

The Basics *of* Nichiren Buddhism

The Basics *of* Nichiren Buddhism



SGI-USA Introductory
and Intermediate Exam
Study Material

Published by World Tribune Press
A division of the SGI-USA
606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401

© 2024 by SGI-USA

All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

Cover and interior design by Jocelyn Hsu.

28 27 26 25 24 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN: 978-1-944604-98-1 (paperback)

Contents

xi Preface: The Purpose of Studying Buddhism

Part 1: Material for the Introductory Exam

3	Chapter 1	The Life of Nichiren Daishonin
17	Chapter 2	Nam-myoho-renge-kyo
23	Chapter 3	Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime and Kosen-rufu
35	Chapter 4	The Ten Worlds
49	Chapter 5	Three Proofs
51	Chapter 6	Faith, Practice, and Study
59	Chapter 7	Faith for Overcoming Obstacles
67	Chapter 8	Changing One's Karma
73	Chapter 9	Faith Equals Daily Life
83	Chapter 10	The History of the Soka Gakkai
107	Chapter 11	Learning From Nichiren Daishonin's Writings

Part 2: Material for Both the Introductory Exam and the Intermediate Exam

- 117 **Chapter 12** Repudiating the Errors of the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood Under Nikken



Part 3: Material for the Intermediate Exam

- 133 **Chapter 13** Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra
- 149 **Chapter 14** Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life
- 157 **Chapter 15** Embracing the Gohonzon Is in Itself Observing One's Own Mind
- 167 **Chapter 16** The Mission and Practice of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth
- 177 **Chapter 17** The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism
- 187 **Chapter 18** Studying the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

Editor's Note

GZ, page number(s)—refers to the *Gosho zenshu*, the Japanese-language compilation of letters, treatises, essays, and oral teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

LSOC, page number(s)—refers to *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, translated by Burton Watson (Soka Gakkai: Tokyo, 2009).

OTT, page number(s)—refers to *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, translated by Burton Watson (Soka Gakkai: Tokyo, 2004).

WND, page number(s)—refers to *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1 (WND-1) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999) and vol. 2 (WND-2) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2006).

References to dates in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* are from the lunisolar calendar that was used in thirteenth-century Japan, which differs from the current Gregorian calendar commonly used in the West.

Preface

Studying Buddhism and embracing its empowering concepts help us develop our faith and establish a regular daily practice. Studying a little every day is ideal. We often learn about Buddhist principles and topics at our monthly discussion, study, and divisional meetings, as well as at other SGI activities.

Working toward SGI-USA study exams also helps us deepen our understanding of Buddhism. Every year, members and guests have the opportunity to take the Introductory Exam. After passing this first exam, members can take the Intermediate Exam.

This booklet contains material for both exams: part 1 covers material for the Introductory Exam, part 2 is for both the Introductory and Intermediate Exams, and part 3 for the Intermediate Exam. With the exceptions of chapters 11 and 18, the material in this booklet is from “The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu,” published on SokaGlobal.org (<https://tinyurl.com/SGIstudy>).

Additional exam material may be published in the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism* before each exam, alongside sample questions and other tools.

For some people, the thought of taking an exam can be daunting or a cause for stress and anxiety. But rather than emphasizing passing these exams, SGI exams drive home the importance of

study, a vital aspect of Buddhist practice for understanding our lives and circumstances from the enlightened Buddhist perspective. Studying Buddhism helps us effect change in our personal lives and within our families, workplaces, and communities. It also helps us more confidently share Buddhism with others. Ikeda Sensei adds:

Earnest study of the Daishonin's writings gives momentum to our movement for kosen-rufu and is the key to the solid foundation of the Soka Gakkai's people-centered organization. It is also the driving force for fostering capable individuals and promoting dynamic development for an eternally youthful Soka Gakkai.¹

Whether new to Buddhism or a longtime practitioner, we hope this booklet serves as a tool for gaining a better understanding of Buddhist perspectives on the workings of life and applying them to all aspects of life.

NOTE:

1. *World Tribune*, February 25, 2011, 4.

The Purpose of Studying Buddhism

The following is an excerpt from Ikeda Sensei's monthly message titled "Shining Our Light as Bodhisattvas of the Earth for the Happiness of the People," published in the October 2023 Living Buddhism.

“Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 386)—this is one of the eternal guidelines of the Soka Gakkai.

How highly Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, would praise the noble efforts of all of you, my friends around the world, who are preparing for Buddhist study exams or participating in study courses with eager seeking spirit.

All that you are learning as you study Nichiren Buddhism together with fellow members—each of you taking time out of your busy schedules while dealing with all kinds of personal challenges—will be engraved deeply in your lives and become a source of immense joy, good fortune, and benefit.

In September 1950, when I was working frantically to transform the dire situation of the businesses of my mentor, Josei Toda, I copied a passage from “Medicine King,” the twenty-third chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in my diary: “This sutra can cause all living beings

to free themselves from suffering and anguish. This sutra can bring great benefits to all living beings and fulfill their desires” (LSOC, 327–28). These words are a declaration that the Mystic Law is the supreme and ultimate teaching for relieving the sufferings of all living beings.

I felt as if I could hear the loud voice that issued from the magnificent assembly of the Lotus Sutra calling out: “You must spread [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world] and never allow it to be cut off” (LSOC, 330).

Retreating was not an option. I resolved to support my mentor, who was leading the propagation of the great Law, and first do everything I could to break through the immediate obstacles that stood in our path.

As Soka Gakkai members, we read Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and the Lotus Sutra, and chant Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō for the happiness of ourselves and others. We base our lives on the ultimate truth of the universe. When we view our problems from the vast perspective of life encompassing past, present, and future and the worlds of the ten directions, what incredible courage and wisdom and powerful life force well up within us to embrace and overcome them!

The Daishonin writes in “The Entity of the Mystic Law,” which he composed 750 years ago [in 1273] while in exile on Sado Island, that Myōhō-rengē is the “wonderful single Law [*myōhō*] that simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*rengē*]” and that “anyone who practices this Law will obtain both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood simultaneously” (WND-1, 421). How profound “the cause and effect of Buddhahood” we obtain through exerting ourselves tirelessly in the “two ways of practice and study,” undaunted by all difficulties!

Part 2: Material for Both the Introductory Exam and the Intermediate Exam

CHAPTER

12

Repudiating the Errors of the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood Under Nikken



Since its establishment, the Soka Gakkai has grounded itself completely on faith that is directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin. It has consistently taken action to spread the Daishonin's Buddhist teachings to create happiness for all people and bring about world peace.

However, a group emerged that sought to destroy this movement for kosen-rufu, and in doing so that group, known as the Nikken sect, revealed its true nature as a devilish function.

The Nikken sect refers to the priesthood of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist school in its corrupt state since the tenure of Nikken Abe (1922–2019), who claimed to be the sixty-seventh in the lineage of its high priests. This sect has taken the position that its high priest, who is also its chief administrator, possesses absolute and uncontested authority and power.

In the three decades since instigating what has become known as the second priesthood issue in 1990, the Nikken sect has betrayed the teachings and spirit of Nichiren Buddhism and has become a group given over to slander of the Buddhist Law.

Though Nikken transferred the office of high priest to Nichinyo in December 2005, the lineage he passed on continues to be mud-died by his slander of the Law.

The Battle Against Evil Functions

In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil” (WND-1, 15) and “The only thing to do now is to abandon the evil ways and take up those that are good, to cut off this affliction at the source, to cut it off at the root” (WND-1, 17).

In other words, in striving to practice Buddhism correctly, it is essential to never forget to wage a continuous battle against the one evil, that is, negative influences that delude people and lead them astray.

Speaking Out Against the “Enemies of the Lotus Sutra”

Nichiren Buddhism emphasizes that admonishing and striving against evil is an important element of faith.

The Daishonin writes:

However great the good causes one may make, or even if one reads and copies the entirety of the Lotus Sutra a thousand or ten thousand times, or attains the way of perceiving three thousand realms in a single moment of life, if one fails to denounce the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, it will be impossible to attain the way. (“Encouragement to a Sick Person,” WND-1, 78)

The “enemies of the Lotus Sutra” refers to those who encourage people to abandon the Lotus Sutra and thereby close off the path to Buddhahood for all people.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that the Buddha nature exists in the life of every person, expressing the universal ideal of respect for all human beings. For this reason, to deny or deprecate the sutra, to impede the spread of the sutra, or to oppress or harm practitioners of the sutra

is to oppose the ideals of respect for the dignity of life, the equality of all people, and the primacy of ordinary people. To engage in such acts is what it means to become an enemy of the Lotus Sutra.

In light of this, one figure from the Daishonin's lifetime who can be cited as a prime example of an enemy of the Lotus Sutra is Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple. While outwardly garnering respect from people of the time, many of whom revered him as a living Buddha, Ryokan covertly harbored animosity toward the Daishonin, who was striving to spread Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, and conspired to have him persecuted. In doing so, he functioned as what the Lotus Sutra describes as an arrogant false sage.

In contemporary times, by scheming to destroy the Soka Gakkai, the organization working to accomplish the Daishonin's will of kosen-rufu, it was Nikken who accorded with the definition of an enemy of the Lotus Sutra.

An Overview of the Priesthood Issue

The Daishonin's spirit and practice for kosen-rufu was correctly inherited and carried on by his disciple Nikko Shonin.

That spirit and practice, however, gradually waned within the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu—a Buddhist school that derived its teachings from the lineage of Nikko Shonin—giving way to hollow formality and ritual. In the process, the priests took on an increasingly authoritarian posture, adopting a discriminatory attitude toward lay believers.

By the time the Soka Gakkai was established, the correct understanding and practice of the Daishonin's teachings had been all but lost within the priesthood.

The Soka Gakkai focused its efforts on realizing the great vow for kosen-rufu and had always supported the priesthood while correcting it whenever necessary.

After World War II, when the priesthood faced severe economic problems, the Soka Gakkai earnestly and sincerely supported and protected it and eventually built and donated more than 350 temples.

However, elements within the priesthood refused to acknowledge or express gratitude for this earnest support, and friction at times arose with certain priests who were intent first on maintaining their religious authority. But in every case, the Soka Gakkai persisted in working to resolve the situation and restore good relations.

The priesthood's tendency to flaunt its authority and look down on lay believers became more pronounced after Nikken took the office of high priest, as it increasingly disregarded the sincere intentions with which the Soka Gakkai had been supporting it for the sake of *kosen-rufu*.

The Soka Gakkai had been making great strides in establishing Nichiren Buddhism as a world religion, and its leader, Ikeda Sensei had become highly respected among notable world figures in many fields. Nevertheless, Nikken came to regard him with enmity and began plotting to destroy the Soka Gakkai.

Nikken's aim was to sever relations with the Soka Gakkai and take control of its members, turning them into subservient followers of the priests, and in 1990 he conceived and put into action a surreptitious plan he named Operation C ("C" meaning to "cut" the Soka Gakkai).

Its implementation began in December that year with the priesthood's sudden announcement of a revision to its rules as a religious corporation, effectively dismissing Sensei from his position as chief lay representative of Nichiren Shoshu.

The Soka Gakkai sought to address and resolve the situation through dialogue, but the priesthood refused any discussion.

On November 7, 1991, the priesthood sent the Soka Gakkai a document titled "Remonstrance to Disband," followed on November 28 by a "Notice of Excommunication."

In addition to this high-handed move, it took the cruel measure of refusing to confer the Gohonzon upon members of the Soka Gakkai. The priests were telling people, in effect, that if they wished to receive the Gohonzon, they could do so only by following the priesthood. In this way, they were holding the Gohonzon, the basis of faith, hostage in a cowardly attempt to pressure and intimidate believers.

Nevertheless, in 1993 the Soka Gakkai decided that it would confer upon its members around the world a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan Shonin, a great restorer of Nichiren Buddhism. This was made possible through the cooperation of a temple that had opposed Nikken's actions and supported the Soka Gakkai.

The Soka Gakkai is now the only religious group working to achieve kosen-rufu in direct accord with Nichiren Daishonin's spirit, conferring upon believers the Gohonzon, which he described as "the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra" ("The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon," WND-1, 831). As such, the Soka Gakkai has become the global organization qualified to confer the Gohonzon in order to realize kosen-rufu, the Buddha's will and intent.

In 1998, the Nikken sect demolished the Grand Main Temple, an edifice at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple, Taiseki-ji, built in 1972 under the aegis of the Soka Gakkai through the sincere faith and contributions of some eight million people. This reckless act made the priesthood's malicious and vindictive nature all the more apparent.

The Grand Main Temple, constructed to last one thousand years, was hailed as a masterpiece of twentieth-century architecture that rivaled any religious edifice in the world. Nikken, however, heartlessly had it demolished just twenty-six years after its completion, disregarding the sincere faith of eight million believers.

The Major Offenses and Erroneous Doctrines of the Nikken Sect

Core to the Nikken sect is a deluded belief that venerates its high priest as a special, absolute, and infallible being, a belief that might be called high priest worship. One of the premises for this claim is that there exists a mysterious heritage, or lineage, that is passed on only from one high priest to the next, a presumption that bolstered the priesthood's tendency to look down on lay believers.

Of course, there is nothing in Nichiren Daishonin's writings to justify or support this in any way, and it therefore constitutes a false doctrine that is starkly opposed to the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism.

Careful study of the essential principles of Nichiren Buddhism makes clear the key errors of the Nikken sect.

1. The Slander of Attempting to Destroy Kosen-rufu

The Nikken sect implemented its Operation C with the aim of destroying the Soka Gakkai, the organization dedicated to kosen-rufu, and in 1991 it sent the Soka Gakkai its notice of excommunication.

The document cited no passages from Nichiren Daishonin's writings and expressed no doctrinal basis to support the Soka Gakkai's excommunication. It simply asserted in an authoritarian and emotional manner that the Soka Gakkai was not obediently following the priesthood.

The task of achieving kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, is the legacy left by Nichiren Daishonin. This is evident when he declares: "The 'great vow' refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra" (OTT, 82) and "When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled" ("The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life," WND-1, 217).

It is for this reason that the Soka Gakkai has aimed since its founding to accomplish kosen-rufu, exerting itself in the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism not only in Japan but throughout the world.

To attempt to destroy the Soka Gakkai, therefore, is to attempt to destroy kosen-rufu, an act that constitutes a grave slander of the Buddhist Law and the great offense of betraying the Daishonin's spirit and intent to save all people from suffering.

Nikken's Grave Offense of Causing Disunity in the Buddhist Order

The Buddhist teachings describe the greatest offenses a person can commit as the "five cardinal sins."

These are (1) killing one's father, (2) killing one's mother, (3) killing an arhat, (4) injuring a Buddha, and (5) causing disunity in the Buddhist Order.

Among these offenses, causing disunity in the Buddhist Order, or actions that create disruption and division among the body of Buddhist practitioners, is extremely serious as it destroys the Buddha's teachings and deludes people, causing them to fall into unhappiness. This is the gravest offense that Nikken committed.

2. The False Doctrine of Worship of the High Priest

It is the doctrine of the Nikken sect that the high priest be regarded as an object of worship or veneration. A high priest should be a person who is primarily responsible for protecting, teaching, and spreading the Buddhist teachings. This person should serve as a model for carrying out faith, practice, and study and for upholding the correct teachings.

In this regard, since the outbreak of the second priesthood issue, Nikken and his supporters, rejecting any dialogue, consistently claimed that because the high priest is infallible and an object of worship or veneration, one must follow him without question.

The idea of the high priest as an object of faith is an extremely vain

doctrine that violates the three treasures—the Buddha, the Law (the Buddha’s teachings), and the Buddhist Order—of Nichiren Buddhism.

For example, a document¹ carried in a Nichiren Shoshu publication states that the high priest to whom the heritage of the Law has been transmitted is an honorable entity that is one and inseparable with the Dai-Gohonzon² and that faith in these two fundamental objects (the Dai-Gohonzon and the high priest) must be absolute.

In Nichiren Buddhism, however, there is just one object of devotion, the Gohonzon.

The Nikken sect’s erroneous doctrine purports that the high priest, whose function should be to protect the Gohonzon, instead stands on an equal par with the Gohonzon. This is a dogma of unprecedented distortion.

Correct Faith Means Basing Oneself on the Gohonzon

Since the time of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, correct faith has been defined as faith based upon the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Believe in this mandala with all your heart” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” WND-1, 412) and “Since Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters believe solely in the Lotus Sutra . . . they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832).

And Nikko Shonin states, “It is specified in the honorable writings [of Nichiren Daishonin] that the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo should be the object of devotion. That is, the object of devotion he inscribed in his own hand” (GZ, new ed., 2180; GZ, 1606).

The Error of Regarding the High Priest as Infallible

In Twenty-Six Admonitions of Nikko,³ he writes, “Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha’s Law and propounds his own views” (GZ, new ed., 2196; GZ, 1618).

Nikko Shonin issued this warning based on his assumption that it was possible that in the future the head of the school might commit a serious error.

In the same document, Nikko Shonin writes:

My disciples should conduct themselves as holy priests, patterning their behavior after that of the late master. However, even if a high priest or a priest striving for practice and understanding should temporarily deviate from the principle of sexual abstinence, he may still be allowed to remain in the priesthood as a common priest without rank. (GZ, new ed., 2197; GZ, 1619)

This means that if a high priest or a senior priest of considerable learning should commit a prohibited act or serious error that by rights would warrant expulsion, he should rather be allowed to renew his practice among priests of ordinary rank while pursuing a basic path of reflection and contrition.

From these admonitions of Nikko Shonin, it is clear that the view that the high priest is infallible promoted by the Nikken sect is completely misguided. It is a dogma that violates the teachings of both the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

3. A Mistaken View of Heritage

Heritage, or lineage, in Nichiren Buddhism has always been something open to all people, not the exclusive possession of an elite few. However, Nikken and his followers held an erroneous view of heritage that is the source of their notion that the high priest is absolute.

That view is as follows: There exists a mysterious heritage or lineage that is passed on only from one high priest to the next. Simply by receiving that lineage, one exclusively inherits the Buddha's enlightenment and the essence of the Buddha's Law itself.

In the same document carried in a Nichiren Shoshu publication

cited earlier, the Nikken sect states that the transmission of the heritage of the Law entrusted to only one person is surely the entity that embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law.

The idea of such a mysterious transmission is an erroneous doctrine that bears no relation to the teachings of the Daishonin or Nikko Shonin. It amounts to a falsehood concocted in later times to bolster the status and authority of the high priest.

The True Meaning of Heritage Is Faith That Is Open to All People

The Japanese term for heritage, literally “bloodline,” is used frequently in the esoteric teachings of the True Word school and by schools such as Tendai and Zen. It likens the transfer of the teachings from teacher to disciple to the genetic heritage passed from parent to child.

In the Buddhist world of Nichiren Daishonin’s time, this heritage predominantly meant the passing on of the deepest Buddhist teachings to a select group of individuals in the form of a secret transmission.

In contrast to this, in “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” the Daishonin writes, “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).

In Nichiren Buddhism, the heritage is ultimately described as the “heritage of faith” (WND-1, 218), that is, as faith itself.

On the other hand, the Nikken sect claims a mysterious, exclusive heritage that upon receipt automatically makes one a Buddha regardless of faith or practice. This is far removed from the essential meaning of the heritage of faith, the heritage taught by the Daishonin.

4. Discriminatory Attitude Toward the Laity

An idea that permeates the entire Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, from Nikken to all the priests, is that they as priests are superior and that

lay believers are inferior. That is, they adopt a discriminatory attitude toward the laity.

There is no teaching or principle within Nichiren Buddhism that would justify priests treating laypeople with such disrespect or contempt.

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

Behind the Nikken sect’s blatant denial of the equality of clergy and laity is the degradation of the role of Buddhism in Japan, primarily during the Edo period (1603–1867), to the extent that it became known as funeral Buddhism, and the spread of the so-called temple parishioner system⁴ during the same period. This resulted in priests exerting control over lay believers and forcing them into a servile position, while lay believers came to depend entirely on the priests rather than carry out their own Buddhist practice.

The harmful tendencies and errors inherent in the temple parishioner system remain deeply ingrained in the Nikken sect, and this has resulted in a belief that priests are superior to laity.

5. Misuse of Religious Rituals

One of the major errors of the Nikken sect is its misuse of Buddhist rituals and ceremonies, turning them into means for making money. These include funeral and memorial services, the bestowal of posthumous Buddhist names, and the issuing of wooden memorial tablets to be placed beside the grave.

Such rituals conducted by priests today were not instituted by the Daishonin but became established in later times. The Nikken sect asserts that unless a funeral service is conducted by a priest, the deceased will be unable to attain Buddhahood; but the Daishonin never taught or stated anything of the sort.

Rather, he encouraged those who had lost loved ones with such statements as “Therefore, because your beloved departed father chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo while he was alive, he was a person who attained Buddhahood in his present form” (“White Horses and White Swans,” WND-1, 1064).

In this way, he stressed that attaining Buddhahood depends on one’s faith and practice while alive.

Therefore, to ignore the Daishonin’s guidance and assert that the deceased cannot attain Buddhahood unless a priest conducts their funeral in itself constitutes the offense of distorting the Daishonin’s teachings.

6. Corruption and Immorality

With regard to the conduct of priests, Nichiren Daishonin states, “True priests are those who are honest and who desire little and yet know satisfaction” (“The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood,” WND-1, 747).

The priests of the Nikken sect, however, beginning with Nikken himself, have consistently behaved in a corrupt and self-indulgent manner in stark violation of the Daishonin’s instruction. The Daishonin compared any such irresponsible priest who uses Buddhism for selfish gain to “an animal dressed in priestly robes” (“The Fourteen Slanders,” WND-1, 760) or to “Law-devouring hungry spirits” (“The Origin of the Service for Deceased Ancestors,” WND-1, 191).

Spiritual Independence

November 28, 1991, marked the day that the Soka Gakkai was excommunicated from Nichiren Shoshu. To Soka Gakkai members, however, this day marks the day they achieved their spiritual independence. Freeing themselves from the chains of the corrupt and misguided priesthood, Soka Gakkai members have emerged all around the globe, embracing their mission to achieve kosen-rufu. Their numbers have steadily grown, and today they are active in 192 countries and territories worldwide.

The Nikken sect, on the other hand, has continued on its course of decline, its membership today a mere 2 percent of what it was before it excommunicated the Soka Gakkai.

By striving to achieve the Daishonin's will for kosen-rufu, the Soka Gakkai has succeeded to the true heritage of Nichiren Buddhism. Resolutely challenging and refuting the false and destructive actions of the Nikken sect, Soka Gakkai members are opening the way for the further expansion of kosen-rufu throughout the world.

NOTES:

1. The document in question was coauthored by several Nichiren Shoshu senior priests in July 1991 and reprinted in the September 1991 issue of the Nichiren Shoshu publication *Dainichiren*.

2. Dai-Gohonzon, also known as the Gohonzon inscribed in the second year of the Koan era (1279), is a wooden mandala that Nichiren Shoshu considers its fundamental and sole object of devotion. In the past, for the sake of kosen-rufu, the Soka Gakkai strove for harmonious unity with the priests and accepted its doctrine regarding this Gohonzon. The priests, however, began to use their possession of this mandala to claim their superiority and authority over all lay believers, as well as the infallibility of their high priest. Nichiren never identified a particular Gohonzon as superior, or as possessing special powers beyond the faith and practice of ordinary believers. Therefore, the Soka Gakkai today does not regard this Gohonzon as being superior to any other Gohonzon. It also refutes Nichiren Shoshu's assertion that all other Gohonzon gain efficacy only through

a link to this particular wooden mandala.

3. "The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko" was written by Nikko Shonin in 1333 and addresses practitioners of future generations, exhorting them to maintain the purity of Nichiren's teachings, and outlines the fundamental spirit of faith, practice, and study.

4. The temple parishioner system: A means by which families were affiliated officially with a local Buddhist temple during the regime of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1867). It was a mandatory system of citizen registration intended to detect hidden Christians—those secretly practicing Christianity, which had been outlawed. It was also a way for the government, with the temples as proxies, to monitor and control the population. Under the system, individuals and families were not permitted to change religious affiliation. People were expected to visit their assigned temple and rely on it to conduct funeral and memorial ceremonies, to offer donations for these services, and thereby provide the temples with a permanent source of income.

Part 3: Material for the Intermediate Exam

CHAPTER

13

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra



The Lotus Sutra

The **Lotus Sutra** is a scripture that embodies the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. It teaches unequivocally that all people can attain Buddhahood. This section will explain the significance and major doctrines of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra has radically changed the Buddhist view of life and of Buddhahood. The sutras Shakyamuni preached during the more than forty years before the Lotus Sutra teach that ordinary people cannot attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. Moreover, they stay in one of nine worlds other than Buddhahood until they die and only then can move to another in rebirth. Therefore, if people wish to attain Buddhahood, they have to carry out Buddhist practices through numerous lifetimes until they eradicate all of their earthly desires, purify their lives, and obtain benefit and virtue worthy of Buddhas. Then and only then can they attain Buddhahood. And when they succeed, only the world of Buddhahood will be present in their lives.

However, in the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni reveals the truth that Buddhahood exists inherently in the lives of ordinary people and that everyone can attain Buddhahood immediately by bringing it

forth from within their lives.

This teaching of the Lotus Sutra is founded on two doctrines: the true aspect of all phenomena and the attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past.

The True Aspect of All Phenomena and the Attainment of Buddhahood in the Remote Past

The True Aspect of All Phenomena

The Lotus Sutra, which consists of twenty-eight chapters, can be divided into two distinct parts: the theoretical teaching, which equates to the first fourteen chapters, and the essential teaching, the latter fourteen chapters.

Two doctrines central to the theoretical teaching (the first half) are the true aspect of all phenomena and the attainment of Buddhahood by people of the two vehicles.

The true aspect of all phenomena is a principle expounded in “Expedient Means,” the second chapter. *All phenomena* here means the world around us and its various workings, including the affairs of life and society. *True aspect* means their ultimate reality or true essential nature.

The truth or reality of all things that Buddhas, through their vast and profound wisdom, are able to perceive is called the true aspect of all phenomena. Once one perceives this reality, one understands that all phenomena and their true aspect are not two separate things but that all phenomena are in fact manifestations or expressions of the true aspect. Therefore, all phenomena and their true aspect can never be divided or separated.

Based on the commentaries of Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (Zhiyi), Nichiren Daishonin clarified that all phenomena refers specifically to all living beings of the Ten Worlds and their respective environments, whereas the true aspect refers to Myoho-renge-kyo.

In his work “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” the Daishonin states that “all beings and environments in the Ten Worlds, from hell, the lowest, to Buddhahood, the highest, are without exception manifestations of Myoho-enge-kyo” (WND-1, 383).

The teaching of the true aspect of all phenomena reveals that not only Buddhas but also the beings of the other nine worlds are all equal because each of the Ten Worlds possesses all of the ten and are essentially embodiments of Myoho-enge-kyo.

Prior to the Lotus Sutra, it was thought that a practically insurmountable gap lay between a Buddha and an ordinary person; that is, between the life state of Buddhahood and the other nine worlds.

However, the Lotus Sutra takes the opposite view. While Buddhas and ordinary people of the nine worlds take on different appearances and qualities in terms of their roles and behavior in the real world, on the level of life itself they are essentially the same, with no distinction between them. Beings of the nine worlds, whatever their present condition or state of life, are all in principle capable of attaining Buddhahood.

Based on the principle of the true aspect of all phenomena, the Lotus Sutra reveals that people of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones) can in fact become Buddhas, although the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings denied their possibility of attaining Buddhahood.

Furthermore, the Lotus Sutra also guarantees the attainment of Buddhahood by evil people as well as the attainment of Buddhahood by women—two groups that were also denied the possibility of enlightenment in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

The “Expedient Means” chapter goes on to explain that the reason or purpose for which all Buddhas appear in this world is to “open the door of Buddha wisdom” for all people, to “show the Buddha wisdom” to them, to “cause them to awaken to the Buddha wisdom” and to “induce [them] to enter the path of Buddha wisdom” (LSOC, 64).

In other words, the fundamental wish of Shakyamuni and all other Buddhas is to enable all people to reveal the Buddha wisdom, inherent equally in everyone's life, and to carry out Buddhist practice based on that wisdom. In this way, they aim to enable all people to achieve a state of life equal to that of the Buddhas themselves. This is conveyed in the Lotus Sutra by Shakyamuni's statement of his long-held vow "to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us" (LSOC, 70). This is the fundamental purpose of Buddhism.

The Attainment of Buddhahood in the Remote Past

A principle central to the essential teaching (the latter half) of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation of Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past.

In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings up through the theoretical teaching (the first half) of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni is described as follows: He was born a prince of the country of the Shakya clan in ancient India but left home to pursue a religious life and after a period of ascetic practices attained enlightenment, or Buddhahood, for the first time while seated in meditation under the Bodhi tree on the outskirts of Gaya (later called Bodhi Gaya). According to those teachings, the causes he had made and accumulated through many lifetimes of Buddhist practice had resulted in his obtaining the rewards of benefit and virtue that enabled him, in his present life in India, to attain Buddhahood.

But his revelation that he had actually attained enlightenment in the distant past fundamentally overturned that existing image.

As explained earlier, the teaching of the true aspect of all phenomena in the theoretical teaching reveals that there is no essential difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person, because both are embodiments of Myoho-enge-kyo. In other words, while Buddhahood is inherent in the lives of ordinary people and anyone can

attain Buddhahood at any time, it would actually require practice over numerous lifetimes to do so. In the theoretical teaching, even Shakyamuni is seen as having attained Buddhahood only after an unimaginably long period of practice, and so disciples would naturally have to carry out the same practice as their teacher.

In contrast, the essential teaching, through the example of Shakyamuni attaining enlightenment in the remote past, explains that Buddhahood, along with the other nine worlds, is permanently inherent in the lives of all people and that they can manifest Buddhahood at any moment under the right conditions.

“Life Span,” the sixteenth chapter, offers a description of a period known as “numberless major world system dust particle kalpas” to explain the vastness of the time that has passed since Shakyamuni originally attained Buddhahood. This overturned the accepted view that Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment for the first time during his lifetime in India and revealed him to be the eternal Buddha who had been enlightened since the remote past. It also explains that since that time he has always been present in this impure saha world.¹

The chapter says, “It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood” (LSOC, 265–66). This signifies that the life state of the Buddha is eternal and always present.

After revealing his original enlightenment in the remote past, Shakyamuni states, “Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed” (LSOC, 268). This means that the nine worlds, represented by the life state of a bodhisattva, are also eternal and always present.

The above two passages mean that both the life state of Buddhahood and that of the nine worlds are forever present in Shakyamuni’s life.

Before the Lotus Sutra clarified that Shakyamuni had attained

Buddhahood in the remote past, it was taught that before becoming a Buddha in India he had purged the nine worlds and their delusions from his life.

In contrast, Shakyamuni's revelation of his original enlightenment shows that all of the other nine worlds are inherent within the world of Buddhahood in his life. Therefore, he was able to appear as a bodhisattva taking various forms as he carried out Buddhist practice in subsequent lifetimes in the past. But even while appearing and acting as a bodhisattva, Buddhahood always existed within his life. In this way he embodied the "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds."

Shakyamuni, the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past, is in fact free from the endless cycle of birth and death, but in order to cause people to seek his teachings, he passes away. He states in the "Life Span" chapter, "As an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana but in truth I do not pass into extinction" (LSOC, 270–71).

Further, the sutra explains that this eternal Buddha always dwells in the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, which is none other than this saha world where ordinary people of the nine worlds live. (This is known as the principle that the saha world is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.) He appears whenever and wherever there are people who seek the Buddha single-mindedly and strive in Buddhist practice without begrudging their lives.

In other words, when one believes in and practices the Lotus Sutra, one's innate Buddhahood emerges, and at the same time, one's environment becomes a Buddha land. This is because everyone's life is inherently endowed with the state of a Buddha. This innate Buddha nature functions as the internal cause, which in response to the right conditions brings about, at any time or any place, the reward of Buddhahood in one's own being and in the environment.

It is the principle of Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in

the remote past that sheds light on the true nature of life; namely that from the most distant past into the limitless future, everyone is essentially a Buddha.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth

In “Emerging from the Earth,” the fifteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni summons countless bodhisattvas for the purpose of entrusting them with the propagation of his teaching in the evil age after his passing. Because the sutra depicts them as emerging in vast numbers from beneath the ground, they are known as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and are considered to have been dwelling in the realm of fundamental truth.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are countless in number, each leading an entourage of followers as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges, the greatest and most venerated river in India.

These bodhisattvas had been constantly taught and instructed by Shakyamuni since the remote past and had already come to uphold the fundamental teaching for attaining Buddhahood. Possessing within them the same enlightened life state as Shakyamuni, they are charged with the mission to widely spread the Mystic Law in the evil age known as the Latter Day of the Law.

They are led by four bodhisattvas—Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices, and Firmly Established Practices. In “Supernatural Powers,” the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Superior Practices and all these bodhisattvas vow to spread the great Law after Shakyamuni’s passing. In response to their vow, Shakyamuni entrusts them with propagating his teaching in the age after his passing, charging them with transmitting the great Law into the future.

In view of these sutra passages, two major questions still remain. That is, when after Shakyamuni’s passing will the Bodhisattvas of the Earth actually appear, and what exactly is the great Law they will spread when they do?

Nichiren Daishonin makes it clear that the time when the Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear is in the Latter Day of the Law, and the great Law they will spread is the Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Daishonin himself fulfilled the instructions contained in this entrustment of the teachings by Shakyamuni described in the Lotus Sutra. That is, it is the Daishonin who appeared at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, taught Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to all people, and spread it with selfless dedication. In this sense, the Daishonin is himself a Bodhisattva of the Earth, whose role accords in particular with that of their leader, Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past. (WND-1, 385)

This passage explains that everyone who accepts and believes in the Daishonin’s teachings, propagates them, and works to achieve kosen-rufu is without exception a Bodhisattva of the Earth. That person is a genuine disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

The practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging described in “Never Disparaging,” the twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, serves as an example of how to spread the correct teaching in the evil age after Shakyamuni’s passing.

Never Disparaging is one of the figures appearing in the Lotus Sutra who depicts Shakyamuni as he carried out Buddhist practices in a former lifetime. He consistently venerates everyone he encounters, no matter who they are, including even those who attack or persecute him, bowing in respect and reciting to each a phrase known as the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra. This name derives from the fact that the phrase consists of twenty-four Chinese characters in the sutra's text and expresses the essence of the Lotus Sutra's teachings and practice. It reads:

I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you will all practice the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood. (LSOC, 308)

These words plainly demonstrate the Lotus Sutra's essential philosophy, which is to respect the life of any and every person because each inherently possesses the Buddha nature.

While preaching this twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra, Never Disparaging is attacked by arrogant people who throw rocks and hit him with sticks, but he perseveres in his practice of consistently praising them and treating them with respect. The sutra explains that it was through the benefit deriving from these actions that Never Disparaging became a Buddha.

The Latter Day of the Law is described as an age of contention or conflict. And the only way to resolve conflict and create a society of humanity and peace is for each person to believe in the Buddha nature of both themselves and others, and to consistently act in a manner that shows respect for people. Buddhism teaches the loftiest form of human behavior—actions that respect others—and encourages all people to act in this manner.

Regarding the importance of human behavior, Nichiren states:

The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the "Never Disparaging" chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being. ("The Three Kinds of Treasure," WND-1, 851–52)

Here the Daishonin is clearly stating that the purpose of Buddhism is to behave as Never Disparaging did, that is, to believe in one's own Buddha nature and that of others and act in accord with that belief.

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra

In the Latter Day of Law, it is inevitable that those who spread the Lotus Sutra will encounter great difficulties. Nichiren Daishonin propagated the Lotus Sutra and encountered major persecutions for doing so, just as the sutra predicted. In this way, he "read" the Lotus Sutra with his very life and fulfilled the role of the votary of the Lotus Sutra who proves the validity of the sutra's teachings.

The Votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law

Nichiren Daishonin referred to himself as the votary of the Lotus Sutra—the genuine practitioner of the sutra who carried out its teachings exactly as instructed while facing and overcoming great persecutions in order to propagate the Mystic Law. The Lotus Sutra explains that anyone who believes in, practices, and spreads the sutra's teaching after Shakyamuni's passing will be assailed by various kinds of obstacles and persecutions.

Suffering Extreme Hatred and Jealousy

In "Teacher of the Law," the tenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is the

passage “Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the thus come one [Shakyamuni Buddha] is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?” (LSOC, 203)

In the Latter Day of the Law, it was only Nichiren Daishonin who experienced persecutions motivated by intense hatred and jealously surpassing those directed at Shakyamuni in his time.

The Six Difficult and Nine Easy Acts

“Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, describes six difficult and nine easy acts. Through these examples, Shakyamuni emphasizes the great difficulty of accepting and spreading the Lotus Sutra in the time after his passing and calls on bodhisattvas to make a vow to propagate the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

The six difficult acts are (1) to propagate the Lotus Sutra widely, (2) to copy it or cause someone else to copy it, (3) to recite it even for a short while, (4) to teach it even to one person, (5) to hear of and accept it and inquire about its meaning, and (6) to maintain faith in it.

The nine easy acts include taking up Mount Sumeru and hurling it across countless Buddha lands, placing the earth on one’s toenail and ascending to the Brahma heaven, walking across a burning prairie carrying a bundle of hay on one’s back without being burned, and preaching eighty-four thousand teachings.

While the nine “easy” acts appear impossible, they are considered easy when compared with the difficulty of the six acts connected with spreading the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

The reason that propagating the Lotus Sutra is so difficult is that doing so invites very real hardships in the form of opposition and persecution. In explaining things in terms of the six difficult and nine easy acts, the sutra is strongly expressing Shakyamuni’s spirit and intent in encouraging the propagation of its teachings, the most difficult among difficult endeavors, in the age after his passing.

The Three Powerful Enemies

“Encouraging Devotion,” the thirteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, contains a passage known as the twenty-line verse² describing three kinds of people who strongly oppress those who spread the sutra after Shakyamuni’s passing. Collectively, they are called the “three powerful enemies.” They are defined as arrogant laypeople, arrogant priests, and arrogant false sages.

The first of the three powerful enemies, arrogant laypeople, refers to people who, ignorant of the Buddhist teachings, attack the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. Because the Daishonin endeavored to spread the Lotus Sutra, such people slandered him and attacked him with swords and staves, just as the sutra predicted.

The second powerful enemy, arrogant priests, indicates members of the Buddhist clergy who persecute the Lotus Sutra’s practitioners. In the Daishonin’s time, Buddhist priests, clinging to their own shallow views and interpretations, slandered the sutra and persecuted him.

The third powerful enemy, arrogant false sages, refers to high-ranking Buddhist priests who pass themselves off as sages or saints and use their status and influence to persecute the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

During the Daishonin’s time, the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple best fit this description of an arrogant false sage. While he was highly respected as a saint by the people of Kamakura, he was in reality most concerned with personal profit and advantage and maliciously sought to destroy the votary of the Lotus Sutra. He ingratiated himself with the wives of certain government officials, among whom he spread rumors and false accusations against Nichiren Daishonin and his followers, plotting in this way to influence the authorities to oppress the Daishonin. This led to the Daishonin’s persecution at Tatsunokuchi—a failed attempt to execute him—and his subsequent exile to Sado Island.

Because he was sent into exile twice—first to Ito on the Izu Penin-

sula and second to Sado Island—Nichiren Daishonin stated that he had read with his very life the passage in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter that reads “again and again we will be banished” (LSOC, 234).

It is clear, then, that Nichiren Daishonin encountered major persecutions at the hands of the three powerful enemies, exactly as the Lotus Sutra says will befall its votary, or true practitioner. Because he met persecutions on account of propagating the Lotus Sutra that exactly matched those predicted in the sutra itself, the Daishonin, in “The Selection of the Time,” writes, “There can be no room to doubt that I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in all of Japan” (WND-1, 575). In the same work, he also states, “I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in the entire land of Jambudvīpa [the entire world]” (WND-1, 552).

In light of all this, the Lotus Sutra is the Buddhist scripture that predicts the Daishonin’s appearance and behavior in the Latter Day of the Law, and by reading the Lotus Sutra with his very life (by fulfilling the predictions made in the sutra), the Daishonin proved that the sutra itself was in no way false, attesting to the validity of Shakyamuni’s words.

Bodhisattva Superior Practices

Nichiren Daishonin was the first to stand alone and stake his life on spreading the Mystic Law as the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. In this way, he demonstrated that his mission and behavior accorded with that of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, whom Shakyamuni, in the Lotus Sutra, entrusted with propagating the sutra’s teaching in the Latter Day of the Law.

The “Supernatural Powers” chapter explains that having been entrusted with propagating the sutra’s teaching in the Latter Day of the Law, Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth will function as the sun and moon to illuminate and expel

the obscurity and gloom plaguing people living amid the realities of this world. Also, in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are compared to the lotus flowers that, unsullied by this impure world and untroubled by earthly desires or afflictions, blossom and bring forth the fruit of enlightenment.

This indicates that Superior Practices is the enlightened teacher of the Latter Day of the Law who in Shakyamuni’s stead teaches and leads the people of this age to Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin gave himself the name Nichiren (meaning sun lotus) and as the votary of the Lotus Sutra persevered in his efforts to save people from suffering. His choice of this name expresses his conviction that he is fulfilling the role of Superior Practices, whose function is compared in the “Supernatural Powers” and “Emerging from the Earth” chapters to the sun, the moon, and the lotus flower.

While in terms of his behavior the Daishonin was carrying out the function of Superior Practices, on a deeper level—in terms of his intrinsic, enlightened state of life—he was the Buddha of limitless joy from time without beginning, the Buddha who can fully display the dignity life inherently possesses.

The Daishonin expressed this fundamental life state of Buddhahood in the form of a mandala, the Gohonzon, which he modeled after the Ceremony in the Air³ in the Lotus Sutra, establishing it as the object of devotion that all people of the Latter Day of the Law should believe in and uphold in order to attain Buddhahood.

When one believes in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reveals the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo inherent in one’s life, one can manifest the life state of the Buddha of time without beginning. It means that ordinary people actually carry out the actions of that Buddha in their daily lives and society.

Soka Gakkai members pray to this Gohonzon as an embodiment, or mirror, of their innate Buddhahood—chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the conviction that they themselves are the Mystic

Law—and strive to teach and share this teaching with others. By doing so they will, just like Nichiren Daishonin, manifest the Mystic Law in their lives, revealing the state of Buddhahood and enjoying the benefit and good fortune that comes with it.

NOTES:

1. Saha world: *Saha* is a Sanskrit term that can be translated as “to endure.” The saha world is one where people must endure ceaseless confusion and suffering, the real world in which we live at present.

2. In Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra, the three powerful enemies are described in twenty lines in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter’s verse section.

3. The Ceremony in the Air: one of the assemblies described in the Lotus Sutra, in which the entire gathering is suspended in space above the ground. During the ceremony, Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the Lotus Sutra specifically to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth led by Superior Practices, entrusting them with its propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. The heart of the ceremony consists of the revelation of Shakyamuni’s original enlightenment and the transfer of the essence of the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

CHAPTER

14

*Three Thousand Realms in
a Single Moment of Life*



“**T**hree thousand realms in a single moment of life” is a Buddhist teaching that reveals how ordinary people can attain Buddhahood. Studying this teaching deepens understanding of the way in which Nichiren Buddhism makes it possible for all people to attain enlightenment.

Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life

One of the philosophical principles forming the basis underlying Nichiren Daishonin’s inscription of the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo—the object of devotion for enabling all people of the Latter Day of the Law to attain Buddhahood—is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

This was formulated by Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (Zhiyi) of China in his work *Great Concentration and Insight* in order to help people put into practice the Lotus Sutra’s teaching that all people can attain Buddhahood.

“A single moment of life” indicates one’s life as it exists at any given moment. “Three thousand realms” refers to all phenomena—all things and their varied functions. The principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life teaches that a single moment

of life includes three thousand realms, and life at each moment permeates and pervades all of them.

Life at each moment contains limitless potential. When one transforms the state of one's life at this moment, the environment that surrounds it also changes, which can even result in a change in the entire world. Thus, the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is a teaching of hope and transformation. Ikeda Sensei expresses the significance of this principle in describing the theme of his novel *The Human Revolution*:

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.

In his work "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," Nichiren Daishonin quotes a passage from T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight* that describes the three thousand realms in a single moment of life:

Life at each moment is endowed with the Ten Worlds. At the same time, each of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all Ten Worlds, so that an entity of life actually possesses one hundred worlds. Each of these worlds in turn possesses thirty realms, which means that in the one hundred worlds there are three thousand realms. The three thousand realms of existence are all possessed by life in a single moment. If there is no life, that is the end of the matter. But if there is the slightest bit of life, it contains all the three thousand realms. (WND-1, 354)

In other words, so long as one is alive, one's life at each moment possesses three thousand realms, each of which is unique and distinct from the others.

The number three thousand comes from multiplying the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds ($10 \text{ worlds} \times 10 \text{ worlds} = 100 \text{ worlds}$) by the ten factors of life and then by the three realms of existence ($100 \times 10 \times 3 = 3,000$). The Ten Worlds, the ten factors, and the three realms are concepts that each approach life and the law of causality operating within it from a different perspective. Three thousand realms in a single moment of life incorporates all of these perspectives and thereby offers an encompassing view of one's life and the world as a whole.

The Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds

The core principle underlying three thousand realms in a single moment of life is the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Daishonin writes: "The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life begins with the concept of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds" ("The Opening of the Eyes," WND-1, 224) and "[The Buddha] also expounded the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, explaining that the nine worlds have the potential for Buddhahood and that Buddhahood retains the nine worlds" ("The Selection of the Time," WND-1, 539).

The Ten Worlds represent ten states of life. They are the worlds of (1) hell, (2) hungry spirits (hunger), (3) animals (animality), (4) asuras, (5) human beings (humanity), (6) heavenly beings (heaven), (7) voice-hearers (learning), (8) cause-awakened ones (realization), (9) bodhisattvas, and (10) Buddhas.

The sutras other than the Lotus Sutra teach that each of the Ten Worlds is a distinct and separate realm, or a fixed condition of life, and that one cannot move from any one of the Ten Worlds to another until after one dies, at which time one can be reborn into another of the Ten Worlds.

But the Lotus Sutra fundamentally overturns this idea, revealing that all people in any of the nine worlds other than Buddhahood also

possess the world of Buddhahood. Conversely, the world of Buddhahood is endowed with all the other nine worlds.

The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds means that a life now manifesting any one of the Ten Worlds possesses all of the Ten Worlds. In that sense, Buddhas and all people of the nine worlds are equally endowed with all the Ten Worlds and are therefore essentially equal.

Also, if one's life is displaying a particular one of the Ten Worlds at this moment, it has the potential to manifest, in response to a condition or influence, another of the Ten Worlds at the next moment. It follows that anyone in any of the Ten Worlds, in response to the right conditions, can manifest the world of Buddhahood and become a Buddha.

The principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, then, explains that one can elevate one's state of life to that of bodhisattvas and even to Buddhahood in the course of this lifetime.

The Ten Factors of Life

There are ten aspects, or factors, common to all life in any of the Ten Worlds. From the world of hell to the world of Buddhahood, all lives in any of the Ten Worlds equally possess the ten factors of life. These ten factors describe the law of causality at work behind the changes in one's state of life.

The section of "Expedient Means," the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, that Soka Gakkai members recite every day during the practice of gongyo describes the "true aspect of all phenomena" as follows:

The true aspect of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end. (LSOC, 57)

To help people conceptualize the true aspect of all phenomena, the sutra introduces ten attributes, or factors. Each factor is prefaced by a term, pronounced *nyoze* in Japanese, meaning “like this,” “such,” or “thus.”

Among the ten factors, “appearance” is the outward form or aspect of a living being that is subject to change from moment to moment.

“Nature” is the innate and consistent character or intrinsic attributes.

“Entity” is the thing or being itself, which has the aspects of appearance and nature.

The first three factors, appearance, nature, and entity, constitute the existence and essence of the living being. The remaining seven factors, in contrast, express the workings or functions of that life.

“Power” means internal energy or inner potential.

“Influence” is the outward expression of internal power and the influence of that power on other life or phenomena.

The next four factors, “internal cause,” “relation,” “latent effect,” and “manifest effect,” express the law of causality that governs the workings of life.

Internal cause is a primary or direct cause inherent in life that produces an effect or result.

Relation refers to an external condition or influence that stimulates the internal cause, functioning as a supporting or auxiliary cause to bring about an effect.

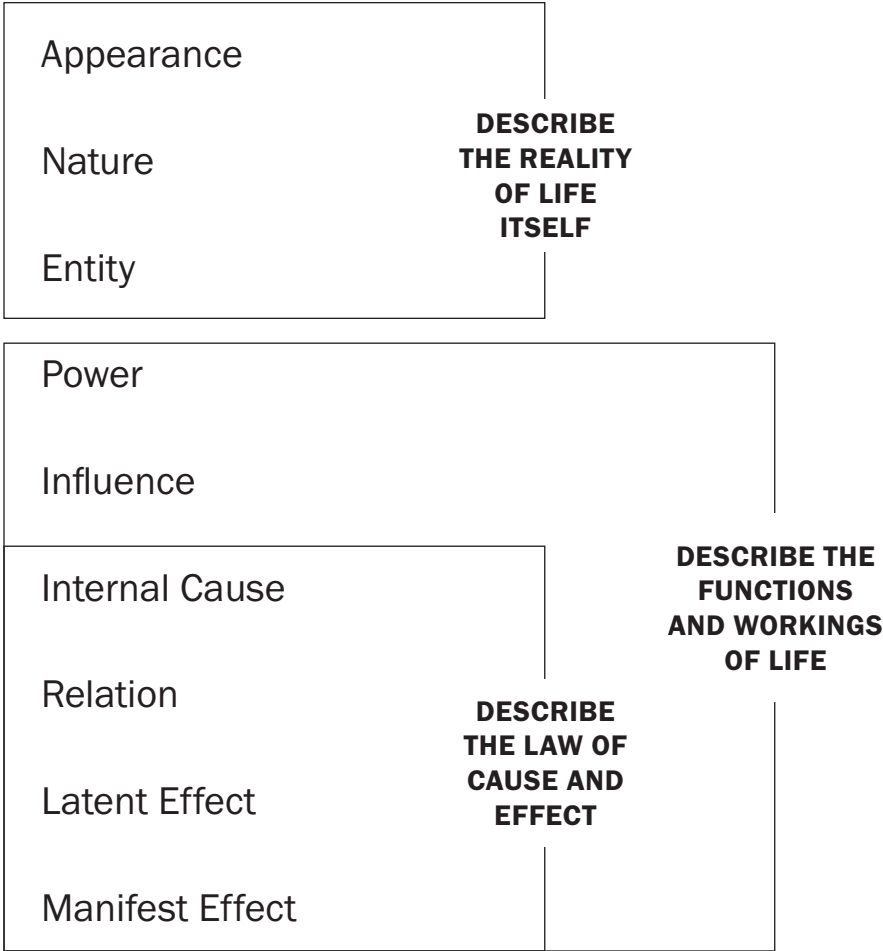
Latent effect is the intrinsic, imperceptible result arising from the interaction of the internal cause and the relation, or external cause.

Manifest effect is the evident result that emerges from the latent effect in response to the time and to external causes or conditions.

Finally, “consistency from beginning to end” means that all the other factors are consistent from the beginning—the first factor, appearance—to the end—the ninth factor, manifest effect. For example, a life presently in the world of Buddhahood will have the

10 Factors

Patterns of existence common to all phenomena in any of the Ten Worlds



Consistency From Beginning to the End

appearance of Buddhahood, the nature of Buddhahood, all the way through the manifest effect of Buddhahood, and the same principle applies to each of the Ten Worlds.

Life in any of the Ten Worlds is equally endowed with the ten factors, that is, with the law of causality that governs changes in one's state of life. One's life, while displaying a particular one of the Ten Worlds, has the potential to manifest, in response to a condition or influence, any other of the Ten Worlds. It follows, then, that anyone in any of the Ten Worlds can, in response to the right conditions, manifest the world of Buddhahood and become a Buddha.

The Three Realms of Existence

The “three realms of existence” are “the realm of the five components,” “the realm of living beings,” and “the realm of the environment.” Each of the Ten Worlds distinctly expresses itself in these three realms.

Living beings are classified according to their states of life, that is, the Ten Worlds, from moment to moment. The realm of living beings reflects the differences between these life states.

Buddhism regards a living being as a temporary union of five components. As such, living beings have no fixed or permanent existence of their own but are in a constant state of flux and change.

It is natural, therefore, that changes or distinctions in the life state of living beings, that is, in which of the Ten Worlds they manifest, are also evident in the five components that make up those living beings.

The five components are form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness.

Form is the physical aspect of life, the body and its physical attributes.

Perception is the function of receiving and sensing information from and about the outside world through the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind).

Conception is the function of forming impressions or ideas about what has been perceived.

Volition is what links the conception of what is perceived to action. It accords with the various workings of the heart and mind, such as will, wants, and desires.

Finally, consciousness describes the discerning function of life that recognizes and distinguishes things.

In the world of hell, the five components of life have characteristics specific to the world of hell, while in the world of Buddhahood they have characteristics specific to the world of Buddhahood. Thus the realm of the five components manifests the Ten Worlds.

The differences in the life state of living beings, or which of the Ten Worlds they manifest, are also manifest in the land or environment those beings inhabit, that is, the realm of the environment.

From the principle of the three realms of existence, we can see that when the state of the five components changes, that of living beings and their environments also changes. A change in the state of one's heart and mind will effect a change in every aspect of one's own life and one's environment.

The principles of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the ten factors of life, and the three realms of existence, when merged together, form the three thousand realms in a single moment of life. This teaching provides a comprehensive view of the law of causality permeating life and the surrounding world and clarifies that all people are equally capable of attaining Buddhahood.

CHAPTER

15

Embracing the Gohonzon Is in Itself Observing One's Own Mind



The purpose of Buddhist practice is to establish, in this lifetime, the state of a Buddha, a life condition of absolute happiness unaffected by changes in one's circumstances or surroundings. It was for this purpose that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon, or object of devotion, thereby establishing the way for everyone to open and reveal within their own lives the world of Buddhahood, to win in their daily affairs and to become victors in life.

This section will explain the significance of the Gohonzon and the principle that embracing the Gohonzon is in itself observing one's own mind, which makes it possible for all people to attain Buddhahood.

The Significance of the Gohonzon

An object of devotion or worship is that which is revered most highly in any religious tradition. In Buddhism, the object of devotion is most often a statue or image of a Buddha or bodhisattva. What a religious faith regards as its object of devotion indicates what is fundamental to its beliefs. It is the core element that determines how people embrace and carry out their faith in that religion.

The object of devotion fundamental to the faith of Soka Gakkai members is the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, which was established by Nichiren Daishonin.

The Seed of Buddhahood

Shakyamuni awakened to the fundamental Law that permeates all life and the universe, and for this reason he was called Buddha, or awakened one. He made it clear that all Buddhas attain enlightenment by awakening to this fundamental Law, the Mystic Law. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the Law that enables all people to attain Buddhahood, and it is also the name of that Law. In other words, Nichiren Daishonin taught and directly expressed the Law that constitutes the fundamental cause for attaining enlightenment as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

The Mystic Law, which is the cause, or seed, of Buddhahood, is essentially inherent in the lives of all living beings. This innate cause is also known as the Buddha nature, or the world of Buddhahood.

In this regard, the Daishonin states:

When we revere Myoho-enge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. This is what is meant by “Buddha.” To illustrate, when a caged bird sings, birds who are flying in the sky are thereby summoned and gather around, and when the birds flying in the sky gather around, the bird in the cage strives to get out. When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law, our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. The Buddha nature of Brahma and Shakra, being called, will protect us, and the Buddha nature of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, being summoned, will rejoice. (“How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 887)

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the name of the world of Buddhahood inherent in one's own life and in all things. When one believes in the Gohonzon and chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, one awakens and summons the world of Buddhahood within one's life; and further, one calls forth the world of Buddhahood from within all things in the universe. In other words, one opens up the limitless potential of one's own life and activates the functions of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and heavenly beings—that is, the protective forces in one's environment.

“I, Nichiren, Have Inscribed My Life”

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the teaching hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sutra, which teaches that all people are capable of becoming Buddhas. Nichiren Daishonin awakened to the Mystic Law within his own life, realizing that it is synonymous with the world of Buddhahood. This Law, he said, is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and he taught and spread it widely. He then expressed it in the Gohonzon as a focus for Buddhist practice.

The Daishonin says:

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (“Reply to Kyo'o,” WND-1, 412)

The Gohonzon is an expression of the world of Buddhahood in Nichiren Daishonin's life—the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that he awoke to, revealed, and embodied.

Down the center of the Gohonzon are inscribed the words “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Nichiren.” Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law for attaining enlightenment, and Nichiren Daishonin, who revealed and taught the Law for all people, is none other than the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

The Clear Mirror That Reflects One's Life

As an ordinary person, Nichiren Daishonin opened and revealed within his life the world of Buddhahood (Nam-myoho-enge-kyo). This is the most ideal state of life, which all people can aspire to attain. Therefore, the Daishonin expressed it in the form of a mandala as the object of devotion, establishing the way for ordinary people to make their innate world of Buddhahood the foundation of their being. When they believe in and pray to the Gohonzon, they can immediately observe the world of Buddhahood inherent in their lives, just as the Daishonin did.

Nichiren Daishonin delved deeply into the Lotus Sutra, which teaches that all people are endowed with the world of Buddhahood, and found in its depths the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood. He revealed that Law directly as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and established the Gohonzon as its concrete expression in order to assist people in their practice for attaining Buddhahood. The Gohonzon, in this sense, can be viewed as a clear mirror that reflects the world of Buddhahood within ordinary people and allows them to observe it and bring it forth.

The Ceremony in the Air

Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon as a mandala depicting in written characters the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra. The ceremony begins in “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” the eleventh chapter of the sutra, with the appearance of the treasure tower of the Buddha named Many Treasures and the entire assembly being suspended in the air. It ends in “Entrustment,” the twenty-second chapter, with the closing of the doors of the treasure tower.

The core elements of this ceremony are as follows: Shakyamuni, having revealed his true identity as the eternal Buddha, entrusts to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, his eternal disciples whom he has sum-

moned from beneath the earth, the task of spreading the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after his passing in order to save the people of that age from suffering and lead them to happiness.

These events occur over eight chapters, beginning with “Emerging from the Earth,” the fifteenth chapter, and continuing through the “Entrustment” chapter. The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon based on the description of this ceremony of entrustment in the Lotus Sutra.

A key element for attaining Buddhahood taught in the Lotus Sutra is to make people aware that the world of Buddhahood is inherent in their own lives and to enable them to unlock and bring forth that world of Buddhahood from within. The Daishonin made use of the motif of the treasure tower, which is central to the Lotus Sutra’s Ceremony in the Air, in creating the image of the Gohonzon. He depicted the treasure tower as Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, which he inscribed down the center of the Gohonzon. He states, “In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra” (“On the Treasure Tower,” WND-1, 299), clarifying that the treasure tower represents the very life of all those who believe in the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin teaches that Shakyamuni and Many Treasures, as they appear in the Ceremony in the Air, represent the world of Buddhahood inherent in all living beings and that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices and others, indicate the world of bodhisattvas also innate within all people. Assembled at the Ceremony in the Air are voice-hearers, heavenly gods and benevolent deities, and other living beings. Representatives from among these various beings of each of the Ten Worlds are included on the Gohonzon.

The Daishonin expressed his enlightenment in the Gohonzon, which he called a *mandala*. This Sanskrit word refers to a depiction of the Buddha and those who have gathered to hear him preach and

is also interpreted as meaning “perfectly endowed” and “cluster of blessings.” This Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is perfectly endowed because it includes all of the Ten Worlds. It is a cluster of blessings because it possesses all the wonderful attributes of the Ten Worlds. In essence, the Gohonzon is the mandala that is fully endowed with the Ten Worlds.

The Gohonzon represents the life state of the Buddha, which is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself, eternally endowed with all of the Ten Worlds, as well as the superior attributes inherent in each of these worlds. When people believe in this Gohonzon and base their lives on it, aware that they themselves are Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they can freely and fully display the dignified, unique attributes of each of the Ten Worlds inherent in their lives.

The Actual Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life

The Gohonzon, which is fully endowed with the Ten Worlds, expresses the principle of their mutual possession—that life in any of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all the Ten Worlds. This means that a living being in any of the Ten Worlds can, through encountering the right condition or influence, manifest the world of Buddhahood and become a Buddha.

The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is core to the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which crystallizes and explains, for the purpose of putting it into practice, the philosophy that all people are capable of attaining Buddhahood.

The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is described by Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai (Zhiyi) in his work *Great Concentration and Insight*. It explains that all people innately possess the essential cause for attaining enlightenment and makes it conceptually clear that all people have the potential to become Buddhas. But while T’ien-t’ai refers to this doctrine as the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, it is at this point still in the realm of theory.

In contrast, Nichiren Daishonin, through his wisdom, perceived the fundamental Law of enlightenment that is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. And, out of his compassionate desire to save all people, he endured countless obstacles and hardships, exhibiting the behavior of a Buddha as an ordinary human being.

The Gohonzon, in which the Daishonin directly revealed his life state of Buddhahood—a state he had brought forth from within as an ordinary person—is a concrete expression of the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. The Gohonzon is therefore referred to as the “actual” three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

Nichiren Daishonin called the Gohonzon the “banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 831). In the Ceremony in the Air, Shakyamuni entrusts the Bodhisattvas of the Earth with the mission of spreading the Mystic Law in the evil age after his passing. The Gohonzon exemplifies this intent of the Buddha. To spread faith in the Gohonzon is to spread the Lotus Sutra, opening the way for kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law.

Embracing the Gohonzon Is in Itself Observing One's Own Mind

The Lotus Sutra makes clear that all people innately possess the wisdom and compassion of a Buddha. It teaches that the ultimate purpose of a Buddha's appearance in this world is to open up this Buddha wisdom in all living beings.

Meditation, a central element of Buddhist practice, means to focus one's mind on cultivating and bringing forth wisdom. In particular, it means to observe one's own life, or mind, based upon the principles taught in the Buddhist scriptures. “Observing the mind” is a practice carried out in order to attain Buddhahood.

By deeply observing the workings of his own mind, T'ien-t'ai came to realize that his life possessed all of the Ten Worlds, and in this way he understood the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. He taught the practice of observing the mind as the means for awakening to the reality that life at each moment is endowed with three thousand realms, or all phenomena. This is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

To prepare people for the practice of observing the mind, T'ien-t'ai formulated a variety of disciplines for leading people through graduated levels of development, or awakening. But these were in reality extremely difficult, requiring superior capacity and intensive effort. Those who arrived at a genuine awakening through such methods were very few indeed.

In contrast to T'ien-t'ai and his approach, Nichiren Daishonin studied and searched for a way of Buddhist practice that would be accessible to everyone and make it possible for anyone to attain Buddhahood. This search culminated in his teaching the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with faith in the Gohonzon as the way for all people to achieve genuine happiness.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the fundamental Law to which all Buddhas awaken when they attain enlightenment, and it is the basis for the various workings of the life states of the Ten Worlds. The Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo reveals the true nature of the lives of all people as being fully endowed with the Ten Worlds.

Those who believe in and pray to the Gohonzon are able to observe the Ten Worlds operating within their own lives. Prior to the Daishonin revealing his teaching, the practice for attaining Buddhahood was based on observation of the mind. But in Nichiren Buddhism, it is accomplished through faith in and practice to the Gohonzon. This is the teaching that embracing the Gohonzon is in itself observing one's own mind.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind” the Daishonin states:

Shakyamuni’s practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo. If we believe in these five characters, we will naturally be granted the same benefits as he was. (WND-1, 365)

All of the vast number of practices (causes) that Shakyamuni carried out and that enabled him to attain Buddhahood and the benefits and virtues (effects) he attained as a result of those practices are encompassed within the seed of Buddhahood, the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo, that is, in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Having expressed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the form of a mandala that is the Gohonzon, or object of devotion for Buddhist practice, the Daishonin is saying in the above passage that when ordinary people of the Latter Day of the Law embrace this Gohonzon, they will be able to obtain for themselves the benefits of all the causes and effects of all the practices carried out by the Buddha.

CHAPTER

16

*The Mission and Practice of the
Bodhisattvas of the Earth*



This chapter will explain the fundamental spirit and attitude of faith in light of the mission and practice of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who aim to accomplish kosen-rufu.

The Mission and Awareness of
the Bodhisattvas of the Earth

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are the disciples whom the eternal Buddha had personally instructed and trained.

What is the abiding wish of Shakyamuni, who was revealed to be the eternal Buddha in the Lotus Sutra? That wish is expressed as follows at the end of “Life Span,” the sixteenth chapter:

At all times I [Shakyamuni] think to myself: How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha? (LSOC, 273).

Nichiren Daishonin refers to this wish in his writings as the compassionate desire of the Buddha.

The Vow of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and the Buddha's Entrustment of His Teachings

In “Emerging from the Earth,” the fifteenth chapter of the sutra, Shakyamuni urges his disciples to spread the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after his passing, and then he summons forth from beneath the earth those who are qualified to be entrusted with this task. They are known as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

In “Supernatural Powers,” the twenty-first chapter, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, responding to Shakyamuni's appeal to propagate the sutra in that age, make a vow to teach and spread among the people the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood. They take to heart, inherit as their own, and strive to actualize the great desire of their teacher, the eternal Buddha. This desire shared by mentor and disciples is to achieve kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the Lotus Sutra's teachings. Accepting their pledge, Shakyamuni entrusts to them the future propagation of the Mystic Law.

Had the Bodhisattvas of the Earth not made their appearance, the compassionate desire of the Buddha would not be realized. One person takes a stand with an awareness as a Bodhisattva of the Earth, aims to build a world where people can live in peace and happiness based on the Mystic Law, and enables two, three, and eventually countless people to awaken as well. These individuals will then encourage one another to fully display their distinctive qualities and abilities and will work together actively to achieve these goals. Kosen-rufu is realized through the existence of such an active alliance of unique individuals.

Where there are the powers of faith and practice of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who persist in fulfilling the vow for kosen-rufu, the boundless powers of the Buddha and the Law inherent in the Mystic Law will clearly emerge, making it possible to transform the suffering-filled saha world into the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, in which the life force of Buddhahood is always present.

When the life force deriving from that great vow pervades all three

thousand realms of phenomena—the entire universe—a society of great well-being that is embraced in the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha will emerge.

Ikeda Sensei states:

The heart of the great vow for kosen-rufu and the life state of Buddhahood are one and the same. Therefore, when we dedicate our lives to this vow, we can bring forth the supreme nobility, strength, and greatness of our lives. When we remain true to this vow, the limitless courage, wisdom, and compassion of the Buddha flow forth from within us. When we wholeheartedly strive to realize this vow, the “poison” of even the most difficult challenge can be transformed into “medicine,” and karma transformed into mission.¹

The Great Vow to Propagate the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren Daishonin states, “The ‘great vow’ refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra” (OT’T, 82). The Lotus Sutra teaches that the lives of all people are endowed with the supremely noble Buddha nature. In it, the mission of spreading the Mystic Law, which enables all people to attain Buddhahood, throughout Jambudvīpa—the entire world—is entrusted to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The Daishonin dedicated his life to the goal of fulfilling this great vow of propagating the Lotus Sutra, the vow to accomplish kosen-rufu.

The Daishonin awakened to this Law within his own life—the Law of Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō, which is the essence of the Lotus Sutra—and he made a great vow to spread it widely. He pledged to become the “pillar,” the “eyes,” and the “great ship” that could protect, support, teach, and guide all people, stating, “This is my vow, and I will never forsake it!” (WND-1, 281). Unperturbed and unbowed by any number of great difficulties, he kept his promise never to retreat in this endeavor while maintaining a noble state of life capable of liberating the people from suffering.

Urging his followers to take up the same task, the Daishonin told them, “My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow” (“The Dragon Gate,” WND-1, 1003), and entrusted them with the mission of achieving kosen-rufu.

The Soka Gakkai Is Advancing in Accord With the Buddha’s Intent

The Soka Gakkai has emerged in modern times in accord with the Buddha’s intent and has taken responsibility to fulfill the vow for kosen-rufu, succeeding to the will of Nichiren Daishonin. It reveres the Gohonzon, which the Daishonin described as “the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 831), and its members have been exerting themselves in the compassionate practice of spreading faith in it, thereby achieving unprecedented development in the worldwide movement for kosen-rufu. Convinced of this noble mission, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda declared that the organization’s name would be recorded in Buddhist scriptures of the future as “Soka Gakkai Buddha.”

The great vow of Nichiren Daishonin is nothing other than kosen-rufu. This is also the great vow of the mentors and disciples of the Soka Gakkai—the three founding presidents—and the members throughout the world who have fought along with them. They have stood up together with a deep awareness as the Daishonin’s direct disciples and a burning sense of mission as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Sensei writes:

Dedicated to the mission of spreading the Mystic Law and realizing kosen-rufu through compassionate propagation, Soka Gakkai members are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth. They are emissaries of the Buddha. When they take action with that awareness, they

undergo a profound inner transformation, and the powerful life force to triumph over any storm of karma flows within them.²

How can the Bodhisattvas of the Earth be described in today's world? They are people who live to fulfill the mission of transmitting the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood in the midst of the most troubled times and social circumstances, allowing those burdened with the greatest misery and hardship to tap the power to build genuine happiness. With the conviction that those who suffer the most have the right to enjoy the greatest happiness, they go to the side of suffering people, teach them the Mystic Law, and together with them walk the path to transforming their destiny. People who act in this way are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Perceiving Evil and Protecting Good

Good Friends in the Realm of Buddhism

In Buddhism, the terms *good friend* and *evil friend* are used to indicate persons who have some influence, either good or bad, on one's thinking and Buddhist practice.

Good friends are those who lead one to the correct teaching or help one practice toward enlightenment. They can include Buddhist teachers and fellow practitioners. Evil friends are those who interfere with or obstruct one's Buddhist practice, leading one away from enlightenment and toward the evil paths, or suffering. It is important to be close to good friends and to wisely take care not to be deceived or influenced by evil friends.

The human mind can easily be swayed or shaken. In carrying out Buddhist practice, there is a possibility of giving in to one's weaknesses and failing to apply oneself, thereby losing sight of the Buddha's correct teaching. That is why it is essential to have good

friends who can inspire one's faith and always direct one on the correct path to Buddhahood. Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Therefore, the best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a good friend. How far can our own wisdom take us? If we have even enough wisdom to distinguish hot from cold, we should seek out a good friend. ("Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain," WND-1, 598)

With regard to evil friends who can obstruct one's Buddhist practice, the Daishonin quotes the Nirvana Sutra:

Have no fear of mad elephants. What you should fear are evil friends! Why? Because a mad elephant can only destroy your body; it cannot destroy your mind. But an evil friend can destroy both body and mind. . . . Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil paths [the realms of hell, hungry spirits, and animals]. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them. ("On Reciting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra," WND-2, 220)

Faith for Transforming Evil Friends Into Good Friends

Not only did the Daishonin teach that one should not follow or be influenced by evil friends, he also taught that one should establish faith strong enough to defeat their attempts to impede one's Buddhist practice and regard them as opportunities to further advance toward one's attainment of Buddhahood.

The stronger one's faith and practice becomes, the more strongly the three obstacles and four devils and the three powerful enemies will emerge to interfere. If, however, through summoning even stronger faith and using the wisdom gained from the Daishonin's writings, one can clearly perceive devilish functions for what they are, they will at that point cease to function as devils.

Through challenging and overcoming such obstacles based on faith in the Gohonzon, one will be able to bring forth from within previously untapped power and tremendous potential, strengthen one's faith, and further develop one's state of life. In other words, one can transform evil friends into good friends.

In "The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin writes: "Devadatta was the foremost good friend to Thus Come One Shakyamuni. In this age as well, it is not one's allies but one's powerful enemies who assist one's progress" (WND-1, 770), and in the letter titled "Why No Protection from the Heavenly Gods?" he states, "Evil persons too will be good friends to me" (WND-2, 432).

Strictness Toward Slander and Flexibility Toward Culture and Customs

Strictly Admonishing Slander of the Law

"Slander of the Law" means maligning, defaming, or speaking ill of the correct Buddhist teaching. The correct teaching means the truth to which the Buddha awakened, the teaching that enables all people to attain Buddhahood. It was expounded by Shakyamuni in the Lotus Sutra, the essence of which Nichiren Daishonin revealed to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

This correct teaching represents a view of life and the human being that regards everyone's life as innately possessing the noble state of Buddhahood and being replete with unlimited potential. To oppose and disparage this correct teaching or to reject it and refuse to believe in it constitutes slander of the Law.

Such slander is an expression of disbelief in and opposition to the most humane and genuine way of life that aims for the happiness of self and others and a peaceful and tranquil society; it is the root cause of unhappiness and should therefore be strictly admonished.

That said, however, one should not reject or exclude people who

don't recognize or support one's faith, nor should one try to force one's beliefs on others.

During the Daishonin's lifetime, the various Buddhist schools spread erroneous doctrines that disparaged the Lotus Sutra, and slander of the Law became widespread. In his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," the Daishonin defines slander of the Law as the one evil that is the source of both people's suffering and the instability of society. He strongly advocates building, through faith in the correct teaching, a peaceful society in which people can feel at ease.

In order to attain Buddhahood, it is not enough to simply refrain from committing slander oneself. It is also important to strictly admonish and challenge the slander of others, endeavor to correct them, and free them from the path to suffering. This is the compassionate practice of shakubuku, spreading the teachings while challenging and defeating slander.

The Daishonin teaches, "To hope to attain Buddhahood without speaking out against slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water" ("The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood," WND-1, 747).

To challenge evil influences that spread slander of the Law serves to empower and increase the virtuous forces of the Buddha and to protect oneself from evil, making the attainment of Buddhahood possible.

The Precept of Adapting to Local Customs

Buddhism teaches the fundamental principle for living a full and satisfying life. It is a principle accessible to all people regardless of the time or country in which they live, their ethnicity, gender identity, or age. As the Lotus Sutra teaches, all human beings, regardless of how they may differ, have the potential to attain Buddhahood, and this is why Nichiren Buddhism in particular recognizes and affords utmost respect to cultural diversity.

The Daishonin refers to a Buddhist principle called the “precept of adapting to local customs,” which teaches that one should respect and abide by the culture and traditions of each country and region, as well as by the customs of the times, to the extent that they do not violate the fundamental teachings of Buddhism.

He writes:

The meaning of this precept is that, so long as no seriously offensive act is involved, then even if one were to depart to some slight degree from the teachings of Buddhism, it would be better to avoid going against the manners and customs of the country. This is a precept expounded by the Buddha. (“The Recitation of the ‘Expedient Means’ and ‘Life Span’ Chapters,” WND-1, 72)

Buddhism aims to uplift and enrich people’s behavior, enabling them to lead a truly humane way of life. The customs and traditions of a society encompass the wisdom of its constituent communities and cultures. Much of that wisdom may accord with the teachings of Buddhism and surely include aspects of Buddhist wisdom. Manners, customs, and traditions that cultivate rich humanity become an entry point for introducing the wisdom of Buddhism.

On the other hand, when introducing the teachings of Buddhism from one culture or society to another, one must take care not to be overly attached to superficial aspects of either culture or inflexible about inessential elements of tradition or formality to the degree that one overlooks the fundamental spirit of Buddhism. To do so would be to confuse the insignificant with the essential and meaningful and would constitute a serious error. What is essential is to establish a peaceful and prosperous society through one’s unwavering faith and practice while advancing one’s human revolution and making significant contributions to one’s community.

NOTES:

1. Daisaku Ikeda, “The Great Vow for the Happiness of All Humanity,” *Living Buddhism*, January 2014, 8.

2. Daisaku Ikeda, *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 27 (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2022), 160.

CHAPTER

17

The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism



The Soka Gakkai is a religious organization that practices Buddhist teachings originating from Shakyamuni Buddha in India and carried on and developed by the Indian Buddhist scholars Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, who were revered as bodhisattvas; Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai (Zhiyi) and Miao-lo (Zhanran) of China; 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.

Shakyamuni

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

In his youth, Shakyamuni witnessed the unavoidable sufferings of

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

As a prince, Shakyamuni led a life of great comfort and ease such that most people would envy. But when he became aware that the riches and luxuries people sought in life were ultimately fleeting and empty, he could find in them no real pleasure. This led him to search for a philosophy or teaching that would clarify the true meaning of human existence.

Buddha—The Awakened One

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

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

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

The Wisdom to Realize the Inherent Dignity of Life

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

within them and return to their original pure state of life that is free of fundamental ignorance or darkness.

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

The Compassion to Respect All People

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

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

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

The Lotus Sutra—The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism

Shakyamuni expounded his teachings for some fifty 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 fulfill it.

Nichiren Daishonin—The Votary of the Lotus Sutra

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

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

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

In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin asserts that peace and social prosperity

are indispensable to building individual happiness. He writes:

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

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

This accords with efforts that practitioners of Buddhism have made since the time of Shakyamuni to overcome the destructive nature of egoism that inflicts so much harm and suffering on people and society. It marked a new humanistic approach based on the fundamental spirit of Buddhism to enable people to realize happiness for themselves and for others—one that sought to foster trust, value creation, and harmony.

Key to this process was dialogue grounded in reason and humanity.

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 Ikeda Sensei'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.

The Westward Transmission of Buddhism and Worldwide Kosen-rufu

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

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

The Soka Gakkai rediscovered the tradition of humanistic philosophy and practice originating with Shakyamuni and inherited by

Nichiren Daishonin, recognizing and treasuring it as the very essence 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, members of the Soka Gakkai strive continually to cultivate and empower many able individuals who can, in their respective roles and fields, exemplify Buddhist humanism. This movement, which aims to realize the happiness of humanity as well as world peace, is called *kosen-rufu*.

Buddhism, which began in India, traveled 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, the Soka Gakkai's humanistic Buddhist movement has spread to 192 countries and territories around the globe.

The Three Treasures

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

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

In Sanskrit, the three treasures (*triratna*) are called Buddha,

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

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

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

In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of sowing (that is, sowing the seeds of enlightenment, namely, Nam-myoho-renge-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 the Daishonin revealed as the Law for universal
enlightenment.

The treasure of the Buddhist Order from the perspective of time
without beginning is Nikko Shonin (the Daishonin's closest disciple
and immediate 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.¹

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 and to believe in it and make it one's foundation.

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

NOTE:

1. In Nichiren's Buddhism, the Buddhism of
sowing indicates the teachings of Nichiren,
in contrast with those of Shakyamuni,
which are called the Buddhism of the
harvest. The Buddhism of the harvest
consists of teachings that can lead to
enlightenment only those who received

the seeds of Buddhahood by practicing
Shakyamuni's teaching in previous lifetimes.
In contrast, the Buddhism of sowing
implants the seeds of Buddhahood, or
Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, in the lives of those
who had no connection with the Buddha's
teaching in their past existences, i.e., the
people of the Latter Day of the Law.

CHAPTER

18

*Studying the Writings of
Nichiren Daishonin*



“On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace
of the Land”: Engaging in Dialogues of Hope to
Bring Happiness and Peace to All People

When we examine this wide variety of sutras, we find that they all stress how grave a matter it is to slander the correct teaching. How pitiful that people should all go out of the gate of the correct teaching and enter so deep into the prison of these distorted doctrines! How stupid that they should fall one after another into the snares of these evil doctrines and remain for so long entangled in this net of slanderous teachings! They lose their way in these mists and miasmas, and sink down amid the raging flames of hell. How could one not grieve? How could one not suffer?

Therefore, you must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]. If you do so, then the threefold world will become the Buddha land, and how could a Buddha land ever decline? The regions in the ten directions will all become treasure realms, and how could a treasure realm ever suffer harm? If you live in a country that knows no decline or

diminution, in a land that suffers no harm or disruption, then your body will find peace and security, and your mind will be calm and untroubled. You must believe my words; heed what I say! (WND-1, 25)

Excerpts from Ikeda Sensei's lecture in The Teachings for Victory, vol. 7, pp. 160–63.

Nichiren Daishonin's effort to "establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land" was a struggle against fundamental evil that rejects fundamental good—that is, rejects the attainment of enlightenment by all people.

In this section, speaking as the host, he sternly admonishes the guest to prevent him from falling prey to evil doctrines that entangle people in slander of the Law. Using such expressions as "the prison of these distorted doctrines," "the snares of these evil doctrines," and "this net of slanderous teachings," he employs the metaphors to stress how difficult it is to free oneself from slander of the Law.

The expression "lose their way in these mists and miasmas" likens confusion in this lifetime regarding the correct teaching of Buddhism to being enveloped in thick mist and haze. The "raging flames of hell" likens the agony of falling into the hell of incessant suffering to raging flames.

The Daishonin confidently teaches the way by which people can free themselves from the chains of misfortune and bring peace and security to society. It requires a transformation of the "tenets that we hold in our heart," he says, a fundamental revolution of our innermost state of mind.

What we have faith in indicates what we hold most precious, what values we cherish. It establishes our fundamental purpose and direction in life.

In other words, are we driven by egoism that seeks personal happi-

ness at the exclusion and expense of others, or by compassion that is concerned with both our own and others' welfare, refusing to build our happiness on the misfortune of others? The focus is on the transformation of our minds, our hearts, our values. It is the human revolution in a single individual. Without that, "establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land" cannot be achieved.

When we transform our hearts and minds, what tenet or ideal should we base them on? According to the Daishonin, it is "the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine." "The single good doctrine" here is the ultimate good taught in the Lotus Sutra—the principle that all people can bring forth their inherent Buddha nature and attain enlightenment.

In his copy of the Daishonin's writings, first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi heavily underlined the words "embrace the one true vehicle, the single good doctrine [of the Lotus Sutra]." Dedicating one's life to the single good doctrine of the Lotus Sutra is the sure way to transform the karma of all humankind.

The Ultimate Aim of "Establishing the Correct Teaching"

I would now like to reconfirm the principle of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.

"Establishing the correct teaching," first of all, depends upon the transformation of the heart and mind, an inner transformation at the individual level. It requires awakening to the fundamental good within us, establishing in our hearts the principles of respect for human dignity and life that are taught in the Lotus Sutra and making them the core of our life philosophy. Only through the actions of such awakened individuals can the teachings of the Lotus Sutra be established as the underlying and guiding principles of society.

And since the essence of "establishing the correct teaching" is to build a spiritual foundation for peace in society, it is only natural that we should join forces with like-minded individuals and organi-

zations, and work together to protect the dignity of life and realize world peace. Our cause is not exclusionary.

The most crucial thing is to foster individuals dedicated to “establishing the correct teaching.” When one individual takes action to apply this principle in real life, they can reorient those around them in the direction of good and peace. “Establishing the correct teaching” ultimately comes down to producing a steady stream of courageous individuals committed to this mission.

The “land” in “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” means the land or realm where people dwell, while “the peace of the land” that is our goal means actualizing a Buddha land and building a realm of happiness and peace for all people. The term *land*, therefore, is not defined narrowly as the nation-state, nor is it restricted to any particular country.

All-Inclusiveness and Eternal Relevance

The essential meaning of “peace of the land” is the diametric opposite of nationalism. It is a concept of peace that is inclusive and open to the world. At the same time, it encompasses and is relevant to the future as well, because the Buddha land includes all Jambudvīpa—the entire world—and will endure forever.

A Buddha land means a society in which the Buddhist spirit of respect for human beings and life is vital and alive. It is a world that values the ideal of realizing happiness for ourselves and others.

In this section, the Daishonin asserts that the threefold world—the real world in which we live—is a Buddha land and a treasure realm that will never decline or be destroyed. As long as the “treasures of the heart” of those who reside there are not destroyed, the land will become an enduring Buddha land.

“Establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” is the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai’s people-centered movement.

Mr. Makiguchi, who as an educator had embarked on a program

of educational reform based on his wish for the happiness of all children, was deeply impressed by “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.” It was, in fact, one of the main reasons why he decided to start practicing Nichiren Buddhism.

Based on his belief that the sole purpose for religion’s existence is to work for the happiness of humanity and make the world a better place,¹ Mr. Makiguchi began to propagate Nichiren Buddhism openly and broadly throughout society. He stood up courageously during World War II, which he saw as the proper time to remonstrate with the Japanese militarist government of the day. Even though he went to prison as a result, he continued to fight for the happiness of the people up to the very end, ultimately dying for his beliefs.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, fully prepared for a struggle with the devilish nature of authority, stood up alone in the devastated ruins of postwar Japan with the vow to rebuild the Soka Gakkai and the movement for kosen-rufu. When, at age nineteen, I had my own fateful first encounter with him at a discussion meeting in Kamata (in Tokyo’s Ota Ward), he was giving a lecture on “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”

“I want to eliminate all misery and suffering from the face of the earth!” Mr. Toda’s lion’s roar still resounds in my heart.

Based on the shared vow of mentor and disciple, the three founding Soka Gakkai presidents have all dedicated their lives to the struggle of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” for the sake of people’s happiness and to free all from misery and suffering.

The name Soka, which emerged from discussions between Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, means “value creation.” What kind of value, then, are we committed to creating?

I believe it can be summed up as empowering suffering individuals we encounter by encouraging them to base their lives on the sound philosophy of the Mystic Law in order to realize peace and security for all people and the world. Both the practice of “establishing the

correct teaching” and the mission of actualizing the “peace of the land” are encompassed in this spirit of Soka, or value creation—a spirit that treasures each individual and is dedicated to one-to-one dialogue.

In that regard, I would like to declare for all to hear that the Soka Gakkai is the organization that has truly inherited and is faithfully carrying on the Daishonin’s struggle of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” in the present day.



“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon”: Tapping the Infinite Benefit of the Gohonzon Through Faith

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness,² the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions. To be endowed with the Ten Worlds means that all ten, without a single exception, exist in one world. Because of this it is called a mandala. Mandala is a Sanskrit word that is translated as “perfectly endowed” or “a cluster of blessings.” This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith.³ This is what the sutra means when it states that one can “gain entrance through faith alone.”⁴ (WND-1, 832)

Excerpts from Ikeda Sensei’s lecture in The Teachings for Victory, vol. 4, pp. 9–11.

Nichinyo must have been extremely moved to learn that the Gohonzon Nichiren gave her was the Gohonzon that had been revealed for the first time in the Latter Day of the Law. But, then, he dis-

closes an even more astonishing fact: “Never seek this Gohonzon 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.” He is saying that the Gohonzon does not exist outside us but within our own lives. Shifting the focus of faith and practice from the external to the internal was a dramatic change.

In Nichiren’s day—and, in many cases, even today—we find a deeply rooted view: “We are but small, insignificant beings and the ultimate reality and eternal value lies somewhere outside of us, somewhere far away.” Such a way of thinking is inextricably connected with belief in some otherworldly, supernatural power.

Nichiren Buddhism, however, rejects this idea completely. It teaches the true reality of life in which the eternal and ultimate Law is revealed in the physical beings of the ordinary people, living right here and now.

The term Buddha, after all, means “enlightened one.” To what did the Buddha become enlightened? To that which should form the true basis of our life—namely, the Law and the true essence of our being. He awoke to the universal Law permeating all phenomena, which had previously been obscured by fundamental darkness.⁵ He awoke to the greatness of each individual’s life that is one and indivisible with that Law.

“The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people”—the real significance here is that the Gohonzon Nichiren inscribed functions is the means by which we can awaken to and call forth the Gohonzon (the Buddhahood) within us. The physical Gohonzon we chant to is the very same Gohonzon that is in our heart; it is by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the happiness of ourselves and others that we can clearly awaken to the Gohonzon within us.

In another letter to Nichinyo, he writes in a similar vein, “When I ponder where this ‘Treasure Tower’ chapter is now, I see that it

exists in the eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart⁶ within the breast of Nichinyo” (“The ‘Entrustment’ and Other Chapters,” WND-1, 915). Both “within the mortal flesh” and “in the eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart” mean “within the depths of one’s own life.”

Still another way Nichiren describes our inner being is “the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). The ninth consciousness—also the amala-consciousness, or pure consciousness—is often referred to in Buddhist texts as the “mind king”⁷ or “ruler of the mind,” indicating the fundamental entity of the mind itself. “The unchanging reality” means the ultimate truth, free from all delusion. Since the “mind king” dwells in this unchanging reality, our mortal bodies are called its “palace.”

In “Reply to Kyo’o,” the Daishonin writes, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart” (WND-1, 412). He is saying here that he has inscribed in the form of the Gohonzon the life state of Buddhahood that he has attained as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, a life state that is identical with the unchanging reality.

The Gohonzon is in the form of a mandala. The Sanskrit term mandala has also been translated into Chinese as “perfectly endowed” and “a cluster of blessings” (see “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). It means a trove of infinite benefit that we can draw from and enjoy freely.

Mr. Toda said, “Nichiren Daishonin’s life is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, so our lives, as his disciples, are also Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.”⁸ On another occasion, he declared: “When we embrace faith in the Mystic Law, the fundamental power of Nichiren Daishonin wells up in response from within our beings, and we, too, reveal our true self—that is, our true enlightened nature that is one with the eternal, unchanging reality.”⁹

Attaining Immeasurable Benefit by “Gaining Entrance Through Faith Alone”

Nichiren further explains: “This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. This is what the sutra means when it states that one can ‘gain entrance through faith alone’” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). Faith, in a word, is the key to attaining Buddhahood. Even Shariputra, who was known as foremost in wisdom among Shakyamuni’s disciples, gained entrance into the ultimate truth of the Lotus Sutra through faith. This is the meaning of the Lotus Sutra passage “to gain entrance through faith alone.”

When we ordinary people of the Latter Day face the Gohonzon, the embodiment of the boundless life state of Buddhahood, and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with deep and strong faith, we can gain entrance to the shining realm of time without beginning manifested in the Gohonzon. Nichiren refers to the Gohonzon as the “object of devotion for observing the mind.” The purpose of the Gohonzon is to enable us to “observe our mind,” that is, to see and awaken to the Buddhahood within our own lives. But being able to see the true nature of our mind, or attain enlightenment, is not something achieved through conceptual thought or meditative practice; faith is the foundation. That is why, he writes, “This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith.” The “object of devotion for observing the mind” is the “object of devotion of faith.”

The Gohonzon (Buddhahood) manifests in the lives of those who have strong faith. A person may possess the Gohonzon, but without faith, they will receive no benefit. Faith is what causes the “cluster of blessings” that is the Gohonzon to manifest in our lives. Accordingly, as long as our faith stays alive, the “cluster of blessings” will never disappear. Even if we were to lose our physical Gohonzon in an accident or natural disaster, as long as we retain our faith, the Gohonzon within our lives remain intact and we can activate its beneficial power.

Only when we have faith does the beneficial power of the Gohonzon manifest itself. Truly, the Gohonzon is found in our faith alone.

NOTES:

1. Translated from Japanese. See Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka kyoiku-gaku taikei* [The system of value-creating education] in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* [The collected writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi], vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha, 2005), 356.

2. Ninth consciousness: Also, *amala*-consciousness. The Buddha nature, or the fundamental purifying force, that is free from all karmic impediments. Here, the Daishonin is associating it with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

3. The Japanese word *faith* consists of two Chinese characters.

4. *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*, trans. Burton Watson (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2009), 110.

5. Fundamental darkness, or fundamental

ignorance: The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. The inability to see or recognize the truth, particularly, the true nature of one's life.

6. The “eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart” refers to the arrangement of the heart, lungs, and other organs in the chest cavity, which was thought to resemble an eight-petaled lotus blossom.

7. The “mind king” refers to the core of the mind, which controls the various workings of the mind.

8. Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* [The collected writings of Josei Toda], vol. 5 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun-sha, 1985), 271.

9. Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* [The collected writings of Josei Toda], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun-sha, 1992), 11.