

SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL
NEW ZEALAND · AOTEAROA



2025 LEVEL 1 EXAM STUDY BOOK



BG00028

Contents

The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin —Nichiren Daishonin’s Life and Teachings	3
1. The Life of Nichiren Daishonin	3
2. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.....	14
3. Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime and Kosen-rufu	18
The Buddhist Philosophy of Life.....	28
4. The Ten Worlds.....	28
5. Three Proofs.....	38
6. Faith, Practice, and Study	39
7. Faith for Overcoming Obstacles	45
8. Changing Karma into Mission.....	51
The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism	55
9. Shakyamuni.....	55
10. Nichiren Daishonin—The Votary of the Lotus Sutra	58
11. The Soka Gakkai—Bringing Nichiren Buddhism to Life in Modern Times	59
12. The Westward Transmission of Buddhism and Worldwide Kosen-rufu.....	60
13. The Three Treasures.....	61
Worldwide Kosen-rufu and the Soka Gakkai	63
14. The History of the Soka Gakkai	63
15. Soka Spirit	82
Learning from The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin: The Teachings for Victory	
16. [42] General Stone Tiger	88

Online Registration: -

www.sginz.org/events/2025level1studyexam



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 (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’ (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 familiarising 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-enge-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-enge-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-enge-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-enge-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-enge-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’ (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 popularised 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 realisation 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 emphasised 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' (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 fulfilment 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.

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 neighbouring 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 Gosho (honourable 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>February 16: Born in Kataumi, Tojo Village, Nagasa District, Awa Province (today, part of Chiba Prefecture)</p> <p>(Age 1)—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>(Age 32)</p> <p>April 28: Declares the establishment of his teaching at Seicho-ji, a temple in Awa Province</p>
1260	<p>(Age 39)</p> <p>July 16: 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>(Age 40)</p> <p>May 12: Exiled to Izu Peninsula</p>
1264	<p>(Age 43)</p> <p>November 11: Komatsubara Persecution</p>
1268	<p>(Age 47)</p> <p>May 12: Sends eleven letters of remonstrance to key figures in Kamakura</p>
1271	<p>(Age 50)</p> <p>September 12: Tatsunokuchi Persecution. Thereafter begins inscribing the Gohonzon for his disciples.</p> <p>October 10: Sado Exile begins</p>
1272	<p>(Age 51)</p> <p>January 16–17: Tsukahara Debate</p> <p>February: Revolt breaks out in Kyoto and Kamakura; writes 'The Opening of the Eyes'</p>
1273	<p>(Age 52)</p> <p>April 25: Writes 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind'</p>
1274	<p>(Age 53)</p> <p>March 26: Returns to Kamakura from Sado</p> <p>April 8: Meets Hei no Saemon; predicts Mongols will attack Japan within the year</p> <p>May 17: Takes up residence at Mount Minobu</p> <p>October: Mongol forces invade the southern island of Kyushu</p>
1279	<p>(Age 58)</p> <p>September 21: Twenty farmers arrested for their beliefs</p>
1281	<p>(Age 60)</p> <p>May: Mongols invade Kyushu a second time</p>
1282	<p>(Age 61)</p> <p>October 13: 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 realisation 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 realise 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 characterise 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 practise 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 practise 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’ (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 realise 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 realise 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’ (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 realise 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]’¹ (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 characterised 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’ (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 realise the life state of a Buddha just as they are, without having to be reborn and changing their present form as an ordinary person.

¹ 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 action 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 does 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 systematised 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 categorised 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 practise 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, practise, 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 realise 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-enge-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-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-enge-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 practising 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 realising 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 realising 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 centring 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’ (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 WND-2, 92).

While 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land' was written to realise peace in Japan at that time, its underlying spirit is to achieve peace and security for the people and, further, to actualise 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-centred 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 realise 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!' (LSOC23, 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. (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! (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 actualise 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’ (WND-1, 385). The Soka Gakkai, which has spread the Mystic Law in the same spirit as the Daishonin, is the organisation 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 organisation 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.

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 coloured by our unhappiness and misery.

[2] The World of Hungry Spirits

The world of hungry spirits, or the life state of hunger, is characterised 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 characterised 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 behaviour 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 recognise 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,² 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’.³ 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.

² 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.

³ 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 fulfil 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 honours, 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 practising the so-called Hinayana teachings.

Persons in these two worlds, which are also known as the life states of learning and realisation, 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’).⁴

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 degree of enlightenment and do not seek the full enlightenment of the Buddha.

⁴ 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.

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-centredness 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 empathise 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 symbolising 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 respect worthy 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-renge-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-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.'⁵ '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.



⁵ 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 practised 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-renge-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 practising 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-renge-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 practising 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-renge-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 practising 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 practise 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 realise 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.⁶

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 practise 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.'⁷ 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 attentively'

⁶ Nichikan, 'The Practices of This School', *The Six-Volume Writings*.

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

(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)⁸; and 'Those of insufficient Buddhist learning who are bent on obtaining fame and fortune are not qualified to call themselves my followers' (GZ, 1618).⁹ In this way, he encourages us to study the Daishonin's writings.



⁸ Article 11 of 'The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko'.

⁹ 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 practise 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 practise Buddhism for the purpose of attaining enlightenment are often categorised 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 practises and endeavours 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 practise 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 practising 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 practise 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* indicate functions that hinder us in our faith and practice. These are categorised 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 practise 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,¹⁰ (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.

¹⁰ 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 utilises various means to persecute and oppress those who are practising 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 recognising 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 recognise 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 revolutionising 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 emphasise 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' (WND-1, 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 recognise 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 practise 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' (LSOC, 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.¹¹

Lessening Karmic Retribution

In the course of practising 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' (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' (WND-1, 303).

¹¹ 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'.¹² 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 empathise 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':

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)



¹² '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 Humanism¹³

The Soka Gakkai is a religious organisation that practises 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 realised 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

¹³ 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 Realise 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 realise 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 realising 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 realise true happiness and dignity, and to actualise 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 revitalising 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 realise 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 realise 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, recognising 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 realise 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 organisation 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 practise 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 organisation that is carrying on the spirit and conduct of Nichiren Daishonin and advancing worldwide kosen-rufu.





Worldwide Kosen-rufu and the Soka Gakkai

14. The History of the Soka Gakkai

In this chapter, we will examine the history of the Soka Gakkai by learning about the accomplishments of its three founding presidents, who dedicated their lives to kosen-rufu, and the spirit of mentor and disciple they shared.

The Lotus Sutra is the scripture that makes clear Shakyamuni Buddha's intent, the real purpose of his teachings. The intent of the Buddha is that all people bring forth the wisdom of Buddhahood that has always been inherent within them and establish unshakable happiness for themselves and for others, creating the basis for peace throughout the world.

The Lotus Sutra describes those who strive to actualise this intent of the Buddha as bodhisattvas of the true Mahayana teaching. They do so by struggling against all kinds of obstacles to achieve a profound transformation in their own lives and the lives of others. Such bodhisattvas, the sutra teaches, appear in the age called the Latter Day of the Law, after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. They work to spread the Lotus Sutra throughout the entire world and thereby realise the Buddha's purpose, a process we call kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the sutra's teaching. The bodhisattvas who shoulder this mission are called the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appear in the Lotus Sutra is named Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Nichiren Daishonin awakened to his mission to fulfil the role of Superior Practices in the Latter Day, taking as his own the great desire and vow for kosen-rufu described in the sutra—the Buddha's will and mandate. He stood up to actualise that will and established the fundamental

teaching and practice for freeing all people and all of society from suffering throughout the Latter Day. For this reason, the Daishonin is known as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

And today, it is the Soka Gakkai that has inherited and is carrying on the Daishonin's spirit, deeply resolved to accomplish its mission of worldwide kosen-rufu and earnestly preserving in its efforts to actualise that goal. The leaders who have firmly established the practice, awareness, and resolve for achieving kosen-rufu in modern times are the Soka Gakkai's first three presidents: its first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, its second president, Josei Toda, and its third president, Daisaku Ikeda (currently its honorary president and the president of the SGI). Together they are respected as the Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents.

Hereafter we will refer to these three founding presidents with the honorific title Sensei, which follows the family name.

The Time of the First President, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi

We can find the origins of the Soka Gakkai in the relationship of mentor and disciple that existed between the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and the second president, Josei Toda. Both were educators.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born on June 6, 1871, in the village of Arahama in today's Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture (on the Japan Sea coast). While in his early teens, he moved to Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands, where he lived under the care of a relative. There he exerted himself in his studies while working, and eventually entered the Hokkaido Normal School (today, Hokkaido University of Education). Upon graduating, he became a schoolteacher, and in 1901 he moved to Tokyo with the manuscripts for his first work, *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life), which was published in 1903. He later held the post of principal at several elementary schools in Tokyo.

Josei Toda was born on February 11, 1900, in a village called Shioya in present-day Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture (also on the Japan Sea coast). In around 1902, his family moved to the village of Atsuta in today's Atsuta Ward in Ishikari City, Hokkaido. After graduating from an ordinary and higher elementary school (roughly equivalent to finishing today's junior high school) in 1914, he studied on his own while working. Eventually, he received his teaching certificate and began his career as a teacher in the Hokkaido town of Yubari.

Mentor and Disciple Meet

Toda Sensei from that time on had been seeking a mentor in life, and upon visiting Tokyo, he met Makiguchi Sensei, who was by then the principal of an elementary school. The two readily took to each other. The former was 48 years old at the time, and the latter, 19. Before long, Toda Sensei began to teach at the school, regarding Makiguchi Sensei as his mentor in life and supporting him in every possible way.

[Note: After moving to Tokyo, Toda, while working, studied at the night school of Kaisei Middle School and night classes at Chuo University.]

The Establishment of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai

As an educator engaged first-hand in primary school education, Makiguchi Sensei's hope and vow was to enable every child to succeed in creating personal happiness as a self-sufficient member of society. He applied himself to developing an approach to education that would make this possible.

Makiguchi Sensei delved deeply into research and formulated a theory of value that could serve as a foundation for the unique pedagogy he would later systematise. In the process, he encountered the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, which he realised clarified the principles and fundamental practice for enabling the kind of life transformation that would give rise to value creation in human society. And in 1928, he took faith in Nichiren Buddhism as a member of Nichiren Shoshu—a Buddhist school that derived its teachings from the lineage of Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's direct disciple and successor. He was 57 years old at the time.

Makiguchi Sensei recounts his state of mind immediately after taking faith in Nichiren Buddhism, writing, 'With an indescribable joy, I completely changed the way I had lived for almost 60 years.'¹⁴ As this statement suggests, he took the Daishonin's teaching as a principle for living and devoted himself to it. He regarded it as a source of power and energy for creating value and achieving actual positive results in the midst of society and in daily life.

¹⁴ Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka Kyoikugaku Ronshu* (Writings on Value-Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1984), vol. 8, p. 406.

Regarding his motivation for taking faith, Makiguchi Sensei recalls, 'Encountering the Lotus Sutra, I realised the teachings of the sutra in no way contradict the principles of philosophy and science that form the basis of our daily lives.'¹⁵

That same year, Toda Sensei followed his mentor in taking faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

On November 18, 1930, Makiguchi Sensei published the first volume of his *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy). This work systematised his views and ideas on education, and was intended as the first of twelve volumes (of which four were eventually published).

His disciple, Toda Sensei, personally helped fund the publishing project, and collaborated in every aspect of its production, including organising and editing Makiguchi Sensei's notes into a manuscript and dividing the content into chapters.

The publisher's imprint listed Tsunesaburo Makiguchi as the author, Josei Toda as the publisher and printer, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society, the predecessor of the Soka Gakkai) as the publishing house. This was the first time the name Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had appeared in public, and for this reason the day of the work's publication, November 18, is celebrated as the day of the Soka Gakkai's founding.

[Editor's Note: After the society was virtually destroyed by the militarist government, as will be explained below, Toda restored and renamed it the Soka Gakkai.]

Soka means 'creation of value'. The purpose of education and the purpose of life are the pursuit of happiness, and the name Soka expresses Makiguchi Sensei's thinking that the creation of value is integral to building happiness.

The conception of the word Soka itself came about in the course of a discussion between the two innovative educators. We could say that the birth of the Soka Gakkai, then, was itself a crystallisation of the united spirit of mentor and disciple.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 405.

Buddhist Practice Directly Connected to Nichiren Daishonin

In this way, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai itself was born out of the bond of mentor and disciple. Gradually, its organisational structure became more defined and it began to grow.

While originally an association of educators interested in the principles of value-creating education, non-educators eventually began to join as well, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai became a group for the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, the power source for value creation.

Though a society of lay practitioners of the Nichiren Shoshu school of Buddhism, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai conducted its affairs in a completely different manner than previously established Nichiren Shoshu lay societies. These groups of lay believers each were affiliated with a specific local temple, and operated under the guidance of the chief priest of that temple.

The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, however, operated independently, under the leadership of President Makiguchi and General Director Toda. It did not rely on priests for its management or operation or for providing guidance pertaining to faith.

Nor was the form of Buddhist practice it encouraged constrained to visiting temples or participating in ceremonies such as funeral and memorial services, as was the case with most Buddhist schools in Japan, including Nichiren Shoshu. Rather, it taught a practice that was open to everyone, which aimed to enable each person to actualise happiness in the midst of life's real challenges and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of society.

Through holding discussion meetings, and its leaders traveling to various regions to offer guidance and encouragement in faith, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai grew steadily, reaching a membership of around three thousand.

Challenging Japan's Militarism

The militarist government, in its reckless rush to expand its war footing with State Shinto¹⁶ as its spiritual pillar, endeavoured to coerce uniformity of thought among

¹⁶ State Shinto: A national religion established and promoted by the government after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 under the emperor system of Japan. The militarist government used it as a means to put the people under its thought control. Worship of the Sun Goddess was its tenet.

Japan's populace. It placed Soka Kyoiku Gakkai discussion meetings and other activities under surveillance by the Special Higher Police, which was responsible for investigating so-called thought crimes.

At the time, the government was pressuring citizens to visit and offer prayers at Shinto shrines and to enshrine and worship talismans to the Sun Goddess, the mythical progenitor of the imperial lineage. In June 1943, the priests of Nichiren Shoshu, in fear of government repression, delivered to the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai the following request: 'Why don't you accept the Shinto talisman?' This was made to Makiguchi Sensei in the presence of the high priest.

The posture of Nichiren Shoshu in accepting the government's demand to enshrine the talisman to the Sun Goddess constituted complicity in slander of the Law (slander of the correct Buddhist teaching). It was a violation of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and his successor Nikko Shonin, from whom Nichiren Shoshu claimed lineage. Makiguchi Sensei adamantly refused to accept the Shinto talisman, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai thus persisted in upholding the Daishonin's teaching and example of strictly admonishing slander of the Law.

On July 6, Makiguchi Sensei, while visiting Shimoda in Izu, Shizuoka Prefecture, and on the same day Toda Sensei, in Tokyo, were taken into custody by detectives of the Special Higher Police. Ultimately, 21 leaders of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai were arrested on suspicion of committing lese majesty (the crime of violating the dignity of the Emperor) and violating the Peace Preservation Law.¹⁷

All those arrested were subjected to coercive interrogation, and most of them abandoned their faith. In the end, only Makiguchi Sensei and his trusted disciple Toda Sensei resisted, persisting in their faith. Makiguchi Sensei even explained to the prosecutors and judges who questioned him the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. Both refused to buckle under the pressure of authority and persevered in upholding the right and just principles of Buddhism.

On November 18, 1944, at the age of 73, Makiguchi Sensei passed away at the Tokyo Detention Centre due to malnutrition and the weakness of age. Coincidentally, the day of his death was the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding.

Throughout his life, he had lived and practised as the Daishonin taught in his writings, never hesitant to risk his life to do so. He lived as a noble pioneer who revived in modern times the Daishonin's spirit of propagating the Mystic Law to lead the people from suffering to happiness.

¹⁷ Peace Preservation Law: Enacted in 1925 and completely revised in 1941, this law was used to suppress thought in the name of protecting the Japanese 'national polity' and preserving peace. The law provided for harsh punishment of persons found to be in violation, including the death penalty.

Toda Sensei's Awakening in Prison

While in prison, Toda Sensei, in addition to exerting himself in chanting daimoku, from early 1944 began to read the Lotus Sutra and ponder it deeply. In the process, he achieved an awakening—a realisation that 'the Buddha is life itself'.

As he continued to chant and engage in profound contemplation, Toda Sensei also became aware that he himself was a Bodhisattva of the Earth who had been present at the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra and who was entrusted with the widespread propagation of the sutra's teaching in the age after Shakyamuni Buddha. Thus, in November 1944, he awakened to the deep conviction that 'I, Toda, am a Bodhisattva of the Earth', whose mission it was to accomplish kosen-rufu.

Through the profound awakening he experienced in prison, Toda Sensei developed an immovable conviction in the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, and resolved that it was his personal mission to ensure their propagation worldwide. The awakening that Toda Sensei had experienced while in prison became the primary inspiration behind the revival of Buddhism in the modern age and the powerful progress of the Soka Gakkai as a religious group dedicated to the accomplishment of kosen-rufu.

At a memorial service for Makiguchi Sensei after the war, Toda Sensei addressed his departed 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' (LSOC7, 178). The benefit of this was coming to know my former existence as 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?¹⁸

This passage from 'The Parable of the Phantom City' (7th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra teaches that the bond between mentor and disciple is such that they will

¹⁸ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, 'Makiguchi Sensei Sankaiki ni' (On President Makiguchi's Third Memorial) in *Toda Josei Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun-sha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 386.

always be born together in a Buddha land, in a place where they will strive together to save people from suffering.

While most of those persecuted by the authorities discarded their faith, Toda Sensei's words express his sincere appreciation and resolve to repay his debt of gratitude to his mentor under any circumstances. In them, we catch a glimpse of the strength of this bond of mentor and disciple.

The Time of Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda

On July 3, 1945, Josei Toda emerged from prison, having endured two years of life in confinement, and stood up alone to carry on the will of his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, for the accomplishment of kosen-rufu. As general director of the Soka Gakkai, he began immediately to undertake the reconstruction of the organisation, which was in a state of ruin.

The people of Japan at the time were in the pit of despair, reeling from the destruction brought on by the war and the turmoil of its aftermath. State Shinto, which had been forced upon the populace, was now being repudiated, along with other beliefs and values espoused by the militarist government. Yet no new source of hope was to be found.

Toda Sensei was convinced that Nichiren Buddhism alone constituted a spiritual principle powerful enough to lead the people away from suffering and confusion, and he stood up with a great wish and vow to spread its teachings widely. The organisation's goal would be not only to carry out educational reform, but to accomplish kosen-rufu, that is, peace throughout the world and happiness for all people. In line with that purpose, he amended its name from Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) to Soka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society), and began again to hold discussion meetings and travel to outlying regions to offer guidance in faith.

Encounter between Mentor and Disciple—Toda Sensei and Ikeda Sensei Meet

In 1947, Toda Sensei met young Daisaku Ikeda, who would later become the third President of the Soka Gakkai (today President of the Soka Gakkai International).

Ikeda was born in the district of Omori, in Tokyo's Ota ward, on January 2, 1928.

He grew up at a time when Japan was plunging into war: He was nine years old at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937),¹⁹ and thirteen at the outbreak of the war with the United States in the Pacific theatre of World War II (1941). As the war intensified, his four older brothers, all in the prime of their lives, were drafted into the military and sent into battle. To help support his family, Ikeda worked at a munitions factory. Suffering from tuberculosis, however, he spent his early youth in physical distress, thinking deeply about the questions of life and death.

When his eldest brother, Kiichi, had returned home temporarily from the battlefield, he described how much misery the war was causing the people of Asia. In addition, his family had been forced from their home, which burned in the air raids. Through these accounts and experiences, he had become bitterly aware of war's injustice and tragic cruelty.

After the war, the family learned that the eldest brother, who had been sent back to the battlefield, had been killed in combat in Burma (today Myanmar). Witnessing his mother's deep sadness on learning of her son's death, young Ikeda's sense that war was evil, a crime against humanity, strengthened and deepened. Searching for clear answers to the question of how to live, he delved into works of literature and philosophy.

It was in the midst of this quest that, on August 14, 1947, he attended his first Soka Gakkai discussion meeting. There he encountered the man who would become his lifelong mentor, Josei Toda.

At the meeting that evening, Toda Sensei was delivering a lecture on Nichiren Daishonin's writing 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land'. When Toda had finished lecturing, Ikeda asked him a series of questions, including 'What is the correct way to live?'; 'What is a true patriot?'; 'What is the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?'; and 'What do you think about the Emperor?'

Toda's answers were clear and well-reasoned, and infused with the deep conviction he had gained through his struggles against Japan's militarist government and during two years of unjust imprisonment. As he listened, the youth was struck with the sense that he could trust everything this man had said.

Ten days later, on August 24, Ikeda began his practice of Nichiren Buddhism. At the time, he was 19 years old, and Toda Sensei, 47.

¹⁹ The war that began in 1937 as a Japanese invasion of China and ended with the World War II defeat of Japan in 1945.

In April the following year, the youth enrolled in night classes at Taisei Gakuin (later, Tokyo Fuji University). In September, he began to attend Toda's lecture series on the Lotus Sutra. Taking Toda Sensei as his mentor, he deepened his study and understanding of Buddhism and vowed to live his life for the sake of kosen-rufu.

And in January 1949, he started to work at Toda's publishing company as the editor of a magazine for boys.

The Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple to Rebuild the Soka Gakkai

In July 1949, the Soka Gakkai launched publication of its monthly magazine, the *Daibyakurenge*. The inaugural issue carried an essay Toda Sensei had written, titled 'The Philosophy of Life'. Later, Toda's businesses, which had been struggling amid the effects of Japan's chaotic post-war economy, faced dire financial setbacks, and on August 24, 1950, he announced his intention to step down from his position as Soka Gakkai general director.

On that occasion, young Ikeda asked him, 'Who will be my mentor from here on?' to which Toda Sensei replied, 'Though I've caused you nothing but trouble, I am your mentor', affirming the unbreakable bond of mentor and disciple.

The disciple exerted himself fully to settle Toda's business affairs, solving the financial crisis. He resolved deeply in his heart to make it possible for Toda Sensei to take full leadership as president of the Soka Gakkai.

Ikeda had decided to stop attending night school so that he could fully support his mentor. But in response, Toda Sensei told him that he would personally instruct him and provide him with a broad education surpassing any he could obtain from a university. This private instruction, known as 'Toda University', continued for nearly a decade, until the year before Toda's death.

Amid this intensive struggle, Toda Sensei discussed with his most trusted disciple his vision for the future. This included the establishment of the organisation's newspaper, *Seikyo Shimbun*, to wage a battle of the written word for the sake of kosen-rufu, and the founding of Soka University. Both of these institutions came into being as a result of such dialogues between mentor and disciple.

Inauguration of the Second President

Having overcome his business troubles, Toda Sensei agreed, in response to requests from many members, to take on the position of Soka Gakkai president. His inauguration as the organisation's second president took place on May 3, 1951, and on that occasion he declared his vow to achieve a membership of 750,000 households.²⁰ There were only about 3,000 members at the time, and no one could believe it was possible to achieve the goal Toda had stated.

Before his inauguration as president, Toda Sensei implemented a restructuring of the Soka Gakkai organisation. He instituted a chapter-based system as a foundation for future development and refreshed the organisation's preparedness to take on the challenge of kosen-rufu.

Prior to his becoming president, the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper commenced publication on April 20. Its inaugural issue carried the first instalment of Toda Sensei's serialised novel *The Human Revolution*, which he authored under the pen name Myo Goku.²¹

'Human revolution' refers to the process by which, through the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, each individual achieves a transformation of their state of life, eventually leading to a transformation in the destiny of all humankind. Upholding the principle of human revolution based on his philosophy of life, President Toda endeavoured to spread Nichiren Buddhism as a teaching accessible and applicable to all people today.

Also, immediately after his inauguration, President Toda established in succession the women's division, the young men's division, and the young women's division.

At the same time, in the beginning of 1952, on Toda Sensei's instruction, Ikeda became chapter advisor to the Soka Gakkai's Kamata Chapter in Tokyo, and led an effort that resulted in 201 new households joining during the month of February. This represented a breakthrough, far surpassing the monthly membership increases achieved by any chapter until then, and became known as the historic February Campaign. It marked a turning point, after which the Soka Gakkai's progress toward achieving its membership goal of 750,000 households accelerated rapidly.

²⁰ In those days the Soka Gakkai's membership was indicated by the number of households.

²¹ The name Myo Goku derives from Toda's prison experience, during which he had awakened (*go*) to the essence of Buddhism, the mystic truth (*myo*) of non-substantiality (*ku*).

Toda Sensei had been planning to publish a collection of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. He knew this would be indispensable to the correct study and understanding of the Daishonin's teachings and, therefore, progress toward kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of Nichiren Buddhism.

Toda Sensei asked the accomplished Nichiren scholar Nichiko Hori (1867–1957) to take charge of the compilation and editing. In April 1952, marking the 700th observation of the Daishonin's establishment of his teaching, the *Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin) was published. From that time on, every Soka Gakkai member used this book to earnestly study Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and the spirit to base everything on the Daishonin's writings was established throughout the entire Soka Gakkai.

Battle against the Devilish Tendencies of Power

In April 1955, the Soka Gakkai ran its first candidates in local assembly elections. It took this step based on the spirit of 'establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land', which the Daishonin espoused in the course of his struggle for the people's happiness and a peaceful society.

In 1956 in Kansai, Ikeda inspired a remarkable increase in propagation, and in May the Osaka Chapter achieved an unprecedented membership increase of 11,111 households in just one month. In the House of Councillors election held in July that year, a candidate running in the Osaka district, whose campaign Ikeda had led, was elected, defying all predictions to the contrary.

It was an outcome so astonishing that a major daily newspaper in Japan reported it under the headline, 'What was thought impossible has been achieved!'

Three candidates endorsed by the Soka Gakkai had been elected to the House of Councillors, and from then on the organisation became a focus of attention as a group with growing social influence. At the same time, vested powers and interests began to attempt unjustly to impede the organisation.

In response to these attacks, Ikeda fought resolutely to protect the Soka Gakkai members. In June 1957, when the Yubari Coal Miners Union in the city of Yubari, Hokkaido, acted unjustly to suppress Soka Gakkai members' religious freedom, he went there immediately to address the issue. Declaring that the Soka Gakkai would adamantly oppose these abuses, he strove diligently to achieve a solution. (This became known as the Yubari Coal Miners Union Incident.)

On July 3, immediately after leaving Yubari, Ikeda was unjustly arrested by the Osaka Prefectural Police (in what became known as the Osaka Incident). In April that year (1957), the Soka Gakkai had run a candidate in a by-election to fill a vacant House of Councillors seat in the Osaka electoral district, and some members involved in the campaign had been charged with violating election laws. Ikeda, as the person responsible for the election campaign, was baselessly accused of orchestrating the illegal activities.

July 3 is the same date on which, in 1945, Toda Sensei was released from prison. Years later, Ikeda Sensei referred to this in a haiku poem, writing, 'On this day of release and of imprisonment [July 3] are found the bonds of mentor and disciple.'

For 15 days, Ikeda was subjected to harsh interrogation, during which the prosecutor threatened: 'If you don't confess your guilt, we will arrest President Toda.' Toda's health had by that time become very frail, and going to jail would have surely led to his death.

To protect his mentor's life, Ikeda confessed to the charges for the time being, resolved to prove his own innocence later in court. On July 17, he was released from the Osaka Detention Centre.

For the next four-and-a-half years, Ikeda Sensei waged an ongoing court battle, and finally, on January 25, 1962, he was pronounced not guilty on all charges. The prosecutor affirmed the court's decision, declining the option to appeal.

Entrusting Kosen-rufu to Successors

On September 8, 1957, Toda Sensei delivered his 'Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons',²² which would become the start and keynote of the Soka Gakkai's peace movement.

In it, based on the Buddhist principle of the sanctity and dignity of life, he identified nuclear weapons as a devilish creation that threatens to usurp humanity's inviolable right to live, calling use of such weapons an act of absolute evil.

In December 1957, the Soka Gakkai reached its membership goal of 750,000 households, which Toda Sensei had vowed to achieve. And in March the following year, it completed and donated the edifice called the Grand Lecture Hall at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple, Taiseki-ji. There, on March 16, six thousand youth

²² 'Nuclear Weapons' in the title can more literally be translated as 'Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs', for this was the common term for nuclear weapons in Japan at that time.

from around Japan, led by Ikeda, gathered for a ceremony in which Toda Sensei entrusted them with every aspect of kosen-rufu. On that occasion, President Toda declared, 'The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world!'

This day, March 16, on which these young successors were entrusted with the great wish and vow for kosen-rufu, came to be called 'Kosen-rufu Day' in the Soka Gakkai and the SGI.

On April 2, 1958, Toda Sensei passed away, having completed all he had set out to accomplish. He was 58. Basing himself on the awakening he achieved while in prison, he had rebuilt the Soka Gakkai and constructed an immovable foundation for the future of kosen-rufu.

The Time of Daisaku Ikeda, Third Soka Gakkai President and SGI President

After Josei Toda's death, Daisaku Ikeda, in the newly established position of general administrator (since June 1958), took full responsibility for the management and leadership of the Soka Gakkai, and on May 3, 1960, was inaugurated as the organisation's third president.

In his speech on that occasion, he said, '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 realisation of kosen-rufu.'²³ With this, his first 'lion's roar' as president—made on the same date that Toda Sensei had been inaugurated as president in 1951—a new period of great development for the Soka Gakkai began.

On October 2 that year, President Ikeda left Japan for North and South America, the first step in a journey to spread the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism around the world. In January 1961, he visited Hong Kong, India, and other destinations in Asia, and that October he travelled to Europe, initiating a surge of progress toward worldwide kosen-rufu.

In this way, Ikeda Sensei opened a substantive path toward achieving the 'westward transmission of Buddhism' and the spread of the Mystic Law throughout the entire world, which Nichiren Daishonin had predicted.

²³ Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2004), Book 2, p. 1971.

In 1965, under the pen name Ho Goku,²⁴ he began writing the novel *The Human Revolution*, which would be serialised in the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper and would eventually extend to 12 volumes. His purpose in doing so was to correctly transmit the history and spirit of the Soka Gakkai to future generations.

In the preface to the novel, he conveys its main theme: 'A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.'²⁵ *The Human Revolution* portrays the efforts and struggles of the three founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai as they strove to build a foundation for the happiness and peace of humankind.

Ikeda Sensei has continued to chronicle the Soka Gakkai's history in *The New Human Revolution*, a 30-volume novel also serialised in the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

A Movement for Peace, Culture, and Education

The Soka Gakkai is an organisation that fosters youth who will contribute positively to society.

Toda Sensei said that when kosen-rufu advances, numerous capable individuals will emerge, playing important roles in various fields of society. He further expected that the Soka Gakkai would one day become an important mainstay for the flourishing of peace and culture for all humankind. To that end, he insisted that it must become an outstanding educational movement, one that can raise people capable of fulfilling their mission.

In order to actualise that vision, the Soka Gakkai under the leadership of Ikeda Sensei has promoted a growing movement for peace, culture, and education grounded in Buddhist principles, thereby making great contributions to society.

In response to his proposals, the Soka Gakkai has created a number of specialised groups or divisions, including those for educators, scientists and academics, artists, writers and authors, and members with international experience

²⁴ In *The New Human Revolution*, Ikeda reflects on his choice of Ho Goku as pen name as follows: 'Mr. Toda used the pen name Myo Goku; I will use Ho Goku. Combining the first part of each name creates *myoho*, or Mystic Law. *Goku* means to awaken to the truth of non-substantiality. The *myo* of *myoho* refers to the world of Buddhahood, and *ho* refers to the other nine worlds. *Myo* is also awakening or enlightenment, while *ho* is fundamental darkness or delusion. Based on this principle we can say that *myo* corresponds to mentor and *ho* to disciple' (Vol. 9, p. 13).

²⁵ Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, Book 1, p. viii.

and interests, as well as physicians and medical professionals. As the organisation has developed a wider range of activities, it has established groups for business professionals, those involved in agriculture and fishing, residents of remote islands, and those involved in community activities and support. It has also founded institutions dedicated to scholarship and the arts such as the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, the Min-On Concert Association, and the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum.

To establish a political movement devoted to serving ordinary people and society in Japan, an independent political party known as Komeito was established in 1964 with the support of Soka Gakkai members.

Ikeda Sensei also established a system of educational institutions to actualise Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda's philosophy of value-creating pedagogy, or Soka Education. It includes kindergartens; elementary, junior, and senior high schools; a junior college, universities, and graduate schools. Among these are Tokyo Soka Junior and Senior High School (opened in 1968) in Kodaira, Tokyo; Soka University (1971) in Hachioji, Tokyo; and Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High School (1973, as Soka Girls' Junior and Senior High School) in Katano, Osaka. In 2001, Soka University of America opened in Orange County, California.

At the same time, Ikeda Sensei was broadening his efforts to conduct dialogues focused on peace, culture, and education on a global scale.

On September 8, 1968, he announced a proposal for the normalisation of relations between Japan and China.²⁶ And beginning in May 1972, he engaged in dialogues with the renowned British historian Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975). Their conversations spanned 40 hours over a two-year period. This marked the start of a series of dialogues and exchanges with influential leaders and thinkers.

In 1974 and 1975, at the height of the Cold War between the East and West and with China and the Soviet Union also in conflict, President Ikeda initiated successive visits to China, the Soviet Union, and the United States, engaging in talks with their top leaders in order to open paths to peace and friendship.

On January 26, 1975, Soka Gakkai members representing 51 countries and territories gathered on the Pacific island of Guam for the establishment of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), appointing Ikeda Sensei as its president.

²⁶ At the time, there were no official diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and Japan, so technically the two countries were still in a state of war, and anti-China and anti-communist sentiment was widespread in Japan. Ikeda's call for normalisation of relations was based on his belief that peace with China was fundamental to the stability of the Asian region and that the reintegration of China into the international community was essential to world peace. His proposal helped establish the groundwork for negotiations leading to the normalisation of diplomatic relations in 1972 and a Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1978.

Starting from around 1977, as the Soka Gakkai was making great strides toward worldwide kosen-rufu, priests at branch temples of Nichiren Shoshu began repeatedly making unfounded accusations against the organisation. This came to be known as the first priesthood issue. Behind this was an alliance formed of priests and former leaders who had betrayed the Soka Gakkai. They plotted together to sever the bond of mentor and disciple—that is, between Ikeda Sensei, the leader of the movement for kosen-rufu, and the members—with the goal of controlling the Soka Gakkai for their own aims.

Ikeda Sensei strove to find a solution to the problem in order to protect the members from these attacks and in hopes of restoring harmony between the priesthood and laity. He found the only feasible way to do so was for him to step down as Soka Gakkai president. In April 1979, Ikeda Sensei did so, taking the title 'honorary president'.

A Succession of Awards and Honours

Beginning in 1983, Ikeda Sensei has issued a 'Peace Proposal' every year on January 26, in commemoration of SGI Day, the anniversary of the SGI's establishment. These proposals are valued highly by many around the world.

He has also delivered more than 30 lectures at universities and academic institutions around the globe, while the number of dialogues he has conducted with leading world thinkers, heads of state, cultural figures, and university deans and presidents exceeds 1,600. More than 70 of these dialogues have been published in book form. Among them, the dialogue with Professor Toynbee has been issued in some 30 languages, gaining wide praise as a 'guidepost for global culture' and 'a textbook for humanity'.

These dialogues, which connect different cultures and faiths, have helped deepen exchanges among peoples and build mutual understanding and solid bonds among those dedicated to good.

In 1995, the SGI Charter was adopted, making clear the principles of humanism the SGI stands for; and in 1996, the Toda Peace Institute (formerly Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research) was founded, focusing on the legacy of the teachings and principles of Josei Toda.

In response to the SGI's efforts for world peace and activities for culture and education, public parks and streets bearing the names of Presidents Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda have appeared in localities throughout the world. Ikeda Sensei has

continued to have honours and awards conferred upon him by nations, municipalities, and educational institutions. These include national medals, honorary doctorates and professorships, and honorary citizenships from numerous cities and counties.

The New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu

In the midst of this global progress, in 1991 the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood took the extreme measure of excommunicating the millions of members of the Soka Gakkai throughout the world. (This and related events are known as the second priesthood issue.) The Soka Gakkai strictly admonished this act perpetrated by a corrupt priesthood, which amounted to a grave slander of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and betrayal of his intent.

Having triumphed over the schemes of the priesthood, the Soka Gakkai has ushered in a new era in the history of worldwide kosen-rufu. Its members are practising Nichiren Buddhism in 192 countries and territories, where they have garnered widespread trust and praise for their steady efforts to contribute to society based on the spirit of Buddhist humanism.

In November 2013, a new edifice, the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu, was completed in Shinanomachi, Tokyo, as part of the Soka Gakkai Headquarters complex.

In his dedication on the monument displayed in the entrance lobby of the Hall of the Great Vow, Ikeda Sensei wrote: 'Kosen-rufu is the path to attaining universal peace and prosperity. It is our great vow from time without beginning for the enlightenment of all people.'

Members from across Japan and around the world gather at the Hall of the Great Vow to do gongyo and chant daimoku. United in their vow to achieve kosen-rufu, they pray to the Soka Gakkai Kosen-rufu Gohonzon, which bears the inscription 'For the Fulfilment of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu through the Compassionate Propagation of the Great Law', and start anew with fresh determination.

Through the efforts of the Soka Gakkai, Nichiren Buddhism now shines as a great source of hope throughout the world, like a sun illuminating all humankind.

*

Commemorative Dates of the Soka Gakkai

Date	Events
Jan. 26	1975. The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is founded in Guam. Daisaku Ikeda is appointed its president.
Mar. 16	1958. Josei Toda entrusts the fulfilment of the great vow to achieve kosen-rufu to his successors, the youth, and to Ikeda in particular.
May 3	1951. Toda is inaugurated as second president. 1960. Ikeda is inaugurated as third president.
Jul. 3	1945. Toda is released from prison after enduring two years in confinement. He embarks on the reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai. 1957. Ikeda is unjustly arrested by the Osaka Prefectural Police (known as the Osaka Incident).
Oct. 2	1960. Ikeda departs Japan for North and South America, taking the first step toward worldwide kosen-rufu.
Nov. 18	1930. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's work <i>Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei</i> (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy) is published, an event regarded as the Soka Gakkai's founding.



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 13th 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 revitalise 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 realising 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 80s, Nichiren Shoshu had become wealthy through the generous donations and support of the Soka Gakkai members. The Soka Gakkai and its international movement, 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 organisation, aiming to prompt a large percentage of Soka Gakkai members to leave the organisation 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. Emphasising 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 organisation'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 summarise 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.’²⁷

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’ (GZ, 1618).²⁸ 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.

²⁷ A Refutation of the Soka Gakkai’s ‘Counterfeit Object of Worship’: 100 Questions and Answers (Los Angeles: Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 1996), p. 8.

²⁸ 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'.²⁹ In other words, they encourage 'single-minded faith in [the high priest] as the living body of Shakyamuni (Nichiren)'³⁰ 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'.³¹

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' (WND-1, 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.

²⁹ *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, October 2008 (Los Angeles: Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 2008), p. 17.

³⁰ *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, September 2008, p. 22.

³¹ *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.’³²

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’ (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’ (WND-1, 33).

And finally, he writes: ‘Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas 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 Myoho-rence-kyo with this realisation 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’ (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 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.

³² *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, March 2009, p. 8.

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 WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN:

THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

[42] “General Stone Tiger”

Strengthening Our Faith and Forging Our Life—The Great Path of Human Revolution

I am not as healthy as others, and in addition, I dwell in this remote mountain forest. This year was especially difficult, with widespread epidemics and famine in spring and summer, which worsened in autumn and winter. My sickness grew worse again, too, but you [Shijo Kingo] gave me various medicines and a quilted robe. Thanks to your remedies, I improved steadily; I have now recovered and feel much better than before. *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice* by Bodhisattva Maitreya and *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* by Bodhisattva Nagarjuna both state that, if one’s illness is caused by fixed karma, even excellent medicine will turn to poison, but that, if one believes in the Lotus Sutra, poison will change into medicine. Although unworthy, I propagate the Lotus Sutra; hence heavenly devils have competed to deprive me of food. Understanding this, I have no complaint, but I believe that I survived this time only because Shakyamuni Buddha entered your body to help me.

So much for that. I was extremely concerned about your journey home last time, and I am overjoyed to hear that you have arrived safely in Kamakura. Such was my anxiety that I asked everyone who came here from Kamakura about you. One said that he had met you at Yumoto, another that he had encountered you farther on at Kozu, and when a third told me that he had seen you in Kamakura, I felt greatly relieved. From now on, you must not come to visit me in person unless absolutely necessary. When you have something urgent to tell me, send a messenger. Indeed, I was deeply worried about your last trip. An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack. If you should have to travel, do not begrudge the cost of a horse. Make sure that you ride a good horse. Bring along your best men to defend you against a surprise attack, and ride a horse that can easily carry you in your armour.

In the eighth volume of *Great Concentration and Insight* and in the eighth volume of *The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight”* it says, “The stronger one’s faith, the greater the protection of the gods.” This means that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one’s faith. The Lotus Sutra is a fine sword, but its might depends on the one who wields it.

Among those who propagate this sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, who compares with Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, Wonderful Sound, Manjushri, and Medicine King? Persons of the two vehicles [such as Shariputra] had destroyed all the illusions of thought and desire, thus freeing themselves from the six paths. Bodhisattvas [such as Perceiver of the World’s Sounds] had eradicated forty-one of the forty-two levels of ignorance and were like the moon on the fourteenth night before it reaches fullness. Nevertheless, Shakyamuni Buddha refused to entrust the mission of propagation to any of these people and gave it instead to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Thus these bodhisattvas are the ones who had thoroughly forged their resolve.

The mighty warrior General Li Kuang, whose mother had been devoured by a tiger, shot an arrow at the stone he believed was the tiger. The arrow penetrated the stone all the way up to its feathers. But once he realized it was only a stone, he was unable to pierce it again. Later he came to be known as General Stone Tiger. This story applies to you. Though enemies lurk in wait for you, your resolute faith in the Lotus Sutra has forestalled great dangers before they could begin. Realizing this, you must strengthen your faith more than ever. It is impossible to say all I want to in one letter.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren

(WND-1, 952–53)

Lecture

In June and July of 1957, 55 years ago, I was engaged in fierce struggles in both Hokkaido and Kansai. I had rushed to Hokkaido to combat the Yubari Coal Miners Union’s blatant abuse of the right to religious freedom of union members who belonged to the Soka Gakkai. At the time, the union was regarded as all-powerful and no one dared stand up to it. In Yubari, I took the lead in the struggle to protect our members and see that justice was done.

Immediately after my efforts in Yubari, on July 3, I travelled to Osaka, to present myself for questioning at the Osaka Prefectural Police Headquarters in connection with alleged election law violations in an Osaka district by-election (in April that year). I was arrested and jailed later that day on false charges.

These two incidents, one following on so quickly from the other, were both defensive struggles against the insidious nature of power and authority. Back in spring when these two struggles were set in motion, I had engraved in my heart and written down in my diary the Daishonin’s lesson about “being able to pierce a stone with an arrow”—referring to the famous ancient Chinese anecdote about General Stone Tiger that appears in this Goshō. It was an expression of my determination to exert myself based on faith in the Mystic Law, the power source for absolute victory and for making the impossible possible. In addition, it was a reflection of my readiness to face every hardship with the dauntless spirit I had forged in the core of my being.

On July 3, on my way from Hokkaido to Osaka, I had a brief stopover at Tokyo’s Haneda Airport. Mr. Toda met me there and presented me with a copy of his just published novel *The Human Revolution*, which had previously been serialized in the *Seikyo Shimbun* under his pen name, Myo Goku.

How mystic this was! At the crucial moment when I was about to embark on a bitter struggle with the devilish nature of authority, I held in my hand *The Human Revolution*, which recorded my mentor’s experience of awakening to his mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth³³ while in prison for his beliefs during World War II.

³³ Bodhisattvas of the Earth: An innumerable host of bodhisattvas who emerge from beneath the earth and to whom Shakyamuni Buddha entrusts the propagation of the Mystic Law, or the essence of the Lotus Sutra, in the Latter Day of the Law. They are described in the “Emerging from the Earth” (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the first chapter of the sutra’s essential teaching (latter 14 chapters). In this chapter, countless bodhisattvas from other worlds ask for permission to propagate the sutra in the saha world after the Buddha’s death, but

Having Absolute Conviction in Faith

In the great struggle to propagate the Mystic Law, it is the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who possess the thoroughly forged resolve never to be defeated, no matter how harsh the storms of adversity that beset them. To win over fear and trepidation and keep pressing forward through all—human revolution is found in this strong, positive pulsing of life.

Mr. Toda taught us that human revolution means being aware of our fundamental purpose in life and having absolute conviction in faith. He also explained that it means transforming our life from a condition dominated by the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness³⁴ to one manifesting the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. This is the process of overcoming all devilish functions, and awakening and summoning forth the noble potential inherent in our life. It is building a strong self. That is why we who are engaged in the challenge of human revolution on a daily basis are always able to draw forth from within us the power to break through any deadlock. Even in the face of daunting obstacles that appear impossible to surmount, we have no need to cower, panic, fear, or run away, for we can tap the power of supreme courage and wisdom that resides within.

In this instalment, let us study the Daishonin's writing "General Stone Tiger" to learn more about the essence of faith for achieving human revolution.

A Disciple Supporting His Mentor amid Personal Adversity

"General Stone Tiger" was written on October 22, 1278, and sent to Shijo Kingo in Kamakura by the Daishonin, who was residing on Mount Minobu. There are two points concerning its background that I would like to confirm.

First, from the previous year (1277), there had been widespread epidemics and a prolonged drought that had resulted in drastic food shortages. In addition, the Daishonin himself had been suffering from ill-health since the end of that year. In other words, his life on Mount Minobu was quite hard, in terms of both material sustenance (food and shelter) and health.

Second, there had been a dramatic change in Shijo Kingo's circumstances as well. In 1277, Shijo Kingo had become ensnared in a plot by Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple and others on the occasion of the Kuwagayatsu Debate.³⁵ This involved some of his fellow samurai making false accusations against him to his lord in an attempt to discredit him. Lord Ema, believing these claims,

Shakyamuni refuses, saying that bodhisattvas who will carry out that task already exist in the saha world. At this point, the earth trembles and splits open, and from within it emerges a host of bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers, each with his own retinue of followers. In the "Supernatural Powers" (21st) chapter, Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the Lotus Sutra to these bodhisattvas, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices, entrusting them with the mission of propagating it in the Latter Day of the Law.

³⁴ Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In 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.

³⁵ Kuwagayatsu Debate: A debate held in Kuwagayatsu, Kamakura, in 1277, between the Daishonin's disciple Sammi-bo and a priest named Ryuzo-bo, who was under the patronage of Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple. Ryuzo-bo was thoroughly defeated by Sammi-bo. Shijo Kingo merely attended the debate as an observer, and did not utter a word. However, it was alleged to Lord Ema that Shijo Kingo had burst into the debate with a number of confederates with weapons drawn and disrupted the proceedings.

was angered, and Kingo found himself threatened with the direst fate for a samurai: the loss of his status as a retainer. But, following the advice of the Daishonin, Shijo Kingo continued to faithfully serve Lord Ema, with the result that Lord Ema not only recognized his sincerity but even presented him with three new estates.³⁶ At the same time, however, this demonstration of Lord Ema's favour fuelled the jealousy of Shijo Kingo's rivals, placing him in even greater danger than before.

It was against this background that Shijo Kingo sent a letter and offerings from Kamakura to the Daishonin on Mount Minobu. The Daishonin lists the offerings that Shijo Kingo had forwarded from his estate in Shinano Province (present-day Nagano Prefecture). "General Stone Tiger" is a reply to Shijo Kingo's sincere letter.

In the opening passage of "General Stone Tiger," prior to the section we will study this time, the Daishonin mentions some of the offerings—three thousand coins, polished rice, rice cakes, sake, dried persimmons, pomegranates, and so forth. Noting that clothes protect one from cold and that food sustains one's life, the Daishonin writes: "No treasure possessed by human beings is more precious than food and drink, clothing and medicine" (WND-1, 952). This is an expression of the Daishonin's gratitude to Shijo Kingo for having sent him offerings of these very items.

The Daishonin always conveyed his deepest appreciation to his followers for their support, treated them with the highest respect, and strove side by side with them in the struggle for kosen-rufu. That was his spirit. We can see here that responding to sincerity with sincerity is the heart of the humanistic teaching of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

I am not as healthy as others,³⁷ and in addition, I dwell in this remote mountain forest [of Minobu]. This year was especially difficult, with widespread epidemics and famine in spring and summer, which worsened in autumn and winter. My sickness grew worse again, too, but you gave me various medicines and a quilted robe. Thanks to your remedies, I improved steadily; I have now recovered and feel much better than before. *The Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice* by Bodhisattva Maitreya and *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* by Bodhisattva Nagarjuna both state that, if one's illness is caused by fixed karma, even excellent medicine will turn to poison, but that, if one believes in the Lotus Sutra [the Mystic Law], poison will change into medicine. Although unworthy, I propagate the Lotus Sutra; hence heavenly devils have competed to deprive me of food. Understanding this, I have no complaint, but I believe that I survived this time only because Shakyamuni Buddha entered your body to help me. (WND-1, 952)

³⁶ The Daishonin writes: "You say that your new domains occupy an area three times the size of Tono'oka [in Shinano Province]. There is a man from the province of Sado staying here now who knows that area well. He tells me that, of the three villages, the one called Ikada is best. Although its fields and paddies are few, its profits are immeasurable. Two sites each yield an annual harvest worth one million coins in land tax; another site, three hundred thousand coins. Such, he says, are their merits" (WND-1, 945).

³⁷ The original Japanese text here can be translated literally as "My situation is distinct from others." There are differing views as to which situation this refers to. One view is that it refers to the Daishonin's poor health, while another is that it refers to his being regarded as a dangerous and disruptive influence by the ruling authorities of the day.

Calmly Overcoming the Three Obstacles and the Four Devils

In this section, Nichiren Daishonin further stresses his deep gratitude to his disciple for assisting him, saying that the workings of the Buddha had surely been activated in Shijo Kingo's life to do so. The context for this remark is that kosen-rufu is a constant, unremitting struggle between the forces of the Buddha and devilish functions.

In the Daishonin's own arduous struggle for kosen-rufu—which saw him living in harsh conditions during his two-and-a-half-year exile on Sado Island and then his residence at Mount Minobu—the Daishonin's health was no doubt seriously compromised. This manifested itself from the end of 1277 as illness accompanied by debilitating and chronic diarrhea. It grew worse with the approach of summer in the first half of June 1278, but the medicine sent at that time by Shijo Kingo [who was also a skilled physician] helped relieve the Daishonin's suffering. His health had improved to the degree that he could write to Shijo Kingo: “My complaint has diminished steadily and is now a mere one-hundredth fraction of its former intensity” (WND-1, 920).³⁸

Several months later, just before the Daishonin wrote “General Stone Tiger,” Shijo Kingo had visited him on Mount Minobu. While probably reporting to the Daishonin on the increase in his estates, Shijo Kingo was also no doubt concerned about his mentor's physical condition as winter approached. The Daishonin expresses his gratitude for Shijo Kingo's judicious care in treating his illness, writing: “I have now recovered and feel much better than before” (WND-1, 952).

While struggling with sickness as an ordinary mortal person, the Daishonin continues to give his entire being to encouraging his disciples. Through his personal example of recovering from illness, he demonstrates the great beneficial power of faith in the Mystic Law, which can “change poison into medicine”³⁹ and thus even prolong one's life span, which was regarded as “fixed karma.”⁴⁰

The Daishonin also states that his illness is a struggle against “heavenly devils.” Because he has engaged in the great struggle to propagate the Mystic Law as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, he asserts, such negative forces are vying to deprive him of his sustenance and rob him of his life.

The fact that the three obstacles and four devils⁴¹ had arisen to assail him because of the efforts he was making for kosen-rufu was just as the sutra taught. And likewise, just as the sutra taught, because his resolve to propagate the Mystic Law remained firm, he was assured of being protected by the Buddhas and heavenly deities—the benevolent forces of the universes.

³⁸ In “The Two Kinds of Illness,” the Daishonin writes: “I developed diarrhea on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month of last year [December 30, 1277], and up until the third or fourth day of the sixth month of this year [June 3 or 4, 1278], it grew more frequent by the day and more severe by the month. Just when I was thinking that it must be my immutable [or fixed] karma, you sent me good medicine. Since taking it, my complaint has diminished steadily and is now a mere one-hundredth fraction of its former intensity. I wonder if Shakyamuni Buddha has entered into your body to help me, or perhaps the Bodhisattvas of the Earth have bestowed upon me the good medicine of Myoho-renge-kyo” (WND-1, 920). And in “Reply to Hyoe no Sakan,” he reports: “The medicine Saemon [Shijo Kingo] sent me has cured my diarrhea” (WND-2, 754).

³⁹ Changing poison into medicine: The principle that earthly desires and suffering can be transformed into benefit and enlightenment by virtue of the power of the Mystic Law. This phrase is found in a passage from Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, which mentions “a great physician who can change poison into medicine.” This phrase is often cited to show that any problem or suffering can be transformed eventually into the greatest happiness and fulfillment in life.

⁴⁰ Fixed karma: Also, immutable karma. The opposite of unfixed karma. Karma that inevitably produces a fixed or set result, whether negative or positive. Fixed karma may also be interpreted as karma whose effects are destined to appear at a fixed time. It was held that one's life span was fixed as retribution for karma.

⁴¹ Three obstacles and four devils: Various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. The three obstacles are (1) the obstacle of earthly desires, (2) the obstacle of karma, and (3) the obstacle of retribution. The four devils are (1) the hindrance of the earthly desires, (2) the hindrance of the five components, (3) the hindrance of death, and (4) the hindrance of the devil king.

“Understanding this, I have no complaint,” the Daishonin writes, teaching us his dauntless spirit in the face of such obstacles.

The Battle between Devilish Forces and the Forces of the Buddha

In a later writing, “The Proof of the Lotus Sutra,” Nichiren Daishonin offers his youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu guidance on fighting illness caused by devilish functions: “Since you now appear certain to attain Buddhahood, perhaps the heavenly devil and evil spirits⁴² are using illness to try to intimidate you. Life in this world is limited. Never be even the least bit afraid!” (WND-1, 1109).

“Never be even the least bit afraid!” says the Daishonin, urging his disciple not to be defeated by this obstacle. He tells Tokimitsu that his illness is caused by devilish functions seeking to prevent him from attaining enlightenment through his vigorous efforts for kosen-rufu.

Further, fiercely rebuking these negative functions that are assaulting Tokimitsu, the Daishonin writes: “And you demons, by making this man suffer, are you trying to swallow a sword point first, or embrace a raging fire, or become the archenemy of the Buddhas of the ten directions in the three existences?” (WND-1, 1109).

No one can avoid the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Even when we practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism, we still fall ill and ultimately die one day. But through our Buddhist practice, we can come to regard illness as an inherent part of life⁴³ and face it from that higher standpoint. The Daishonin set an example for his followers through his own unperturbed conduct and his victory over the three obstacles and four devils.

Mr. Toda also declared: “With the power of faith in the Gohonzon, I conquered the devils of illness and death that I was compelled to do battle with.” He embodied the life-state of a fearless lion king, exemplified by the words: “What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?” (WND-1, 412).

Kosen-rufu is a battle between the forces of the Buddha and the devilish functions that pervade the universe. Faith in the Mystic Law enables us to vanquish the devils of illness and death. That is why the Daishonin describes the medical care given to him by Shijo Kingo—whose actions served to protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra—as the workings of Shakyamuni Buddha, and clarifies the principle for triumphing over all obstacles and negative functions without fail.

So much for that. I was extremely concerned about your journey home last time, and I am overjoyed to hear that you have arrived safely in Kamakura. Such was my anxiety that I asked everyone who came here from Kamakura about you. One said that he had met you at Yumoto, another that he had encountered you farther on at Kozu, and when a third told me that he had seen you in Kamakura, I felt greatly relieved. From now on, you must not come to visit me in person unless absolutely

⁴² The word for “evil spirits” in the original Japanese passage is *gedo*, which literally means “out of the way” and usually indicates heretics and non-Buddhists. Here, the word means something or someone that brings about disasters. Hence the expression “evil spirits.”

⁴³ In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “If we look with the eyes of wisdom as they are opened by the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the essential teaching [of the Lotus Sutra], we will become enlightened to the truth that sickness, pain, and distress are, and have always been, an innate part of life. Such is the wisdom of the Buddha of limitless joy” (OTT, 174).

necessary. When you have something urgent to tell me, send a messenger. Indeed, I was deeply worried about your last trip. An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack. If you should have to travel, do not begrudge the cost of a horse. Make sure that you ride a good horse. Bring along your best men to defend you against a surprise attack, and ride a horse that can easily carry you in your armour. (WND-1, 952–53)

Concern for Shijo Kingo's Return to Kamakura

In this letter, the Daishonin expresses his deep concern for Shijo Kingo's safe return to Kamakura.

At the time, the journey from Minobu to Kamakura was two or three days by horse. The Daishonin seems to have been desperately worried about Shijo Kingo's safety for several days. Whenever someone arrived at Minobu from the direction of Kamakura, he inquired whether they had met Shijo Kingo en route. People said they had sighted him in Yumoto and Koze (respectively located in the present-day town of Hakone and the city of Odawara in Kanagawa Prefecture) and eventually back in Kamakura. Hearing this, the Daishonin was finally reassured of Kingo's safety and could breathe a sigh of relief.

What a wonderful, caring mentor the Daishonin was! But his consideration did not stop there; he goes on to instruct Shijo Kingo not to make the perilous journey to Minobu again unless it is absolutely necessary, adding that if should he have something urgent to convey to him he should send a messenger.

Why was the Daishonin so worried?

In traveling to Kamakura from Minobu, one first followed the trail running alongside the Fuji River⁴⁴ and then travelled east through Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture), crossing the mountains of Hakone. Suruga Province was home to many fiefs under the direct control of members of the ruling Hojo clan, the majority of whom, as adherents of the established Buddhist schools, were hostile toward the Daishonin's followers. In addition, there were many other dangers in journeying through mountainous terrain. The Daishonin couldn't help but be concerned for his disciple's safety.

Also, though Lord Ema's attitude had changed dramatically for the better, Shijo Kingo still had to remain constantly vigilant against the envious and resentful samurai who had slandered him to his lord and would take any opportunity that presented itself to do away with him.

It's especially important to be careful on one's return journey: having completed some objective, we're likely to be more relaxed, making it easier to be caught off guard. We're also likely to be more tired than we realize. In the case of Shijo Kingo, even though he was a skilled swordsman, a sudden attack by an enemy at such a moment could well prove fatal.

Vigilance Is the Key to Victory

The Daishonin notes: "An enemy will try to make you forget the danger so that he can attack" (WND-1, 952). We should all take these words deeply to heart. To cross a raging torrent and achieve one's aims, one must exercise the utmost caution.

⁴⁴ A river to the west of Mount Fuji flowing south into Suruga Bay.

At the end of our meetings, we urge members to be on guard against traffic accidents and remind them that the meeting doesn't really end until they all get home safe and sound. By making a conscious effort to take care, we can avoid falling victim to the workings of devilish functions.

The Daishonin even gave Shijo Kingo advice about the kind of horse he should ride. In today's terms, this would be advice about method of transportation—car, motorcycle, bicycle, and so forth. When we're out doing SGI activities, traveling from one place to another, even if on foot, we need to stay alert.

As members of the SGI, you all possess a noble mission for kosen-rufu. Please don't cut corners as far as safety is concerned, but always remain alert to the slightest forewarnings of danger or mishap. Bring every activity to a safe and successful completion. But if someone should meet with an accident, then please warmly encourage them.

No matter what trials we may encounter, by summoning forth faith in the Mystic Law we can lessen our karmic retribution⁴⁵ and change poison into medicine. Of course, having no accidents is best.

My wife and I are always chanting earnestly for the safety and well-being of all our members. Each of you is a precious follower of the Buddha, so remind one another to be careful and vow to keep devilish influences out of your way.

As Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage" (WND-1, 997). I pray that all of you without exception will exert yourselves diligently in your Buddhist practice in accord with this eternal guideline, thereby vanquishing negative functions and leading lives of great victory.

In the eighth volume of [the Great Teacher T'ien-tai's] *Great Concentration and Insight* and in the eighth volume of [the Great Teacher Miao-lo's] *The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight"* it says, "The stronger one's faith, the greater the protection of the gods." This means that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one's faith. The Lotus Sutra is a fine sword, but its might depends on the one who wields it. (WND-1, 953)

The Importance of Strong Faith

The heavenly deities will definitely protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, who uphold and propagate the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas will praise such individuals, and the gods of the sun and moon will light their way before and behind.

⁴⁵ Lessening one's karmic retribution: This term, which literally means, "transforming the heavy and receiving it lightly," appears in the Nirvana Sutra. "Heavy" indicates negative karma accumulated over countless lifetimes in the past. As a benefit of protecting the correct teaching of Buddhism, we can experience relatively light karmic retribution in this lifetime, thereby expiating heavy karma that ordinarily would adversely affect us not only in this lifetime, but over many lifetimes to come.

But it is the individual's faith that activates these protective functions of the universe. The realization of our prayers depends on our wholehearted effort and earnest determination. This, indeed, is the lesson to be found in the Great Teacher Miao-lo's words, "The stronger one's faith, the greater the protection of the gods" (WND-1, 953). Strong faith, strong resolve, is the key to victory. The power brought forth from the mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra hinges on the faith of the person who wields it.

The Daishonin consistently urged Shijo Kingo to behave and live as a person of wisdom. He cared deeply for Kingo's success, and he offered him detailed advice about areas to watch in his daily life as well as about his attitude toward his lord, and his manner of interacting with the others around him.

In one sense, our aim as practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism is to build and live a life in which nothing can defeat us. Faith in the Mystic Law enables us to establish a life-state of absolute victory—victory of a deeper dimension than the relative victories and defeats we experience in the unfolding of our daily lives. By steadily exerting ourselves in our Buddhist practice and gradually cultivating inner strength day after day, we can develop the powerful conviction in faith that will allow us to wholeheartedly challenge any difficulty when the winds of karma blow, or when the three obstacles and four devils assail us.

"Treasures of the heart" are something that we slowly accumulate over time. Our steady efforts each day to polish our lives and strengthen our faith and resolve are the means by which we can build an unshakable state of life in which we "enjoy ourselves at ease" (cf. LSOC16, 272 [LS16, 230]).

Faith resides in our ongoing human revolution. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to realize our full potential as a human being. That's why the Daishonin urged his beloved disciple Shijo Kingo to live out his life as a person of wisdom and a model for other followers. In addition, he instructed him to overcome the very real problems he encountered in his life through his Buddhist practice.

In "General Stone Tiger," the Daishonin offers Kingo numerous pieces of advice for his future safety and security, and emphasizes that strengthening his faith and forging his resolve are of vital importance. As the Daishonin writes, the protection of the heavenly deities "depends on the strength of one's faith" (WND-1, 953).

"It Is the Heart That Is Important"

As the Daishonin teaches, "It is the heart that is important." It is no exaggeration to say that victory or defeat in life depends upon whether one's heart, one's resolve, is strong and steadfast.

Speaking of individuals with strong resolve, I have engaged in a dialogue with Aurelio Peccei (1908–84), the cofounder and first president of the global think tank, the Club of Rome. Behind Dr. Peccei's warm smile was a man of indomitable conviction.

Dr. Peccei was a hero of the Italian antifascist resistance. He was arrested by the fascist militia in February 1944 and spent almost a year behind bars. This was, of course, during World War II, at the same time that the Soka Gakkai's first and second presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, were imprisoned in Japan. Dr. Peccei was subjected to violent interrogation by his captors, but he did not break.

Dr. Peccei said that his experience in prison had taught him both the weakness and the strength of human beings. He witnessed self-important, arrogant individuals who, at the first sign of pressure, were cowardly and caved in to the authorities. At the same time, others, who may not have made much of an impression in ordinary life, revealed themselves under harsh persecution as true heroes who steadfastly refused to betray their comrades.

Dr. Peccei wrote: “It is perhaps from the experiences of that period [of captivity] that I began to be convinced that lying latent in man is a great force for good.”⁴⁶ His insight resonates closely with the teachings of Buddhism. We possess a “great force for good” within us that cannot be defeated by any form of oppression or persecution. That indomitable “strong resolve” only appears when we directly encounter hardship. As the saying goes, “Adversity makes a person wise.”

In his final years, Dr. Peccei also reached the conclusion that human revolution was vital. He declared: “From now on, everything depends on [modern man’s] behaviour and his decisions; it is he himself who, inadvertently or consciously, will shape his individual and collective destiny, and even the destiny of his species.”⁴⁷ He also said: “I have faith in man—and I believe in the human revolution. . . .”⁴⁸

Among those who propagate this [Lotus] sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, who compares with Shariputra, Mahakashyapa, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, Wonderful Sound, Manjushri, and Medicine King? Persons of the two vehicles [such as Shariputra] had destroyed all the illusions of thought and desire, thus freeing themselves from the six paths. Bodhisattvas [such as Perceiver of the World’s Sounds] had eradicated forty-one of the forty-two levels of ignorance and were like the moon on the fourteenth night before it reaches fullness. Nevertheless, Shakyamuni Buddha refused to entrust the mission of propagation to any of these people and gave it instead to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Thus these bodhisattvas are the ones who had thoroughly forged their resolve.

The mighty warrior General Li Kuang, whose mother had been devoured by a tiger, shot an arrow at the stone he believed was the tiger. The arrow penetrated the stone all the way up to its feathers. But once he realized it was only a stone, he was unable to pierce it again. Later he came to be known as General Stone Tiger. This story applies to you. Though enemies lurk in wait for you, your resolute faith in the Lotus Sutra has forestalled great dangers before they could begin. Realizing this, you must strengthen your faith more than ever. It is impossible to say all I want to in one letter.

With my deep respect,

Nichiren (WND-1, 953)

Bodhisattvas of the Earth—Distinguished by Their Thoroughly Forged Resolve

In this passage the Daishonin inquires to whom the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law has been entrusted.

⁴⁶ Aurelio Peccei, *The Human Quality* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1977), p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Shariputra and Mahakashyapa are direct disciples of Shakyamuni and representatives of the practitioners of the two vehicles. Perceiver of the World's Sounds, Wonderful Sound, Manjushri, and Medicine King are bodhisattvas who assembled for the preaching of the Lotus Sutra. Both the Buddha's disciples and the bodhisattvas have extremely impressive credentials.

However, Shakyamuni did not entrust them with the difficult task of propagating the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law; instead, he left it to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The Daishonin describes the Bodhisattvas of the Earth as "ones who had thoroughly forged their resolve" (WND-1, 953). As the Lotus Sutra teaches, persecution and difficulties are unavoidable in propagating the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law: "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" (LSOC10, 203 [LS10, 164]). The Daishonin repeated this passage often, and applied it to his own life. What is the quality needed to be able to carry out this most difficult of undertakings? A thoroughly forged resolve.

The root meaning of "to forge" is to repeatedly heat and fashion metal until it is strengthened. In another letter to Shijo Kingo illustrating this point, the Daishonin writes: "Untempered iron quickly melts in a blazing fire. . . . But a sword, even when exposed to a great fire, withstands the heat for a while, because it has been well forged" (WND-1, 839).

Deep Determination Can Make the Impossible Possible

At the end of this letter, Nichiren Daishonin encourages Shijo Kingo, who was a member of the Kamakura warrior class, by sharing an anecdote about how the ancient Chinese General Li Kuang received the name "General Stone Tiger."

General Li Kuang's mother was killed by a tiger. One day Li Kuang, an excellent archer, sighted the tiger crouching in a clump of grass. Believing it to be the tiger that killed his mother, and determined to avenge her death, he shot an arrow at it, hitting his target. Assuming he had killed the tiger, he ran up to it to discover that it was a stone in a shape resembling a tiger. Even so, his arrow had penetrated the stone up to the arrow's feather. Although he tried to reproduce this feat, he never could.

Through this famous anecdote, the Daishonin sought to teach Shijo Kingo the importance of basing himself on strong, indestructible faith, and that such faith is certain to move the heavenly deities to protect him. The Daishonin encourages Kingo: "Though enemies lurk in wait for you, your resolute faith in the Lotus Sutra has forestalled great dangers before they could begin. Realizing this, you must strengthen your faith [in the Gohonzon] more than ever" (WND-1, 953).

A year after receiving this encouragement from the Daishonin, in October 1279, an attempt was actually made on Kingo's life during an ambush, forcing him to cross swords with fellow samurai who bore him enmity. Fortunately, he was successful in repelling his attackers. On receiving a report of this lucky escape, the Daishonin praised Kingo's faith, saying [in "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra"]: "It is a matter of rejoicing that your usual prudence and courage, as well as your firm faith in the Lotus Sutra, enabled you to survive unharmed" (WND-1, 1000). He also wrote these words that are an eternal guideline for all who practice his teaching: "Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other" (WND-1, 1001).

The Daishonin's delight and relief at his disciple's safety is evident. Shijo Kingo's victory was actually a victory of faith—of sincerely striving for kosen-rufu with the same commitment as the Daishonin and putting his teachings faithfully into practice. It was also a victory of human revolution.

A Century of the Victory of the People and a Century of Human Revolution

On that July 3, 1957, a women's division member of Tokyo's Bunkyo Chapter called out to me at Haneda Airport as I was walking to board my flight to Osaka. She asked me for a message to relay to our members. I replied without a moment's hesitation: "Dawn has arrived in Japan! Please convey this message to the members!" The undying light of human revolution is found in waging a great spiritual struggle in a time of unprecedented challenge, dispelling the darkness of fear and doubt and illuminating all with the compassionate light of the sun of absolute confidence and peace of mind. It is found in keeping the bright flame of courage and hope alive in one's heart amid even the most harrowing adversity.

For two weeks from that day, I waged an unceasing struggle while in jail on false charges. Though I was an ordinary young man, I forged my inner strength and fortitude so that my life became as strong as a mighty sword. "Summoning up the courage of a lion king" (cf. WND-1, 997), I stood up for what I knew was right. On July 17, when I was released from jail, the Osaka Rally⁴⁹ was held at Nakanoshima Civic Hall amid a torrential downpour. All of us gathered there that night blazed with the determination to ensure that justice would prevail.

I am confident that this event marked the dawn of an age of the people—an age when we would vanquish the fundamental darkness or ignorance at the root of unhappiness and misfortune, defeat all the negative and insidious forces that inflict harm and suffering, and raise our voices in a song of triumph. These efforts represent an unchanging formula.

Our valiant efforts as members of the SGI to make the 21st century a century of the victory of the people and a century of human revolution are now becoming more and more important.

In this corrupt and troubled world rife with the three poisons, we must take action with courage, wisdom, and compassion, wielding the mighty sword of faith in the Mystic Law. Let's press onward with the dauntless confidence and pride of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, firmly establishing the spirit of human revolution in our lives.

(Translated from the July 2012 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai monthly study journal)

⁴⁹ Osaka Rally: A Soka Gakkai rally held to protest the unjust detention of President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, by the Osaka District Prosecutor's Office in connection with the Osaka Incident. It was convened at the Nakanoshima Civic Hall in Osaka on July 17, 1957, the day of President Ikeda's release after two weeks of questioning by the authorities.