Gakkai. Finally, in November 1991, they issued an order excommunicating the organization, aiming to prompt a large percentage of Soka Gakkai members to leave the organization and directly join their temples.

That didn't happen.

The crux of the priesthood's motives lay in its view that priests are necessary intermediaries between lay believers and the power and teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. Emphasizing ritual and formality not found in Nichiren Daishonin's writings, the priests sought to make veneration and obedience to themselves and their high priest, in particular, the most important aspect of a practitioner's faith.

In contrast, the Soka Gakkai bases itself directly on the spirit and intent of Nichiren Daishonin as set forth in his writings and proven in practice by the organization's founding presidents. The fact that the SGI has flourished all the more since the time of its excommunication is evidence of its correct interpretation and practice of Nichiren's teachings. SGI members in 192 countries and territories have consistently proven the power of correct faith and practice of Nichiren Buddhism in their lives and in their communities.

The following three points summarize the roots of the errors of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood.

### **Error 1: The Absolute Power of the High Priest**

“Faith in the high priest” has erroneously become the central doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu, which has incorrectly elevated the position of the chief priest of their head temple to that of the object of worship. The priesthood upholds the view that, without venerating and obediently following the high priest, practitioners cannot attain enlightenment—a view that undermines the self-empowering properties of Nichiren Buddhism and contradicts the writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

According to the priesthood, the high priest alone has the power to determine who attains Buddhahood and who does not. They write, “The master gives his sanction to a disciple’s enlightenment. . . . The very establishment of the object of worship according to the sanction of the High Priest, who is the only person to be bequeathed the Daishonin’s

Buddhism, is what makes the attainment of Buddhahood possible.”<sup>32</sup>

The idea of the high priest “sanctioning” a disciple’s enlightenment is found nowhere in the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Nor does the concept of the high priest being absolute and infallible originate in Nichiren’s teachings. Rather, these concepts appeared centuries after Nichiren in order to bolster the status of the office of high priest of the Fuji school at times when those holding the office lacked the respect and support of the other priests.

Nichiren’s successor, Nikko Shonin, states in his “Twenty-six Admonitions,” “Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha’s Law and propounds his own views” (Gosho zenshu, p. 1618).<sup>33</sup> It is obvious that Nikko did not consider those who would hold the office of high priest to be beyond the possibility of error or corruption. Having absolute faith in whoever holds the office of the high priest is an erroneous teaching completely contrary to what Nichiren taught.

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<sup>32</sup>A Refutation of the Soka Gakkai’s “Counterfeit Object of Worship”: 100 Questions and Answers (Los Angeles: Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 1996), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>See *The Untold History of the Fuji School* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 21.

## **Error 2: The High Priest Receives Exclusive Transmission of the Law**

To justify the notion that the high priest is absolute, the priesthood propounds the mysterious idea of the “heritage of the Law being entrusted to a single person.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, they encourage “single-minded faith in [the high priest] as the living body of Shakyamuni (Nichiren)”<sup>35</sup> through which practitioners can access the heritage of the Law.

They state that the transmission takes place through a “golden utterance” in a face-to-face conversation between the outgoing high priest and his successor and that “the fundamental principle of the Daishonin’s Buddhism is transmitted only to the High Priest.”<sup>36</sup>

Quite to the contrary, Nichiren repeatedly stresses that the Law is inherited through embracing the Gohonzon with faith. He states: “The heritage of the Lotus Sutra flows within the lives of those who never forsake it

“Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood” (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 217).

The idea of an exclusive lineage belonging to a select group of clergy was prevalent in other Buddhist schools during the Daishonin’s time, but Nichiren himself took pains to refute such views in his writings. Concerning the question of who controls what is holy or sacred in the universe and the human heart, Nichiren Buddhism teaches that all people have equal access through their own faith and practice.

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<sup>34</sup>*Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, October 2008 (Los Angeles: Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 2008), p. 17.

<sup>35</sup>*Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, September 2008, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>*Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, December 2008, p. 21.

### **Error 3: Inequality of Priests and Laity**

That priests are afforded an elevated status in society is especially true in Japan. During the 17th century, partly in response to the influx of Christianity, the Japanese government mandated that all citizens register with their local Buddhist temple. Priests became de facto agents of the government, conducting the census, issuing travel and work documents, and becoming intertwined in both the secular and religious lives of the people. Nichiren Shoshu states: “Nichiren Shoshu believers must support their direct masters, who are the chief priests of their local temples, and offer their devotion to the major master, who is the High Priest. If we ever lose sight of this essential practice of our faith, we ultimately will lose our privilege to have an audience with the Dai-Gohonzon.”<sup>37</sup>

In his letter to the Soka Gakkai on January 12, 1991, Niching Fujimoto, the general administrator of Nichiren Shoshu, wrote: “To talk about the priesthood and the laity with a sense of equality manifests great conceit. In fact, it corresponds to the five cardinal sins—to destroy the unity of Buddhist practitioners.”

And more recently, the priesthood published, “It is only natural that an innate difference exists between the priesthood and laity in the Daishonin’s Buddhism.”

Nichiren clarifies the equality of priests and laity when he states: “The Buddha surely considers anyone in this world who embraces the Lotus Sutra, whether lay man or woman, monk or nun, to be the lord of all living beings” (“The Unity of Husband and Wife,” WND-1, 463) and “anyone who teaches others even a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra is the envoy of the Thus Come One, whether that person be priest or layman, nun or laywoman” (“A Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering,” WND-1, 33).

And finally, he writes: “Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpa ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myohorenge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death. This is a matter of the utmost importance for Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters, and this is what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra” (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND-1, 216).

The equality of all people is a fundamental tenet of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism. The correct relationship between a Buddhist teacher and a disciple is expressed in the principle of the oneness of mentor and disciple, which means that both the teacher and the disciple equally share responsibility for kosen-rufu based on mutual respect and commitment. A genuine teacher becomes

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<sup>37</sup>*Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, March 2009, p. 8.



qualified as such through relentless struggle to awaken Buddhahood within ordinary people in the face of all obstacles, even at the risk of one's own life.

But in Nichiren Shoshu, the teacher is qualified simply by office and rank. Rather than selflessly working to teach others, the high priest requires that others venerate him, while considering lay believers unworthy to know the "secrets" he supposedly possesses. It is important that we clearly understand that this approach is a distortion of Buddhism and seek to develop a correct understanding through our study and practice of the principles Nichiren himself taught.



# Learning from the Gosho, the Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin

## Lecture 20 - Happiness in This World

### We Practice Faith To Become Truly Happy

We practice faith to fully enjoy life, to lead the happiest possible existence. The Gosho we will study this time, "Happiness in This World," (1) explains the "secret teaching" that makes this possible. It is a short letter, but it offers a complete exposition of the ultimate principles of faith. When we deeply understand this Gosho, we have internalized the secret of faith and of life.

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**There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-  
renge-kyo. The sutra says, "The people there [in my land] are happy and at  
ease." (2) "Happy and at ease" here means the joy derived from the Law. You  
are obviously included among the "people," and "there" indicates the entire  
world, which includes Japan. "Happy and at ease" means to know that our  
lives --- both our bodies and minds, ourselves and our surroundings --- are the  
entities of ichinen sanzen and the Buddha of absolute freedom. There is no  
greater happiness than having faith in the Lotus Sutra. It promises us "peace  
and security in this life and good circumstances in the next." (3) Never let  
life's hardships disturb you. After all, no one can avoid problems, not even  
saints or sages.**

**Just chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and when you drink sake, stay at home  
with your wife. Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy.  
Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-  
myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. Then you will experience  
boundless joy from the Law. Strengthen your faith more than ever.**

**With my deep respect,  
Nichiren**

The twenty-seventh day of the sixth month in the second year of Kenji (1276) (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, pp. 161-62)

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## Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo --- the Greatest Happiness

There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

"Human beings" at the outset carries great significance. This means all humankind; the Daishonin's teaching can benefit all people without exception.

Buddhism is a teaching that exists for all human beings. It is not only for the Japanese or the people of one particular country or ethnic group. Nichiren Daishonin declares that, ultimately, for all people --- whether poor or wealthy, famous or unknown, powerful individuals or ordinary citizens, artists or scientists --- apart from chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, there is no true happiness, no true joy or fulfillment in life. That's because when we chant daimoku, our lives become one with the life of the Buddha, enabling us to draw forth the inexhaustible strength to carry out our human revolution and to help others do the same.

Fame, wealth and social status alone do not guarantee happiness. Many wealthy individuals suffer terribly within their mansions. Some people may be so bound up in vanity that they can find no peace of mind. Many famous people feel miserable the moment they slip from the limelight.

Let's say there are two people who work in the same company, perform identical jobs and have equivalent material resources and social standing; yet one feels happy while the other feels nothing but despair. It is not at all uncommon to find such disparities among people whose lives are otherwise quite similar. The disparities arise due to differences in people's inner states, differences in their hearts.

Nor can it be said that the advance of science or economics necessarily brings happiness. In every case, whether we feel happy or unhappy ultimately depends on us. Without changing our state of life, we can find no true happiness. But when we do change our inner state, our entire world is transformed. The ultimate means for effecting such change is chanting daimoku.

The sutra says, "The people there [in my land] are happy and at ease"

This sutra passage is from the jigage section of the "Life Span of the Thus Come One" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It means that in this world people ought to live in happiness and ease. We recite this passage every morning and evening in gongyo.

We are born in this world to enjoy life. We are not born to suffer. This is the basic premise of the Lotus Sutra on the nature of human existence. To live happy and at ease in this world means to enjoy our work and family life, to enjoy helping others through Buddhist activities. If we have a truly high state of life, then even when unpleasant things happen we view them as making life all the more interesting, just as a pinch of salt can actually improve the flavor of a sweet dish. We feel true delight in life, whatever happens.

This sutra passage assures us that we can definitely develop such a great life force. And it urges us to exert ourselves in Buddhist practice toward that end.

"Happy and at ease" here means the joy derived from the Law.

To experience the "joy derived from the Law" means to fully savor the eternally unchanging Mystic Law and the power and wisdom that derive from it. In contrast to this joy, there is the "joy derived from desires" --- the enjoyment that comes from fulfilling desires of various kinds. While it might seem like genuine happiness, such joy is only temporary and superficial. It does not arise from the depths of our lives and it soon gives way to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Faith enables us to receive the eternal joy derived from the Law. So let us engrave in our hearts this point: We ourselves receive this joy. Because we receive it ourselves, our happiness does not depend on others. No one else can make us happy. Only by our own efforts can we become happy.

Therefore, there is no need to feel envious of others. There is no need to bear a grudge against someone or depend on another person for our happiness. Everything comes down to our state of life. It is within our power to take our lives in any direction we wish.

To be dragged around by other people or the environment is not the way of life the Lotus Sutra teaches. True happiness is not feeling happiness one moment and misery the next. Rather, overcoming the tendency to blame our sufferings on others or on the environment enables us to greatly expand our state of life.

Also, at the most fundamental level, faith is for our sake, not for anyone else's. While we of course practice for ourselves and others and to realize kosen-rufu, ultimately we are the prime beneficiaries of all our efforts in faith. Everything is for our growth; everything contributes to the development of our state of life and the establishment of Buddhahood in our lives. When we practice with this determination, all complaints vanish. The world of Buddhahood that had been covered by the dust of complaints begins to shine, and we can freely and fully savor the joy deriving from the Law.

## True 'Peace and Security' Is Having Courage to Overcome Hardships

You are obviously included among the "people," and "there" indicates the entire world, which includes Japan. "Happy and at ease" means to know that our lives --- both our bodies and minds, ourselves and our surroundings --- are the entities of ichinen sanzen and the Buddha of absolute freedom.

The Daishonin says that this passage, "The people there [in my land] are happy and at ease," is about you. The sad thing is that no matter how much we read the sutra or study the Goshō, we still have the tendency to think, "That might be true for others, but my situation is different." Particularly, when we are assailed by storms of adversity, when it seems as though our hearts will burst with woe, we may think, "My sufferings alone are beyond help." But in this passage the Daishonin is telling us that this definitely is not the case.

When this letter was written, Shijo Kingo, its recipient, had been libelously accused of various wrongs by his colleagues and had fallen from favor with his lord as a result. This was all due to envy. Kingo had enjoyed the deep trust of his lord, but he also had the straight-forwardness to speak out when he felt it necessary. As a result, he had made many enemies.

People have the tendency to become envious over the slightest thing, which is perhaps human nature. They may try to undercut someone of whom they feel envious and then delight at the person's misfortune. We must not be defeated by this pitiful tendency. To allow ourselves to become caught up in or swayed by such whirlpools of emotion, going from elation one moment to dejection the next, is pointless.

As indicated by the phrase "[receiving oneself] the joy derived from the Law," the key is to develop such inner strength that we can look upon everything from the world of Buddhahood, the condition of supreme happiness. And, as the Daishonin says, steadfastly chanting daimoku enables us to do this.

Also, as the Daishonin indicates where he speaks of "both our bodies and minds, ourselves and our surroundings," Buddhism is not abstract theory involving only the mind. Nor is it about changing our subjective outlook irrespective of other people and our surroundings.

The good fortune and benefit we accumulate in the depths of our lives become manifest on the material plane, as well as in our environment. In our bodies and minds, ourselves and our surroundings, it is our mind of faith, which is invisible,

which moves everything with enormous power and strength in the best possible direction --- toward happiness, toward the fulfillment of all our wishes.

Someone who puts this principle into practice is a "Buddha of absolute freedom." Leaving aside a doctrinal discussion of this term, the Buddha of absolute freedom is a Buddha who, while remaining an ordinary person, freely receives and uses limitless joy derived from the Law.

Specifically, the Buddha of absolute freedom is Nichiren Daishonin. In a general sense, the term also refers to those striving to achieve kosen-rufu who have a direct connection in faith to the Daishonin.

"Absolute freedom" is interpreted by the Daishonin as meaning "the property to freely receive and use."

In one place he says, "The 'property to freely receive and use' is the principle of a single life-moment possessing 3,000 realms " (Gosho Zenshu, p. 759).

Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, explained that the Gohonzon is an inexhaustible store of benefit. And Nichikan Shonin declared, "[If only you take faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a while,] no prayer will go unanswered, no offense will remain unforgiven, all good fortune will be bestowed and all righteousness proven." (4)

The extent to which we can receive and use the vast, profound joy derived from the Law depends entirely on our faith. Will we take only a small cup of water from the ocean, or will we fill up a large swimming pool? Can we freely receive and use still more? This is determined entirely by faith.

If somewhere in your heart you have decided, "I alone am incapable of becoming happy," "Only I cannot become a capable person" or, "Only my sufferings will forever remain unresolved," then that one factor of your mind or determination will obstruct your benefit.

In this passage, therefore, the Daishonin's intention is to tell Shijo Kingo, who was experiencing great hardship, "You, too, can definitely become happy just as the sutra states." The Daishonin expresses his immense compassion here.

There is no greater happiness than having faith in the Lotus Sutra. It promises us "peace and security in this life and good circumstances in the next."

There is a saying, "A small heart gets used to misery and becomes docile, while a great heart towers above misfortune." True happiness is not the absence of suffering; you cannot have day after day of clear skies. True happiness lies in building a self that stands dignified and indomitable like a great palace --- on all days, even when it is raining, snowing or stormy.

Attaining "peace and security in this life" doesn't mean having a life free from all difficulties, but that whatever difficulties arise, without being shaken in the least, you can summon up the unflinching courage and conviction to fight against and overcome them. This is the state of life of "peace and security in this life."

And, as indicated by the dictum, "If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present," (5) establishing a great state of happiness and security in this life is proof that in the future you will experience good circumstances; being born into a place conducive to your further growth.

Some religions teach that people will become happy after death even if their present lives are filled with misery. But this is not the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which explains that we can thoroughly enjoy both the present and the future. That is the essence of Buddhism.

Toward establishing such an existence, we need to develop a strong life force by chanting daimoku and thoroughly challenging the realities of our lives. It is through such efforts that we realize true "peace and security in this life" and "good circumstances in the next."

Regard Both Suffering and Joy As Facts of Life

Never let life's hardships disturb you. After all, no one can avoid problems, not even saints or sages.

Not even saints and sages, the Daishonin says, can avoid difficulties. In society, people tend to suppose that if someone is vilified and persecuted, the person must be somehow bad or evil. But from the standpoint of Buddhism, it is possible that people may be verbally attacked and undergo difficulties even though they are without guilt or blame. People may label or write about a good person as though evil, asserting that lies are true and depicting the truth as a lie. This is a fact of human society.

Shijo Kingo, too, suffered on account of calumny. But the Daishonin told him, "Never let life's hardships disturb you." Those who resort to libelous accusations are



defeated as human beings; nothing is more lowly and base. We should not be swayed in the least by such despicable actions. Just as you do not put garbage into your mouth, you must not permit such rubbish into your heart. The Daishonin in effect encouraged Shijo Kingo to shut the cowardly behavior of his accusers out of his mind. The Roman philosopher Seneca (4 B.C.E.-C.E. 65) says that the arrows of slander cannot pierce a person of wisdom's heart. (6)

Much human misery arises from people despairing over things that despairing cannot help. We should not worry about things that no amount of worrying will resolve. The important thing is to build a golden palace of joy in our hearts that nothing can disturb --- a state of life like a clear blue sky above the storm, an oasis in the desert, a fortress looking down on high waves.

What matters most is that we fight thoroughly against injustice with a lofty, dauntless spirit. While waging a determined struggle against evil that nearly cost him his life, Nichiren Daishonin cried out [to Shijo Kingo, as they were being led to the execution grounds at Tatsunokuchi], "You should be delighted at this great fortune" (MW-1, 181). And he wholeheartedly anticipated that his disciples would "form their ranks and follow him" (MW-1, 176).

Even a tiny speck of evil that causes people to be unhappy should not be tolerated. Attaining "peace and security in this life and good circumstances in the next" lies precisely in carrying out such a struggle with the faith of indomitable courage.

Just chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and when you drink sake, stay at home with your wife.

The moment he set foot outside his home, Shijo Kingo was in danger of being attacked by enemies. The Daishonin cautioned him not to act with imprudence, but to stay at home and chant daimoku. And he advised that Shijo Kingo and his wife encourage one another. He taught his follower, in other words, the importance of faith for building a happy, harmonious family.

The Daishonin urged Shijo Kingo to live happily in the present, without brooding on events of the past or needlessly troubling himself over what might happen in the future. Happiness does not lie far off in the distance. It is to be found in the here and now.

Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. Then you will experience boundless joy from the Law.

In times of suffering, chant daimoku. In times of joy, chant daimoku. Chanting daimoku is itself happiness. In life, there are both times of suffering and of joy. These are all irreplaceable scenes in life's drama. Without suffering, we could not appreciate joy. Without tasting the flavors of both suffering and joy, we could not savor life's profundity.

"Suffer what there is to suffer," the Daishonin says. Suffering is inevitable in life. Therefore, we need to be prepared for hardship and to have the inner fortitude to rise above our worries and anxieties. We have to cause the "serene light of the moon of enlightenment" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1262) --- the world of Buddhahood-to shine in our lives. Then earthly desires are transformed into enlightenment and we can use everything that happens to fuel our happiness.

To "enjoy what there is to enjoy" means to cause the "mystic lotus of the heart" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 978) to brightly blossom with a sense of appreciation and joy. Someone who can find joy, who can feel appreciation, experiences a snowballing exhilaration and joy in life. Such is the heart's function.

The ocean, even when waves are crashing on its surface, is calm and unchanging in its depths. There is both suffering and joy in life --- the point is to develop a profound, indomitable self not influenced by these waves. A person who does so receives the joy derived from the Law.

In the journey of kosen-rufu things will not always proceed smoothly. But we are eternal comrades. People who come together in good times but desert one another when the going gets rough are not comrades. Turning a blind eye to the sufferings of others, using the rationale that "it has nothing to do with me," is not the spirit of comrades. True comrades share both suffering and joy.

We suffer together, rejoice together and bring our lives to fruition together. We regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. To maintain this comradeship, this single-minded commitment to faith, is our eternal guideline in advancing toward kosen-rufu. Let us ever advance with the strong unity of faith!

Strengthen your faith more than ever.

When Nichiren Daishonin was taken to be executed at Tatsunokuchi, Shijo Kingo ran straight to his side. Clutching the reins of the horse on which the Daishonin rode, he resolutely stood at his side, vowing to kill himself and join him in death. He was a person of immensely strong faith who boldly ran forward along the path of mentor and disciple.

Even to Shijo Kingo, who possessed such strong faith, the Daishonin says, "Strengthen your faith more than ever." It's not a matter of what we've done in the past --- it's what we do from now on that counts. Strength of faith is what everything comes down to. Faith is strength. It is the greatest power people have.

We receive the power of the Buddha and power of the Law embodied in the Gohonzon in accordance with the power of our faith and practice. Faith is the secret art for thoroughly infusing our daily lives with the inherent power of the universe.

Shijo Kingo exerted himself in faith just as the Daishonin instructed. After his difficulties passed, he showed actual proof by regaining the firm trust of his lord and having the size of his lands doubled. Those colleagues who harassed him suffered pitiful consequences.

To practice just as the Daishonin instructs is the fundamental spirit of the SGI. We are advancing in strict accord with the Goshō's teachings. As long as we remember this point, we can definitely achieve great victory in life and our efforts for kosen-rufu.

The Goshō is truly an eternal teaching, which we should be most grateful to have. Thanks to our having encountered this teaching, we can lead wonderful lives of eternal victory.

(This concludes the series "Learning From the Goshō, the Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.")

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Notes:

1. "Shijo Kingo Dono Gohenji" (Goshō Zenshu, p. 1143), written in June 1276 when the Daishonin was 55.
2. LS16, 230.
3. LS5, 99.
4. From his "Commentary on 'The True Object of Worship.'"
5. From the Shinjikan Sutra. See MW-2 [2nd ed.], 172.
6. Seneca: Moral Essays, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), vol. 1, pp. 57-59.

## SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

### LEARNING FROM THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN:

#### THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

#### [33] "On the Treasure Tower"

#### The Treasure Tower Resides within Us

I [Nichiren] have read your [Abutsu-bo's] letter with great care. I have also received your offering to the treasure tower of one thousand coins, polished rice, and other articles. This I have respectfully reported to the Gohonzon and to the Lotus Sutra. Please rest assured.

In your letter you ask, "What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth?" The teaching on the treasure tower is of great importance. In the eighth volume of his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai explains the appearance of the treasure tower. He states that it has two distinct functions: to lend credence to the preceding chapters and to pave the way for the revelation to come. Thus the treasure tower appeared in order to verify the theoretical teaching and to introduce the essential teaching. To put it another way, the closed tower symbolizes the theoretical teaching, and the open tower, the essential teaching. The open tower reveals the two elements of reality and wisdom. This is extremely complex, however, so I will not go into further detail now.

In essence, the appearance of the treasure tower indicates that on hearing the Lotus Sutra the three groups of voice-hearers perceived for the first time the treasure tower within their own lives. Now Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters are also doing this. In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves the treasure tower, and, likewise, are themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures. No treasure tower exists other than Myoho-renge-kyo. The daimoku

of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

At present the entire body of the Honorable Abutsu is composed of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. These five elements are also the five characters of the daimoku. Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful. It is the treasure tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures— hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself. You may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. You, yourself, are a Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction. Then the place where you chant daimoku will become the dwelling place of the treasure tower. The sutra reads, “If there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my treasure tower will come forth and appear in that spot.” Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the treasure tower especially for you. You must never transfer it to anyone but your son. You must never show it to others unless they have steadfast faith. This is the reason for my advent in this world.

Abutsu-bo, you deserve to be called a leader of this northern province. Could it be that Bodhisattva Pure Practices has been reborn into this world as Abutsu-bo and visited me? How wonderful! How marvelous! I do not understand how it is that you have such faith. I will leave it to Bodhisattva Superior Practices when he appears, as he has the power to know these things. I am not saying all this without good reason. You and your wife should [offer prayers before] this treasure tower privately. I will explain more later.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

(WND-1, 299–300)

## *Lecture*

None are more noble or perceptive than the ordinary people. The times are clearly moving in the direction of an age of the people. However, the negative tendency to regard people as the means to an end and trample on their humanity and dignity still continues unabated. That is precisely why, at this critical crossroads, fostering individuals of unwavering conviction is so vital.

I firmly believe that one of the most crucial concerns of religion in the 21st century should be to foster individuals who are able to positively transform the spiritual climate of society, create a current of respect for all people, and establish respect for the dignity of life as a universal value. For it is individuals who will open the way to creating this age of the people. Such a triumphant age will start to dawn when we each awaken to the treasure that exists within our life.

### **Everything Begins with Our Inner Human Revolution**

What is the true treasure of the nation, of society, that will create a new age?

Former South African president Nelson Mandela, who spent more than 27 years in prison for his beliefs, triumphed over the evil of apartheid and ushered in a new dawn of victory for the people. Speaking of his faith in human beings, he said: “[My country’s] greatest wealth is its people, finer and truer than the purest diamonds.”<sup>38</sup> Just as he says, people are truly the greatest wealth.

The emergence of principled, steadfast people will unfailingly change society for the better. Each individual is indeed a supreme treasure. Hence, the spiritual revitalization of each individual is important as the starting point for all positive change.

Our great human revolution as an individual begins when we awaken to the true potential of our life. When we become aware of the immense and worthy potential of our own life, we will naturally also come to recognize the same in others.

By developing genuine respect for the dignity and worth of self and other, humanity as a whole can elevate its state of life. By breaking through the fundamental darkness or ignorance<sup>39</sup> that shrouds both self and other, humanity can transform its karma of conflict and discord.

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<sup>38</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), p. 542.

<sup>39</sup> Fundamental darkness or ignorance: The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. The inability to see or recognize the truth, particularly, the true nature of one’s life.

When we stand up and take action with the awareness that our life itself is the supremely noble “treasure tower,” it is possible for us to raise great towers of peace and happiness all over the world. This is the aim of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Our inner revolution is the key to everything.

Awakening to our true, original self—that is the subject of Nichiren Daishonin’s writing “On the Treasure Tower,” addressed to his follower Abutsu-bo. In this installment, let us look at how the Daishonin taught Abutsu-bo this essential principle.

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I [Nichiren] have read your [Abutsu-bo’s] letter with great care. I have also received your offering to the treasure tower [i.e., the Gohonzon or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] of one thousand coins, polished rice, and other articles. This I have respectfully reported to the Gohonzon and to the Lotus Sutra. Please rest assured.

In your letter you ask, “What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth [in the “Treasure Tower” (11th) chapter of Lotus Sutra]?” The teaching on the treasure tower is of great importance. In the eighth volume of his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai [of China]<sup>40</sup> explains the appearance of the treasure tower. He states that it has two distinct functions: to lend credence to the preceding chapters [of the sutra] and to pave the way for the revelation to come. Thus the treasure tower appeared in order to verify the theoretical teaching [the first 14 chapters of the sutra] and to introduce the essential teaching [the last 14 chapters]. To put it another way, the closed tower symbolizes the theoretical teaching, and the open tower, the essential teaching. The open tower reveals the two elements of reality and wisdom.<sup>41</sup> This is extremely complex, however, so I will not go into further detail now.

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<sup>40</sup> T’ien-t’ai (538–597): Also known as Chih-i. The founder of the T’ien-t’ai school in China. Commonly referred to as the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai. His lectures were compiled in such works as *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, and *Great Concentration and Insight*. He spread the Lotus Sutra in China, and established the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

<sup>41</sup> Regarding the two elements of reality and wisdom, President Ikeda writes: “This is a crucial principle explaining the Buddha’s enlightenment. “Reality” means the objective reality or truth, and includes all things spiritual and physical. “Wisdom” means the subjective wisdom to perceive or illuminate that truth. The towering wisdom of the Buddha not only illuminates the true nature



In essence, the appearance of the treasure tower indicates that on hearing the Lotus Sutra the three groups of voice-hearers<sup>42</sup> perceived for the first time the treasure tower within their own lives. (WND-1, 299)

### **The Magnificent Drama of the Emergence of the Treasure Tower**

It is uncertain whether the Daishonin wrote “On the Treasure Tower” during his exile on Sado<sup>43</sup> or after he had taken up residence at Mount Minobu. Recent research has suggested that, based on its content, it was the latter.

The opening passage of the letter acknowledges Abutsu-bo’s sincere offerings of one thousand coins, polished rice, and other articles. It also tells us that Abutsu-bo had written to the Daishonin asking the doctrinal question, “What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth?” (WND-1, 299).

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of all universal phenomena, but also makes us aware that we ourselves are entities of the Mystic Law. The essential point regarding the two elements of reality and wisdom is illuminating our true self with the light of great wisdom. This is the fusion of reality and wisdom, through which means we can attain the expansive and perfectly serene state of mind of a Buddha” (*SGI Newsletter* No. 7640). In “On the Treasure Tower,” the two elements of reality and wisdom are represented, respectively, by the Buddhas Many Treasures and Shakyamuni seated together within the open treasure tower.

<sup>42</sup> Three groups of voice-hearers: Also, three groups of voice-hearer disciples. Shakyamuni’s voice-hearer disciples, whose enlightenment is prophesied in the theoretical teaching (first half) of the Lotus Sutra. There, Shakyamuni teaches that the sole purpose of the Buddha’s advent is to expound the one Buddha vehicle, or the teaching that leads all people to Buddhahood. He explains that the three vehicles, or the teachings directed at voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas, set forth in earlier sutras, are not ends in themselves but only means to lead people to the supreme vehicle of Buddhahood. This concept is called the “replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle.” Shakyamuni Buddha’s disciples are divided into three groups according to their capacity to understand that teaching: those of superior, intermediate, and inferior capacity. This traditional division of capacity was employed by T’ien-t’ai and others in interpreting the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>43</sup> Sado Exile: The Daishonin’s exile to Sado Island in the Sea of Japan from October 1271 through March 1274. When the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school in Kamakura was defeated by the Daishonin in a contest to pray for rain, he spread false rumors about the Daishonin, using his influence with the wives and widows of high government officials. This led to the Daishonin’s confrontation with Hei no Saemon, deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, who arrested him and maneuvered to have him executed at Tatsunokuchi in September 1271. When the execution attempt failed, the authorities sentenced him the following month to exile on Sado Island, which was tantamount to a death sentence. However, when the Daishonin’s predictions of internal strife and foreign invasion were fulfilled, the government issued a pardon in March 1274, and the Daishonin returned to Kamakura.

To clarify the meaning of this question, let's begin by reviewing the scene in which the treasure tower comes forth in the "The Emergence of the Treasure Tower" (11th chapter) of the Lotus Sutra.

The chapter begins with the treasure tower suddenly appearing before the eyes of those gathered at the assembly on Eagle Peak. The huge tower rises out of the earth and stands suspended in the air. Then, a loud voice is heard issuing forth from within it: "Excellent, excellent! Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, that you can take the great wisdom of equality, a teaching to instruct the bodhisattvas, guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, and preach it for the sake of the great assembly! It is as you say, as you say. Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!" (LSOC11, 209–10 [LS11, 171]).

The voice is that of Many Treasures, a Buddha of the past from the land of Treasure Purity in the east who made a pledge to appear with his treasure tower in order to attest to the validity of the Lotus Sutra, wherever it might be taught.

At this point, however, the door to the tower remains closed, and no one has yet seen the Buddha Many Treasures seated within.

After the voice has spoken, numerous miraculous events take place, such as the "three-time purification of the lands,"<sup>44</sup> which prepares the way for the gathering of the emanation Buddhas<sup>45</sup> of the worlds of the ten directions. Once they have arrived, Shakyamuni rises to open the door to the treasure tower and sits next to Many Treasures Buddha inside the tower. With this series of extraordinary events, the Ceremony in the Air<sup>46</sup> commences. This magnificent ceremony all starts with the appearance of the treasure tower.

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<sup>44</sup> Three-time purification of the lands: Also, threefold transformation of the land. Shakyamuni's act of three times purifying countless lands in preparation for the Ceremony in the Air to make room for the assembling Buddhas from the worlds in the ten directions who are his emanations, described in the "Treasure Tower" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>45</sup> Emanation Buddhas: Also called emanations of the Buddha, or simply emanations. Buddhas who are separate manifestations of a true Buddha. According to Mahayana belief, a true Buddha can divide his body an infinite number of times and appear in innumerable worlds at once in order to save the people there. Hence, "the emanation Buddhas of the ten directions" and other similar expressions. In the "Treasure Tower" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni summons the Buddhas who are his emanations from the ten directions in order to commence the Ceremony in the Air.

<sup>46</sup> Ceremony in the Air: One of the three assemblies described in the Lotus Sutra, in which the entire gathering is suspended in space above the saha world. It extends from the "Treasure

The treasure tower is of a mind-staggering scale. It is a massive 500 yojanas<sup>47</sup> in height and 250 yojanas in width and depth—estimated, according to one calculation, to be around one-third the size of the Earth in diameter.

The tower is adorned with the seven kinds of treasures: gold, silver, lapis lazuli, seashell, agate, pearl, and carnelian.

Imagining this colossal, sparkling tower suspended in the air right before one's eyes, a vision of incomparable magnificence and grandeur, Abutsu-bo no doubt felt compelled to ask the Daishonin to explain its meaning—hence, his question, “What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth?” (WND-1, 299).

### **Perceiving the Treasure Tower within Our Own Life**

From old, there have been many explanations and interpretations of the meaning of the treasure tower that appears in the Lotus Sutra. However, Nichiren Daishonin declares incisively that we ourselves are the treasure tower, and that the treasure tower is also the Gohonzon. Because the emergence of the treasure tower has such enormous and profound significance, the Daishonin says: “The teaching on the treasure tower is of great importance” (WND-1, 299).

He begins his explanation by referring to the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, stating that the emergence of the treasure tower has two functions: (1) to lend credence to the preceding chapters [the theoretical teaching] of the sutra, and (2) to pave the way for the revelation to come in subsequent chapters [the essential teaching]. Or put another way, he says, “the closed tower symbolizes the theoretical teaching, and the open tower, the essential teaching” (WND-1, 299). But the Daishonin states: “This is extremely complex, however, so I will not go into further detail now” (WND-1, 299). The reason for this, we can surmise, is that he wanted to go directly to his own conclusion, thereby getting right to the heart of the matter. He says: “In essence, the appearance of the treasure tower indicates that on hearing the Lotus Sutra the three groups of voice-hearers perceived for the first time the treasure tower within their own lives” (WND-1, 299).

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Tower” (11th) chapter to the “Entrustment” (22nd) chapter. The heart of this ceremony is the revelation of the Buddha's original enlightenment in the remote past and the transfer of the essence of the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who are led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

<sup>47</sup> Yojana: A unit of measurement used in ancient India, said to equal the distance that the royal army could march in a day. According to one explanation, it corresponds to about 10 kilometers (6 miles).

The “three groups of voice-hearers” refers to Shakyamuni’s voice-hearer disciples whose future enlightenment is prophesied in the theoretical teaching (first half) of the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin states that the significance of the emergence of the treasure tower is that these disciples, on hearing the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, “perceived for the first time the treasure tower within their own lives” (WND-1, 299). In other words, they came to realize that the giant treasure tower that they thought had emerged outside them had in actual fact emerged within them. This was to them as revolutionary, in a certain sense, as the geocentric worldview of Ptolemy being overturned by the heliocentric view of Copernicus in the Middle Ages. For example, in his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, T’ien-t’ai explains that the treasure tower is the Buddha’s Dharma body<sup>48</sup> and was seen by those at the assembly on Eagle Peak, but he stops short of saying that they perceived the treasure tower in their own lives.

As the full title of the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra indicates, the treasure tower “emerges” or “manifests” within us. A resplendent treasure tower stands majestically in the inner universe of our life, and we see and awaken to its presence. In other words, the emergence of the treasure tower means recognizing that the treasure tower is a representation of the true reality of our own life.

What kind of treasure tower do we, as people living in the Latter Day of the Law, perceive within us on hearing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra? The Daishonin goes on to explain the significance of this great inner treasure tower in more detail.

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Now Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters are also doing this [i.e., perceiving the treasure tower within their own lives]. In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo are themselves the treasure tower, and, likewise, are themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures. (WND-1, 299)

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<sup>48</sup> Dharma body: Also, body of the Law. One of the three bodies—the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharma body means the essence of Buddhahood, the ultimate truth or Law, and the true nature of the Buddha’s life. It also means a Buddha per se, whose body is the Law itself.

## Those Who Embrace the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law Are Themselves the Treasure Tower

“Now Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters are also doing this” (WND-1, 299), declares the Daishonin, meaning that just like the voice-hearers of Shakyamuni’s day, his followers in the Latter Day of the Law are now seeing and awakening to the treasure tower within their own lives.

Next comes the well-known passage: “In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo are themselves the treasure tower, and, likewise, are themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures” (WND-1, 299).

Incidentally, founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi underscored in red in his copy of the Goshō this passage and numerous other lines and phrases in “On the Treasure Tower,” indicating that he also studied this letter closely.

How surprised and moved Abutsu-bo and his wife Sennichi must have been to read these words of the Daishonin, who explained the meaning of “the treasure tower within” not only in terms of the sutra passages, but also directly identified it with their own lives. Perhaps the elderly couple smiled at each other, sharing their profound appreciation for the Daishonin’s explanation.

The Daishonin declares that the lives of all are the treasure tower, “whether eminent or humble, high or low” (WND-1, 299). Social status is irrelevant in Buddhism. In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “When one looks at one’s own body, one can see that that body is a stupa [i.e., tower] endowed with the three thousand realms.<sup>49</sup> And when one looks at one’s mind, one can see that it is a Buddha endowed with the three thousand realms” (OTT, 229). We can interpret this to mean that our body is the treasure tower, and that Many Treasures Buddha seated inside the tower is our mind.

This represents a philosophy that upholds supreme respect for all human beings. Those who fail to recognize the dignity and worth of the lives of all people

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<sup>49</sup> Three thousand realms: The three thousand realms, or the entire phenomenal world, exist within a single moment of life. The number three thousand here comes from the following calculation: 10 (Ten Worlds) x 10 (Ten Worlds) x 10 (ten factors) x 3 (three realms of existence). Life at any moment manifests one of the Ten Worlds. Each of these worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself, and this mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is represented as a hundred possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the ten factors, making one thousand factors or potentials, and these operate within each of the three realms of existence, thus making three thousand realms.

and discriminate against others are actually denigrating themselves. Valuing and respecting others is the way to make our own inner treasure tower shine its brightest.

### **Attesting to the Greatness of the Mystic Law through Our Actions and Example**

In this passage, the Daishonin also refers to “the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra.” Here, the word “figures” encompasses such things as our outward form and actions. It does not refer to some abstract or ideal, but to the actual concrete reality of our life as we earnestly go about our daily affairs here and now.

The Daishonin declares that there is no treasure tower other than real, living human beings. The lives of those who embrace faith in the Gohonzon, chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and propagate the Daishonin’s Buddhism shine moment after moment as entities of the Mystic Law. We ordinary people, while undergoing the joys and sufferings of this world, are each an infinitely noble treasure tower, just as we are.

And there are no treasure towers that shine as brilliantly as our SGI members, who are striving tirelessly in this suffering-filled world to transform their own karma and contribute to the happiness of others, undaunted by the negative comments of mean-spirited individuals.

The Daishonin states that “those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves the treasure tower, and likewise, themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures” (WND-1, 299). The reason he says that those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves Many Treasures Buddha is that, like the latter, they attest to the validity of the Lotus Sutra. Those who testify are by no means passive bystanders. Eagerly committed to going to where the Buddhist teaching is being explained or shared, they actively attest to the Mystic Law as the highest truth and the key to attaining Buddhahood.

I cannot help but be reminded of the heroic efforts of our esteemed pioneering members, the members of the Many Treasures Group, who certainly embody this ideal. My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, also often praised our elderly members who possessed a wealth of life experience as “those who testify like Many Treasures Buddha” and “our noble Many Treasures comrades.” The Many Treasures Group members have sincerely persevered in their Buddhist practice for 20, 30, or 50 years. Striving alongside me, they have overcome numerous

vicissitudes in our struggle for kosen-rufu and in their personal lives. And they have continued to proclaim and prove through their own actions and example the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai. Though unheralded, from the perspective of Buddhism, none are more noble or heroic than they are. Their confident words carry the weight of long years of rich life experience. Their lives themselves are proof to the truth of the Mystic Law.

Amid the suffering and heartbreak in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan, a member of the Many Treasures Group wrote these lines of verse, vowing to rise again and rebuild her life. Her words brought tears to my eyes:

Though everything  
has been wrenched away  
from me,  
one thing remains:  
the flame burning in my heart.

Elderly members in the affected areas are forging ahead with an invincible spirit, determined not to be beaten. They are loved and trusted by their fellow members and others in their communities for their unwavering confidence and conviction. Each of them is indeed a magnificent treasure tower and a Many Treasures Buddha who attests to the truth of the Daishonin's teachings.

My wife and I are praying earnestly for the health and long life of all our members who are in their golden years in Japan and around the globe.

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No treasure tower exists other than Myoho-renge-kyo.<sup>50</sup> The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

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<sup>50</sup> In his writings, the Daishonin often uses Myoho-renge-kyo synonymously with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra. Myoho-renge-kyo is written with five Chinese characters, while Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is written with seven (*nam*, or *namu*, being comprised of two characters).



At present the entire body of the Honorable Abutsu [Abutsu-bo] is composed of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space.<sup>51</sup> These five elements are also the five characters of the daimoku. Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful. It [the treasure tower of Abutsu-bo] is the treasure tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures—hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself. (WND-1, 299)

### **The Bright Mirror of the Gohonzon**

From this passage, the Daishonin emphasizes that Abutsu-bo is himself the treasure tower of Myoho-enge-kyo, sparkling with the seven kinds of treasures, and that Abutsu-bo is himself a Buddha. He then goes on to explain why he says that Abutsu-bo is the treasure tower.

He begins by stating: “The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo” (WND-1, 299). The treasure tower of the Lotus Sutra is none other than Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, which the Daishonin inscribed in the form of the Gohonzon, the object of devotion.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “Now when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, they see and understand the ten thousand phenomena as though these were reflected in a bright mirror. This bright mirror is the Lotus Sutra. And in particular it is the ‘Treasure Tower’ chapter” (OTT, 149).

Without a mirror, we can’t see our face. Similarly, we also need a bright mirror in order to see the treasure tower within our own life. The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon to serve as that mirror. The Gohonzon is a depiction of his own enlightened state as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Therefore, when we

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<sup>51</sup> Five elements: According to ancient Indian belief, the five constituents of all things in the universe. They are earth, water, fire, wind, and space. The first four are also known as the four basic elements and correspond respectively to the physical states of solid, liquid, heat, and gas. Space is interpreted as integrating and harmonizing the other four elements.

chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the Gohonzon as our bright mirror, our own inherent Buddhahood emerges powerfully. The purpose of the Gohonzon is to bring forth this treasure tower within each of us.

### **We Ourselves Are the Treasure Tower of the Mystic Law**

Next, the Daishonin states: “The entire body of the Honorable Abutsu is composed of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. These five elements are also the five characters of the daimoku [Myoho-renge-kyo]” (WND-1, 299). In short, our body itself is an entity of Myoho-renge-kyo, or the Mystic Law. The treasure tower represents each of us who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is the meaning of the Daishonin’s statement: “Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself” (WND-1, 299). The essence of these golden words can be called the ultimate conclusion of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, which is why the Daishonin next says: “No other knowledge is purposeful” (WND-1, 299).

This is the profound insight of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. For the Daishonin, the infinitely precious treasure tower shines nowhere more brightly than in the lives of the ordinary people of this troubled latter age. If all humanity possessed the ability to perceive the supreme dignity and worth of each person, the direction of history would change for the better. The essential point is recognizing the dignity of each person’s life, of opening our eyes to just how precious and respectable each individual is.

The American philosopher Henry David Thoreau (1817–62), speaking of the gradual evolution of political systems toward democracy, described this course of development as “a progress toward a true respect for the individual.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, humanity can only realize genuine progress when society respects, values, and empowers each and every individual in a manner appropriate to the true dignity and worth with which they are originally and inherently endowed.

Thoreau looked to the future for the attainment of that social ideal: “There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 413.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

The “Treasure Tower” chapter teaches us that each person’s life has a worth and brilliance equal to the universe itself, far surpassing those of any nation or even the world as a whole. Each individual is the embodiment of such dignity. The true significance of the emergence of the treasure tower in the Lotus Sutra is awakening people to this sublime inner potential that we all possess.

### **The Seven Kinds of Treasures Are the Efforts We Make in Buddhist Practice**

The Daishonin then goes on to say: “It is the treasure tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures—hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself” (WND-1, 299).

If the treasure tower is the life of ordinary people themselves, then what are the seven treasures that adorn the lives of those who embrace the Mystic Law, corresponding to the seven kinds of precious materials such as gold, silver, and lapis lazuli that adorn the treasure tower in the Lotus Sutra? They are, the Daishonin says here, the seven indispensable elements of Buddhist practice—“hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself” (WND-1, 299).

For us as practitioners of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, these seven treasures represent (1) hearing the teaching of the Mystic Law, (2) believing in the Mystic Law, (3) observing the precept of the Mystic Law [i.e., embracing and upholding the Lotus Sutra (the Gohonzon) (cf. OTT, 37)], (4) focusing our mind on the Mystic Law [i.e., chanting to the Gohonzon], (5) exerting ourselves diligently in faith and practice, (6) casting aside our self-centeredness by putting faith first, and (7) engaging in honest self-reflection and continually trying to improve ourselves day after day. The Daishonin teaches that all of these elements are encompassed in faith in the Mystic Law. Indeed, if we look at our daily SGI activities, we can see that this is in fact true.

With regard to the seven treasures, ultimately it is not jewels or precious stones that adorn our life and the treasure tower (Buddha nature) within us, but rather our heart and our actions.

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You [Abutsu-bo] may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. You, yourself, are a Thus Come One [a Buddha] who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies.<sup>54</sup> You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction. Then the place where you chant daimoku will become the dwelling place of the treasure tower. The [“Treasure Tower” chapter of the] sutra reads, “If there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my treasure tower will come forth and appear in that spot” [cf. LSOC11, 210 (LS11, 171)].<sup>55</sup> Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the treasure tower [i.e., in the form of the Gohonzon] especially for you. You must never transfer it to anyone but your son. You must never show it to others unless they have steadfast faith. This is the reason for my advent in this world.

Abutsu-bo, you deserve to be called a leader of this northern province [of Sado]. Could it be that Bodhisattva Pure Practices<sup>56</sup> has

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<sup>54</sup> Three bodies: Three kinds of body a Buddha may possess. They are the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharma body is the fundamental truth, or Law, to which a Buddha is enlightened. The reward body is the wisdom to perceive the Law. And the manifested body is the compassionate actions the Buddha carries out to lead people to happiness. Generally, a Buddha was held to possess one of the three bodies. In other words, the three bodies represented three different types of Buddhas—the Buddha of the Dharma body, the Buddha of the reward body, and the Buddha of the manifested body. On the basis of the Lotus Sutra and the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life derived from it, T’ien-t’ai maintained that the three bodies are not separate entities but three integral aspects of a single Buddha. From this point of view, the Dharma body indicates the essential property of a Buddha, which is the truth or Law to which the Buddha is enlightened. The reward body indicates the wisdom, or the spiritual property of a Buddha, which enables the Buddha to perceive the truth. It is called reward body because a Buddha’s wisdom is considered the reward derived from ceaseless effort and discipline. The manifested body indicates compassionate actions, or the physical property of a Buddha. It is the body with which a Buddha carries out compassionate actions to lead people to enlightenment, or those actions themselves. In discussing the passage in the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra that reads, “You must listen carefully and hear of the Thus Come One’s secret and his transcendental powers,” T’ien-t’ai, in his *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, interpreted “secret” to mean that a single Buddha possesses all three bodies and that all three bodies are found within a single Buddha.

<sup>55</sup> A rephrasing of the Lotus Sutra passage: “If, after I have become a Buddha and entered extinction, in the lands in the ten directions there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my funerary tower, in order that I may listen to the sutra, will come forth and appear in the that spot to testify to the sutra and praise its excellence” (LSOC11, 210 [LS11, 171]).

<sup>56</sup> Bodhisattva Pure Practices: One of the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who appear in the “Emerging from the Earth” (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. *The Supplement to “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra”* by Tao-hsien, an 8th-century priest of the T’ien-t’ai

been reborn into this world as Abutsu-bo and visited me? How wonderful! How marvelous! I do not understand how it is that you have such faith. I will leave it to Bodhisattva Superior Practices [the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth]<sup>57</sup> when he appears, as he has the power to know these things. I am not saying all this without good reason. You and your wife should [offer prayers before] this treasure tower [i.e., the Gohonzon] privately. I will explain more later.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

(WND-1, 299–300)

### **The Treasure Tower Stands in Our Life Where We Are Right Now**

Next, the Daishonin writes: “You [Abutsu-bo] may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself” (WND-1, 299). The offerings we make to the treasure tower—in other words, to the Gohonzon—are actually offerings we make to ourselves.

The Daishonin also says that Abutsu-bo himself is a “Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies” (WND-1, 300)—meaning a complete and perfect Buddha. This is a monumental declaration that each of us is originally such a Buddha.

The Gohonzon enables us to elevate our life and shine our brightest. This is what distinguishes the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin as a truly humanistic teaching. In addition, we are the “Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies” and the treasure tower; hence, wherever we are is the site of the treasure tower. As the Daishonin writes in this letter: “The place where you

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school in China, says that the four bodhisattvas represent the four virtues of the Buddha’s life—true self, eternity, purity, and happiness. Of these virtues, Bodhisattva Pure Practices represents purity.

<sup>57</sup> Bodhisattva Superior Practices: The leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Shakyamuni entrusts Superior Practices with propagating the Lotus Sutra during the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin associates himself with Bodhisattva Superior Practices, saying that he is fulfilling the mission entrusted to the bodhisattva by Shakyamuni, and he refers to his propagation efforts as the work of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Nichikan Shonin, the 26th high priest, regarded the Daishonin as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices in terms of his outward behavior, and as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, in terms of his inner enlightenment.

chant daimoku will become the dwelling place of the treasure tower” (WND-1, 300). This also means that we need not seek the treasure tower anywhere else.

Whenever or wherever we chant with strong faith in the Gohonzon, that time and place immediately becomes the Ceremony in the Air and Eagle Peak, and the treasure tower stands aloft.

### **The Daishonin’s Praise and Aspirations for His Loyal Disciple**

Nichiren Daishonin visually depicted the treasure tower of the Lotus Sutra in the form of the Gohonzon. He tells Abutsu-bo, “I will inscribe the treasure tower especially for you” (WND-1, 300). To “inscribe the treasure tower” signifies inscribing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the object of devotion, the Gohonzon, by which means the Daishonin established the way for all people to attain Buddhahood in the actual reality of their daily lives. This is the true fundamental purpose of his appearance in the world as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Praising Abutsu-bo’s staunch faith and selfless practice, the Daishonin calls him the “leader of this northern province [of Sado]” (WND-1, 300). Abutsu-bo was indeed a truly noble leader of kosen-rufu.

Those who have awakened to the fact that they are the treasure tower also naturally realize that the treasure tower exists equally in the lives of others and, because of this, they seek to help others open that treasure tower within themselves in the same way. Starting with Abutsu-bo, many people all over Sado and neighboring areas throughout northern Japan would one day go on to embrace faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism and shine as treasure towers. We can read these words of the Daishonin as earnest encouragement to Abutsu-bo, urging him to stand up and strive together with him as a true disciple and leader of kosen-rufu.

This is also why the Daishonin says: “Bodhisattva Pure Practices has been reborn into this world as Abutsu-bo” (WND-1, 300). The Daishonin no doubt felt that the support and protection offered him by Abutsu-bo, at the risk of his own life, must have been due to some wondrous Buddhist bond from the past connecting them. Expressing his appreciation for Abutsu-bo’s sincere devotion, the Daishonin says: “How wonderful! How marvelous! I do not understand how it is that you have such faith. I will leave it to Bodhisattva Superior Practices when he appears, as he has the power to know these things” (WND-1, 300).

In closing, the Daishonin encourages Abutsu-bo and his wife Sennichi to carefully protect the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo before it. He writes: “You and your wife should [offer prayers before] this treasure tower privately” (WND-1, 300). The reason he says “privately” is that most likely even after his being pardoned from exile on Sado, the situation may still have remained difficult for his followers on that remote island. This is perhaps why he calls on them to take the greatest care of the Gohonzon and to chant daimoku before it, out of a wish that they will maintain steadfast faith based on the Gohonzon throughout all.

### **Bringing a Great Paean to Humanity and Life to Resound**

In 1991—exactly two decades ago this year—during a time when we were fighting to secure our spiritual independence in the wake of the second priesthood incident, we of the SGI studied the Daishonin’s writing “On the Treasure Tower” again and again.

“My life is the treasure tower!”—I firmly believe that the time has come for this spirit of universal humanism based on the respectful and life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to bring a great paean to humanity and life to resound throughout the world.

The treasure tower resplendent with seven kinds of treasures symbolizes our own essential dignity and nobility. Our life itself is a majestic treasure tower.

The Daishonin teaches us: “If we examine the nature of Myoho-rence-kyo, we see that the treasure [tower is] none other than all living beings, and all living beings are none other than the complete entity of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo” (OTT, 230).

By always striving to see the treasure tower in ourselves and others, we can cause an unceasing number of treasure towers to appear in our communities and the world. Let us also erect treasure towers of kosen-rufu in our communities, leaving an eternal monument to our achievements in this world. Let’s adorn our own life with the pride and joy, “Here stands my treasure tower!” Let’s bring forth the treasure tower within us and help many others do the same. The sparkling brilliance of the tower’s seven kinds of treasures directly reflects the radiance of our human revolution. Those making efforts always shine. The lives of those dedicated to the great vow for kosen-rufu emanate an undying light like a precious gem.

Each member of the SGI is a valiant champion and hero of kosen-rufu possessing a mission to cause great treasure towers of human dignity and respect to appear all



over the world—something for which all humankind is yearning. That time has come at last!

(Translated from the October 2011 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai monthly study journal)